

When I was growing up in my parents home... and I faced a particular challenge in life... my mother had a phrase that she would always say to me: *“Everything is going to turn out all-right... Jim... I just **feel** it!”*

I had an injury during my senior year of high school... which tore the rotary cuff in my shoulder... and severed the nerve of my deltoid muscle (which died and I have never had since then.) After the surgery on it to repair whatever they could... the main surgeon told us that he was pretty certain that I would need to strap my left arm to my side... for the rest of my life... because they could not *permanently* give me back the use of my arm.

*“Everything is going to turn out all-right... Jim... I just **feel** it!”*

Last week I told you the story of Patti’s and my experience when I was in seminary. Patti’s life... and the life of our unborn child... were both under threat. They were hospitalized and we did not have medical insurance. A lesser... but still great concern... was that it seemed obvious that seminary was now up-ended. ... Through multiple long-distant phone calls I heard: *“Everything is going to turn out all-right... Jim... I just **feel** it!”*

Bless her heart... but those words were not very *assuring*. They slightly **comforted** me... because they expressed *empathy*... but they could not deliver me from uncertainty.

Today we come to a verse that is designed to go beyond sharing feelings of mere empathy... when we (as believers) face dire circumstances in our life. Empathy is fine! It is good to share this feeling with someone in most cases. But there is something better. There is a truth that we can **know** – not just a wish that we can **feel**.

As we turn to a very familiar verse to many of you – because it is the opening verse of our passage today – the first thing that I'd like for you to notice is that Paul writes that we **KNOW** this truth – rather than feel it.

### **Romans 8:28**

The text is so familiar that sometimes we do not even take time to say it... we just quote the reference. "*Having trouble today, my friend? Well, remember Romans 8:28. Chin up!*" ... .. It is good advice... although I am not sure it should be used so **glibly**. ... For one thing... the text is for Christians only, "*those who love Him*" — that is... those who have experienced the love of God... and have responded to it. ... Romans 8:28 has become *so popular* that those with *no* faith in Christ... obtain from it a *false* security.

Believers (however)... can wrap their souls in it! Believers can know that because of God – there is no such thing as accidents. God is going to work all things together for good. He is the One Who is energizing it.

You may say... "*Well... I'm a believer... and because of circumstances that I have personally experienced... as well as when I look at the world around me... this just not make good sense. It contradicts what I see. How is this possible when the world is filled with hatred and evil... and when good people... as well as evil people... suffer daily?*"

We often cry out... as Jeremiah ("the Weeping Prophet") in Jeremiah 11:14 – "*Why, God, did You let me see trouble?*" ... When times are good... (when we have steady jobs... when our families are doing well... when no loved one is sick... and there have been no recent deaths — in times like

these)... well... it is easy to say, "*We know that in all things God works together for the good of those who love him.*" ... .. But what about the other times?

What is obvious (and will become even more obvious as we continue in our passage) is that Romans 8:28 does not mean (as is commonly thought)... that "*everything will turn out okay in this life.*" ... If "good" means "rich" ... (as some would like it to mean)... the text is not true... since most Christians have not been given a great supply of this world's goods. ... The same thing is true if "good" means "healthy." ... (Not all believers have good health.) ... Similarly... "good" cannot mean "successful" or "admired" or even "happy" in the world's sense... since God asks many Christians to endure failure or scorn or very distressing personal experiences or severe disappointments.

What does "good" mean (then)... if it does not mean rich or healthy or successful or admired or happy? ... The answer will be found in the next verse. ... But before we get to it... there is something very important for us to discover (yet) in our current verse. We will **NOT** be able to fully understand the next verse or the one that follows... unless we take the time to see this very strong point in Romans 8:28.

Romans 8:28 clearly announces that God has a plan for your life and a plan for mine. For anyone who is a believer... God has an individual plan... and every circumstance of your life is ALL working together according to God's plan. His plan for your life... is different than His plan for my life – but the **PURPOSE** is the same. God has an individualized plan for you... that is grounded in a common purpose that He has for all of

us. ... And it is that purpose... which is the “good” Paul wrote about in Romans 8:28. “All things work together – to accomplish the PURPOSE God has for our lives.” God’s purpose... and the “good” written of in Romans 8:28 are one and the same. ... So the question NOW is... what is God’s common purpose...? ... It’s right here... verse 29...

### **Romans 8:29**

Did you see it...? All things work together for us “*To be conformed to the image of His Son...*” (in other words... to be made more and more like Jesus.) ... Everything we do and say... everything people do to us or say about us... every experience we will ever have — ALL are sovereignly used by God... to conform us into the image of Christ.

Verse 29... also adds “in order that He (Jesus) might be the first born among many brothers.” The word “firstborn” is an unusual word in the original language of the New Testament. The Greek word is proto-tokos... which does mean firstborn... has the definite sense of “pre-eminent.” ... So it means “*that Christ would be a prince over many brothers and sisters in the family of God.*”

God loves Jesus so much... that He is determined to have many more souls like His. (Not that we become divine... of course. Nothing in the Bible teaches that. But rather that we might become like him in his many communicable attributes: things like love... joy... peace... holiness... wisdom... patience... grace... kindness... goodness... compassion... faithfulness... mercy... and other qualities.)

God's purpose is to cause all things to work together for your good which means that you would be like the Lord Jesus Christ. ... Are you becoming more like Jesus? - That's the test. No other test. ... Not how many verses you can quote. Not how many Bible studies you attend... or how much money you give to ministry. ... Not any of those things. ... Are you more like the Lord Jesus today than you were yesterday?

God wants to use all of our circumstances to mold us... and sometimes He will use a hammer and a furnace. So we resist... We complain (a lot) and we flee. God often allows us to run to another place... another job... another city... another church... a different spouse - but eventually those hardships return... don't they...? Do you know why...? Because God is determined to make us into His Son's image!

The first thing that we need to recognize from today's passage is that (I.) God has a plan for every believer and it is grounded in a purpose. The purpose is to make us like Christ. The second thing to know from today's passage is (II.) God's plan is guaranteed by predestination. (It is **guaranteed** – Folks - by predestination!) Look again at verse 29... and also verse 30...

### **Romans 8:29-30**

(Think about it!)... this means that all of hell can't stop yours and my being made into the image of Christ! . And what has been predestined in eternity... will never be undone in time. We are going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ. ... It is so certain... it is so sure... that God even puts it in the

**past** tense. He already speaks of it as having happened. Notice in verse 30 again:

**Romans 8:30 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

(**LISTEN!**) — you would think He would say, “those he **will** glorify.” But that isn’t what it says. It says—“*those he also*”—what?—“**glorified**.” (It is so certain that Paul writes it in the past tense.)

“Bank on it! ... It is done! You’re already glorified. God sees you (right now) as glorified. God looks at you... and God sees His finished product at this very moment. You don’t look like Jesus right now... but you’re going to be like Jesus. You’re going to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Now... Paul uses the concept of predestination to make this point. I don’t understand the concept of predestination. (That should **not** shock anyone.) I can guarantee that **you don’t** either. And I am pretty certain that the smartest seminary professors and theologians cannot fully comprehend it. ... But that doesn’t worry me. I just read here in the plain meaning of Scripture... so I know that it is true. There is predestination. I am so thankful that I don’t have to understand it.

Vance Havner said, “I don’t understand electricity... but I don’t intend to sit around in the dark until I do.” ... And there are a lot of things that we don’t **have** to understand. ... Do I believe in predestination? Yes. Do I believe in free-will (that man can chose to follow God?) Yes. I believe both are true. Well how can they both be true...? I don’t know. But I’m not **bothered** that I don’t know.

Here is what I **do** believe about both. Any time that we over-emphasize one as though the other is not true... we will get ourselves into trouble. I envision it as two ropes dangling from two holes in the ceiling. What we cannot see (up in the attack) is a pulley over which only a **single** rope is draped (but from our vantage point... it looks like two separate ropes.) Can you see this in your mind's eye? What happens when we jump up and grab hold of only one part of the rope and try to suspend all of our weight from it...? We fall. But we **don't** fall if we grab both side of the rope at the same time.

I believe **predestination** and human **free-will** are two sides of the **same** rope. Even though I don't understand it... there are a few illustrations that have been put forth to help us (without getting into the fairness of it – although **God can do whatever He wants**. In the very next chapter (here in Romans)... Paul will say this about God's choosing Jacob over Essau. (It is **all** God's business!)

But here is one of the **better** understandings that I've read: God... in the exercise of His sovereign will... does not necessarily **deprive** man of his free will. ... Imagine two men playing a game of chess; the one player is a **master** at the game... the other is very much an amateur. ... (This reminds me of my older brother and I playing chess in high school.) ... The master knows hundreds of moves for opening... pursuing... and closing the game... whereas the amateur plays blindly... from one move to the next with **little** skill and only limited forethought. (That was me!) ... Both players have free will to make whatever moves they wish. But the master of the game... without in any way violating his opponent's free will... uses every move the amateur makes - to drive him into a corner and take his king.

That is just how it is in the game of life. Each of us has a free will and we exercise that will in a thousand ways. The choices we make determine the way we move through life. But above and beyond us and our choices is God. He overrules our every move to make each one conform to His own sovereign will. ... But God is Unable to make a mistake – like a chess player can!

God has done all that is needed to secure our eternal glory. He has already made the decision: “*Those whom He justified He glorified.*” ... We may disagree about whether believers can refuse to accept that decision. ... But from God’s side (at least)... the matter has already been determined. That means that no genuine believer need ever wonder whether he or she “*has what it takes*” to get to heaven. (None of us does.) ... But that doesn’t matter in the end. God - **Himself** - has supplied all we need. ... God sees ahead of time... and God provides for every event... and God protects from every enemy.

This puts an axe to the root and any believer’s pride... or presumption... or despair. ... It is all **God’s** work! His wisdom! His plan and purpose is being carried out. The will of God is coming down – out of eternity past! Don’t think that you can stop it. You (simply) need to “get onboard and ride”!

Does this whole concept of predestination mean (as many have proposed) that we are not to get out and do the work of ministry...? (Let go and let God! It will happen anyway...) Since it is all God... does that mean we do not need to make great effort to take the gospel out to the ends of the earth... or bring it to our own neighborhoods...? ... .. Absolutely NOT!



It means that we need to get onboard with God making us like Jesus and all the more plead and warn and minister (just like Jesus) among the lost and the needy. Predestination is all about God making us like Jesus - Who does those things – and Hell can't stop it!

Listen!

(I.) God has a plan for your life that is grounded in a purpose.

(II.) God's plan (which is for you to be formed into the image of His Son) is guaranteed by predestination.

Some of our pain comes because we are resisting God's purpose for our lives. (We don't listen at times... and God "takes us to the woodshed...") ... He's trying to do something. And we say, "*Well, I want to get out of this circumstance,*" and so we just move out of that circumstance. ... And God will allow us to move out of that circumstance... but still He overrules... and we find ourselves right back in another circumstance just like it.

When we complain and we grumble about the events of our lives... what is it that we are really doing...? Well... If God is working all things together for His intended purpose – we are criticizing God.

We are so much like the Israelites when God was bringing them up out of Egypt... to the Promised Land. Moses thought that they were murmuring against him... so he went to God with all of their griping... and God said to Moses... "*Moses... they're not murmuring against you; they are murmuring against me!*" (Numbers 14:27)

(LISTEN!)... when you complain about your position in life... when you gripe... when you criticize... you're murmuring against God. ... And you're

saying that Romans 8:28 is not true... (that God's plan and purpose is not good.)

If you're in a circumstance that you can't change... then perhaps you should begin (at this time) to thank God for that circumstance. ... Now I am NOT saying to thank God that the circumstance itself has happened... especially if there is sin... misery... and ignorance that is involved... but thank God - that God is working... whether you see it or not.

**Ephesians 5:20 (ESV)**

*<sup>20</sup> giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*I don't know there's a better affirmation of faith than this: to just say, "God, I can't understand it. I don't know why You're doing it. It hurts. I don't even know how I'm going to make it through, but I know that You're the sovereign God and Your purpose for me is one day I'll be like the Lord Jesus."*

When we begin to praise... when we begin to give God thanks... God moves in our lives in ways that He would not otherwise do. ... (You see)... we don't pass the test - until we give Him thanks. ... God doesn't say, "Fee! thankful." He just simply says, "Give thanks."

Now... I will close with a direct look at the image God is making us into. Turn with me to a passage we will be studying in a few weeks. Look ahead to Romans 12. This is what the image God is making in us looks like. As we read it... ask yourself: "*Am I letting God create this in me?*"

**Romans 12:14-21**