

All Things For Good
Dr. Mack
Romans 8:28
July 08, 2012

I'm glad to be back with you folk again, it was about a year ago this time that we were here, and we're delighted to be back. We bring you greetings from Linwood Baptist Church in Pretoria, South Africa, as well as Strength in Ministries Training Institute, where I do a lot of teaching. I happen to be one of the elders at Linwood Baptist Church in Pretoria, South Africa. Our son-in-law, Sabrent DeSwat, will be with you people later in the summer. It's winter over there, but it's summer over here. He and our daughter, as well as our little granddaughter who is going to be 2 in August of this year, they will be with you later in the summer. So they'll bring you greetings as well.

We came from South Africa about ten days ago, and went through Greece. We visited Athens, and Mars Hill is there, where Paul stood and taught. There is the Areopagus, the Agora, the marketplace where he taught. We were also in Thessalonica, which to my surprise, in the time of the apostle Paul, we found out that Thessalonica was a city of about 200,000 people. You read in the scripture that he came into town and this one man stirred up the whole city. You read that and just pass right by it without realizing that it was a big city. The accusation against the apostle Paul was that he had turned the whole world upside down. He created quite a ruckus and as a result of that he was run out of Thessalonica, and he went on from there to Berea, where we went as well. He was also in Philippi which is in that northern Greece area. We spent a lot of time in these various, biblical places on our way to here in Atlanta. We arrived here in the middle of this past week. I guess it was Wednesday, our time is so mixed up. We got an email already from our daughter saying that they had had a wonderful worship service. They're done with their morning service over there and we're just starting because it's seven hours earlier in Pretoria, South Africa. We are delighted to be here.

I want to direct your attention this morning to a verse that I'm sure is very familiar. In fact, as I thought about preaching on this particular verse, I was kind of hesitant to do that because it's a verse that so many people are familiar with. At any rate, I want to look at it because I think it has so much to say to us in our particular day. I'm talking about Romans 8:28, but to get the context I want us to read Verses 26-39.

Romans 8:26-39 ~ In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is the Word of God. Let's just ask the God of the Word to minister to us through His Word.

Our Father, we come to You, thanking You that You've not left us in darkness. You've given us the Lord Jesus Christ Who is the light of the world, but You've also given us the Word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. You've given us the Word of God so that we might know You better, and so we might know our Lord Jesus Christ. And so then in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation, we might be able to hold forth the Word of Life, and shine as lights. And so our Father, we bow before you even know. You know us thoroughly, completely. You know exactly what we need to hear. You know how we need to be challenged, and comforted, and lifted up. So we ask Father that You would be present by Your Spirit, to burn Your Word into our hearts and to use it to teach us,

to reprove us, to correct us, to train us in righteousness so that we might be thoroughly equipped under every good work. To Your praise and to Your glory, we pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Now, if I were to ask a group of Christians to make a list of ten of their favorite verses, I suspect that Romans 8:28 would be on many of those lists. Romans 8:28 is probably, along with John 3:16, and Psalm 23, one of the best known verses in all of the Bible. It's a verse that many people have memorized. It's a verse that I often hear quoted. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said of Romans 8:28, that it is one of the most remarkable statements that you'll find in any of the apostle Paul's 13 epistles. Now, Paul made many remarkable statements, but Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that this is one of the most remarkable statements. Then he goes on to say this is one of the most comforting statements in all of the Bible. In respect to this statement, there is really nothing higher than this. He says there is nothing higher than the truth that we have in Romans 8:28.

Now why are the things that I've just mentioned true? Why is what Martyn Lloyd-Jones said true? Well I believe Romans 8:28 is one of the most precious verses in the Bible because it contains a truth, that when rightly understood and applied, is one of the most glorious, and helpful, and comforting promises that any human being could ever be given. If the promise of Romans 8:28 is not true, then we as Christians could never rejoice ever more as 1 Thessalonians 5:16 tells us to do. But if Romans 8:28 is true, then we have every reason to rejoice ever more. If the promise of Romans 8:28 is not true, then the command of Philippians 4:6 that said we should be anxious for nothing, is simply a joke. But if Romans 8:28 is true, then we have a solid basis for being calm, and worry-free, and peaceful regardless of the challenges that we're facing. If the promise of Romans 8:28 is not true, then the experience of overwhelmingly conquer, as described in Romans 8:27, is out of our reach. But if the promise of Romans 8:28 is true, then we can face tribulation, we can face distress, we can face persecution, we can face opposition, and not be destroyed. If the promise of Romans 8:28 is true, then the experience of loneliness, and opposition, and condemnation, and hopelessness described in Romans 8:31-34 will be devastating. But if the promise of Romans 8:28 is true, we can experience a reality of Isaiah 40:31 which tells us we are to run and not to be weary, we are to walk and not faint, we are to mount up with wings as eagles, and we are to rise above our difficulties. Well if Romans 8:28 is true, Isaiah 40:31 can be our experience.

It was because Peter and John knew and believed the truth of Romans 8:28 that they could do what they did in Acts 5:41, which says they rejoiced in their sufferings. They rejoiced in their sufferings because they believed Romans 8:28, and because they knew and believed the truth of this verse, they could do as they did in Acts 5:42 which says they kept right on preaching even though it was their preaching in the temple and from house to house that was the reason for their being persecuted. And because the apostle Paul knew and believed the truth of Romans 8:28, he could say and mean what he said in 2 Corinthians 6 where he talks about some of the difficulties which he experienced, and he says in spite of those difficulties, he says that he was beaten, he says he was imprisoned, he experienced tumults in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger, and yet he gave glory to God and he continued in his ministry. In 2 Corinthians 12, he talks about the fact that he experienced distresses. In 2 Corinthians 1 he says that he has burdens that were very heavy, and yet he did not go under, he did not give up, he did not quit, he sang and he praised God in spite of his difficulties, or in the midst of his difficulties, and he did that because he really believed Romans 8:28.

For Paul, the truth of Romans 8:28 was a choice feast on which he feasted again and again throughout his lifetime. In the 4th Century, there was a well-known pastor by the name of Ambrose who described the whole Bible by saying that the whole Bible is a feast for the soul. In the 17th Century, one of my favorite Puritan preachers, Thomas Watson, said that if the whole Bible is a feast for the soul, then Romans 8 is one of the choicest feasts in that particular feast. If I may add something, in the 21st Century, I say that if Romans 8 is a feast for the soul, Romans 8:28 is one of the choicest of the choice dishes that are found in that feast. So as we come to this text this morning, what we find here is a choice feast for us as believers. It's one of the choicest morsels found in the whole of Romans 8. Now today I want to take this text apart and I want to look at different sections of this text, then what do these sections mean, and how do they apply to us in our day?

Now as we begin to look at Romans 8:28, it's important for us to notice that the text doesn't merely say that all things work together for good. It doesn't say, "Cheer up, because all things are going to work together for good." That's not what the text says. The text says, ***God causes all things to work together for good...*** Recently in our elders meeting, we have an elders meeting every Friday morning where we meet together for prayer. In our elders meeting on this recent Friday morning, we looked at Psalm 66, and in Psalm 66:5-12, the Psalmist says, "Come and see the works of the Lord. He's awesome in His deeds. He turned the sea into dry land. He rules by His might forever. His eyes keep watch on the nations. He keeps us in life," Verse 9. "He does not allow our feet to slip. He tries

us,” Verse 10. “He refines us as silver is refined. He brings us sometimes into the net,” Verse 11. “He lays an impressive burden upon our loins. God is in control. God causes these things to happen. He makes men ride over our heads. We go through fire and through water, and yet he brings us out into a place of abundance.”

After reflecting on this wonderful concept that God causes all things to happen, I was reminded of Psalm 136, which has 26 verses. In this wonderful Psalm, the Bible is reminding us that God is the One Who causes all things to work. In Verse 1, the Psalmist says, “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good. For His loving kindness is forever. Give thanks to the God of Gods, His loving kindness is forever. Give thanks to the Lord of Lords. Give thanks to Him Who alone does great wonders. Give thanks to Him Who made the heavens with skill. Give thanks to Him Who spread out the earth above the waters. Give thanks to Him Who made the great lights. Give thanks to the One Who makes the sun to rule by day, and the moon and the stars to rule by night,” and on and on, reminding us that God is in charge, and that God causes all things to happen.

Now as I was reflecting on Psalm 66 and Psalm 136, I was reminded of Isaiah 45:5-7, where God says:

Isaiah 45:5-6 ~ “I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; 6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me.

And what He’s saying there if people around us, they don’t know God, and they don’t even recognize the fact that it’s in Him we live, and move, and have our being, and that all of us, believers and unbelievers, are dependent upon God. And then He says, “That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other. I am the One forming light and creating darkness. I’m the One causing well-being and creating calamity. I am the Lord Who does all things.”

So when Paul writes in Romans 8:28, he reminds us that God is the One Who causes all things to work. We need to keep that in mind. The second thing that our text stresses for us is the fact that He does work all things together for good to those who love Him. Now earlier, in Romans 3:11-18, Paul tells us that people do not naturally seek or love the God of the Bible. In fact, Romans 5:10 tell us that by nature, rather than loving God, we are enemies of God. And Romans 8:7 says that

by nature we are hostile to God. We're not subject to the law of God, we can't please God, and the truth is that we don't want to please the God of the Bible. In other epistle, Colossians 1:21, Paul reminds us that by nature we are alienated from God. We're not just separated from God. I can be separated from my wife because I'm preaching or doing a ministry someplace else, but I'm not alienated from her. If I'm alienated from her, it means there's a problem between me and her. Colossians 1:21 says that by nature, we are alienated from God, we are enemies of God. We don't love God.

So the truth is, not everyone can claim the promise of Romans 8:28, it's only those who love God and are called according to His purpose. And who are these people who love God? Well when we look at the context of the whole Book of Romans, the people who loved God are people, who according to Romans 1-3, have recognized their sin. They are people who realize that from the top of their heads to the bottom of their feet, inside and outside, they are in opposition to God. They are people who according to Romans 3:24, people who love God are people who have been declared righteous freely through the redemption that's found in Jesus Christ. There are people who, according to Romans 8:1, no longer walk according to the flesh, but walk according to the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 8:3 says that if any man loves God, he's known, approved, and accepted by God. So who are those who love God? They are people who have been approved by God. They are people who have been known by God, who have been accepted by God. James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man who endures trials and testing, for he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him." It's only those who love Him who can claim the promise of Romans 8:28, or James 1:12.

In Ephesians 6:24, Paul writes to the Ephesians and he says, "Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ." The only people who really experience the grace of God, the favor of God, are people who love our Lord Jesus Christ. And who are the people who love our Lord Jesus Christ? Well if you go back in the context of the Book of Ephesians, you find in Ephesians 1:3, there are people who have been blessed with every spiritual blessing, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus. There are people who have been chosen according to the purpose of God from all eternity past. There are people who have been adopted into the family of God, Ephesians 1:4. There are people who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, Ephesians 1:7. There are people who have acknowledged and confessed their sins, and have sought and received God's forgiveness. There are people who, according to Ephesians 1:13, who have listened to the message of truth and have embraced that message. There are people who have been sealed by the Spirit. There are people, according to Ephesians 2:5, who were dead in their trespasses

and sins, but who have been made alive through Jesus Christ. Who are those who love God and who can claim the promise of Romans 8:28? They are people who, according to Ephesians 2:8-9, have been saved by grace through faith, and that not of themselves but it was the gift of God. It is of these people, people who love God, that the Lord says, “He works all things together for their good.” We need to be aware of that.

As a counselor I remember having a woman come some time ago, and she sat in my office and she was lonely, she was hopeless, she had had a very difficult life. She had been involved in prostitution, she had had two abortions, and she had just discovered that she had cancer. She sat in my office, with a sense of hopelessness, and she looked at me and she said, “Is there any hope?” And I say, “No!” I didn’t say it that loudly, but I did say, “No, there is no hope for you. Hope is on the other side of that door, and until you’ve gone through the door, Who is Jesus Christ, repented of your sins, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, received forgiveness from Him, I’ve got nothing to offer you. There is no hope apart from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

So, Romans 8:28, if we are believers, if we do love God, we can claim this promise and we know that it’s absolutely true. Thirdly, as we look at Romans 8:28, it’s very important for us to clarify the words ‘all things’. Because of the immediate context here in Romans 8:28, which begins actually all the way back in Romans 8:28 where Paul talks about sufferings, and then in Verse 35 he talks about tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. He talks about being killed in Verse 36. In the context, we could say, “Well, what Paul is referring to is all of the painful things that we experience.” But when you look at the context of Romans 8, we find that the Bible not only mentions trials, it not only mentions unpleasant things, it not only mentions negative things, in Verse 1 it talks about positive things. “There’s therefore now no condemnation.” So when the text refers to all things, I take it that all things include the painful and the unpleasant things, but it also includes the positive things. It also includes the blessed things.

Now when you turn to Matthew 13:21-22, we find Jesus mentioning affliction and persecution as a hindrance. But as you look at that passage, He also mentions riches and wealth as a potential hindrance to us in our Christian life. And the point is, Paul is saying, “God causes all things, the pleasant things, riches, wealth, the trials, and the difficulties. He works all of these things together for good.” Paul is saying that God can cause good things, bad things, prosperity and poverty, pain and pleasure, success and failure, even our sins. That’s a wonderful thing. God is so sovereign that He can even use our sins together for our good.

Now we must be clear in noting that Paul isn't saying that all things in and of themselves are good. He's not saying, for example, that our sins are good, but he is saying that God can use anything that comes our way for a good purpose. He isn't recommending cynicism, he isn't recommending masochism, he isn't recommending disobedience, but he's saying, our God, if we love Him, is so sovereign, so wise, and so loving that He can take the worst that we could do, or the worst that anybody could do for us, and work it together for our good as well as for His glory.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones says:

God brings the happy result which is described in Romans 8:28 to pass by permitting some things to happen. He could have stopped them, but He doesn't. He permits them, He allows them to take place. That's an activity on the part of God. God's permissive will is nevertheless an activity of God. It is a negative one, but it is part of His activity. Therefore, when sometimes in life we find things happening to us which we cannot understand, we must not always assume that it is God Who is doing this to us. We tend to assume that and ask, "Why has God done this to me?" but God has not always done it directly. In the positive sense, what has happened is that He has permitted it to happen to us. The classic example of this is the man Job. God permitted the devil to try and test His servant Job. It was not God Who actually brought about the various things that happened to Job, but He permitted the devil to do so. This is a very important part of our understanding of the life into which God has brought us. God, however, not only permits things to happen to us, He sometimes does things to us directly, and sends things upon us for our good. This is the point in which many people get into trouble. They're idea, as it is the idea of every child, that a father is nothing but a mass of benevolence, who is always smiling, always giving out money, always giving everything we ask for immediately. Children always tend to think in that way, and therefore they feel very grieved and hurt when anything is withheld from them, or when punishment is administered to them.

The same is true in the Spiritual life. God sometimes does things to us for our good. The children of Israel are a classic example of this. God not only permitted many things to happen to them, but He raised up enemies against them. He sent hornets to trouble them and pestilence upon them quite deliberately. He was doing it for their good because they were His people. "You only," says God in Amos 3:2, "have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you. It's because I have known you that I will punish you." And He did. There are specific terms. He raised up enemies against them to molest them, to attack them, to trouble

them, and the enemies were not only human enemies, but their trials came in many ways.

And on and on Martyn Lloyd-Jones goes in describing the fact that God is involved in all things.

The fourth thing that we need to focus on and meditate on in Romans 8:28, if we're to really understand it and get the help out of it that God wants us to get, is we need to clarify what the Bible means when it uses the word 'good'. Some may think that when Paul uses this word, that he's referring to God making someone rich, or God giving someone excellent health, or God keeping a person from failure, but that's not what he's saying at all. God is not saying in this text that He always makes the person successful in a worldly way. A lot of times, I've been at Christian businessmen's meetings, and they usually have somebody get up and give a testimony, at least the ones that I was at, where they would say how they became a Christian, and then God blessed their business, and it went so well, and they got wealthy and were able to buy a bigger house, and take wonderful vacations, and all of that. I was looking for someone to get up and give a testimony and say, "I came to Christ and I went bankrupt." You don't hear that kind of thing. They assume that when God says that He works all things together for good, that He means you're always going to be successful in the way that the world would define success. But the text says, "He works all things together for good according to His purpose."

Now, when it says that those for whom He works things together for good are people who have been called according to His purpose, what the Bible is referring to here is referring to the effectual call. It's God speaking to us, and as the Word of God is being opened, it's as though it were God who was speaking to us. It's not some preacher we're hearing only, but it's God getting into our hearts and saying, "Hey, I'm speaking to you. This is for you," and you take it personally. That's the effectual call where God takes the general call, the general exposition of the word, and He brings it home to your heart with impact and with power, and you know that the message was for you. It brings you to repentance, and brings you to Christ. It brings you to the place where you trust Him and you acknowledge your need for salvation.

I remember November 11th, 1951. That's quite awhile ago. In fact, if my mathematics is right, that was 61 years ago. That night, I heard the Gospel for the first time. I was 16 years of age. For the first time in my life, I heard the Gospel. I heard that I was a sinner. I heard that Christ died for sinners. I heard that I needed

to repent, and I needed to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I knew that night, though it was Percy Crawford who was speaking, that Someone Else was speaking. It was God speaking to me, showing me my sin, showing me my need of a Savior. There have been many times as I've heard the word of God preached by others, and on occasion even by myself, when God has taken the message and He has applied it to my heart. That's what He's talking about. That's what it means to be called.

In Jude 1:1, Jude says, "I'm writing to those who are called." Every believer has been called effectually. God has spoken to that person's heart and they've known that the word of God was for them, and they responded to the message of the word of God. So this text says that God works all things together for good to those who are called, but they're called according to His purpose. Well, what is that purpose? What's the purpose for which God calls us? Well, that purpose is described in Romans 8:29-30, which says:

Romans 8:29-30 ~ 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

It's so sure we're going to make it, that as far as God is concerned, He sees us already glorified, free from sin, having a totally new nature. What's His purpose? What is the purpose for which God causes all things to work together for good? It's to conform us to the image of His Son.

In Ephesians 4:1, Paul says, "I want you to walk worthy of the calling, where with you've been called." In Philippians 3, he says, "I've not yet apprehended, I've not yet laid hold of that for which God laid hold of me. I'm not totally perfect yet. I'm not totally like the Lord Jesus, but I'm pressing toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. It's in Christ Jesus. It's becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ." In Ephesians 4:15, Paul says that God wants us to grow up into Jesus, more and more, becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, "We all as beholding in a mirror, the mirror of God's Word, the glory of the Lord, we are transformed into the same image, the image of Christ, from glory to glory." God wants to use everything that happens to us to make us more like Jesus. This, my friends, is the ultimate good. There's nothing better than that, than becoming like the Lord Jesus Christ. When God saves us, this

is the purpose He has in mind. The ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself by making us more like Jesus. The ultimate purpose is to reverse the effects of the fall and make us more and more into the likeness of Jesus. The ultimate purpose is salvation in the fullest sense. The Greek word ‘salvation’ literally means to be made whole. He wants to make us whole, and being made whole means we become like the Lord Jesus Christ. Since Adam and Eve, He’s the only whole Man who has ever lived, and God will not be satisfied until He’s accomplished that purpose.

1 John 3:2 says that as we behold the Lord Jesus Christ, and we become like him. God’s purpose, my friends, is not to make us happy primarily. It’s not to make us successful. It’s not even merely to forgive us, although that’s involved. It’s not only justification to be declared righteous. It includes that, but it involves a lot more. His purpose is not just to get us to heaven. His purpose is to make us like Jesus. It’s to conform us to the image of His Son. He wants to use the good, the bad, the pleasant, and unpleasant, to draw us to Himself. His ultimate purpose, according to Romans 8:29, is that Jesus might be the firstborn among many brethren. The ultimate purpose, according to Colossians 1:23, is that in all things, Jesus might have the preeminence.

Do you remember Acts 4:13? It says when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John and knew that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus. There was something about Peter and John that reminded them of Jesus, and the question that you and I need to ask is if that’s true about us, that there’s something about us. They watch the way we as husbands related to our wives. They watch the way you wives relate to your husbands, the way you parents relate to your children, and the way you children relate to your parents, and the way you relate to other people, and the way you handle your money, and the way you use your time, and your values, and your standards. As people look at you, do they say, “That person’s like Jesus”? Well, God wants to make us like the Lord Jesus Christ. His purpose is that we should be reflecting the Lord Jesus. That’s the good. That’s the good toward which God is working all things.

Now, as we take this verse apart, I want you to notice very carefully how the verse begins. It begins with the words: *And we know...* It doesn’t begin with: And we think... It doesn’t begin with: And we feel... It begins with: *And we know...* In other words, we’re absolutely sure of this. We’re certain. Now go back if you have your Bibles open still, to Romans 8:26, where Paul says there are some things we do not know. He says *...for we do not know...* Have you ever considered how

many uncertainties we face in life? Have you ever considered how many times and about how many things we must say, “We don’t know”? There are some of us who ought to say that more often than we do. We pretend we know everything. The truth is many times we just have to say, “We don’t know.” If we’re honest, we’ll have to agree with James, the author of the book of James, who was absolutely on target when he wrote, “Come now, you who say, ‘Tomorrow, we’ll go into such and such a city and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit,’ yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You’re just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.” James says, “You don’t know. You really don’t know what your life will be like.” Or we certainly will agree with the writer of the book of Proverbs 27:1, where he said, “We shouldn’t boast of tomorrow, because we don’t know what a day may bring forth.”

Earlier, your pastor mentioned that Carol and I celebrated this week our 55th Wedding Anniversary. During our 55 years of marriage, we’ve had a lot of blessings, and just recently in fact, as we were approaching our 55th Wedding Anniversary, Carol and I sat down and we discussed the most happy, the most pleasant times in our 55 years of marriage, and then we went on to discuss some of the most unhappy, and some of the most challenging times during 55 years of marriage, not necessarily with each other but in our lives and ministry. And interestingly, we agreed about the most pleasant as well as the hardest periods that we’ve ever had, and more than that, we were also in agreement that as we’d gone through life, we never knew exactly whether the road ahead would be smooth, or whether the road ahead would be rough.

In other words, as we have gone through life, we have faced many uncertainties, and from that discussion that Carol and I had with each other, we were reminded of the absolute truth of Proverbs 27:1, that we don’t know what a day may bring forth, and of James 4, which says that you don’t know what your life is. It’s just a vapor. It appears and is gone. In other words, in one way or another, we’re constantly encountered by uncertainties in our own lives, uncertainties in our families, uncertainties in our world, uncertainties in society, and uncertainties even sometimes in our churches. There’s uncertainty all around us, and so when we turn to the word of God and hear the apostle Paul saying by inspiration of the Spirit of God, “Here’s one thing of which we can be absolutely certain.” There are many things of which the Christian is uncertain, and there are some things, according to 1 Corinthians 13:9-12, that we only know in part, and we only see through a glass dimly, but of the issue of which Romans 8:28 is speaking, Paul says you can know this with absolute certainty: You can be absolutely certain that God is working and will work the circumstances of our lives and of this world together for our

good, in making us more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. The text doesn't say, "Well, maybe He'll do this." It doesn't say, "Well, there's a slight chance that He'll do this." It doesn't say, "There's a possibility that this might be true." It says: ***And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.***

The question is: Why can we as Christians be certain that God will do this? Well, because Romans 8:28 is part of the Scripture which is given to us by a God who, according to Psalm 31:5, is the God of truth. We can know this because Romans 8:28 is one of the promises of which 2 Corinthians 1:20 says all of the promises of God are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. We can know this because Romans 8:28 is given to us by a God who, according to Titus 1:2, cannot lie. It's not simply that He does not lie, but He can't lie, because He's a God of truth. We know that Romans 8:28 is true because it's part of the Scriptures given by God for whom, according to Hebrews 6:18, telling a lie is an absolute impossibility. It's not just that He does not lie, but it's impossible for Him to lie. We can know with certainty that God will fulfill this promise, because God who makes His promise is absolutely sovereign. He rules among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of earth, and none can stay His hand or say, "What doest thou?"

He is sovereign. He is so sovereign, that whatever He purposes to bring to pass, He has the power to bring to pass. He is so sovereign, that whatever He doesn't really want and can't use for our good and for His glory, He can't stop it from happening? Yes, He can, because He is all together sovereign. We know that Romans 8:28 is true, because He is the immutable God. He is the unchangeable God. He's the same yesterday, today and forever. He can't change. We know that Romans 8:28 will be fulfilled because the God who made this promise is a God who loves us with an everlasting love. Nothing shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We know this because this promise was given to us by a God who can never cease to be faithful to His people.

1 Corinthians 10:13 ~ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful,...

He is absolutely faithful. We know that Romans 8:28 is true because the God who made this promise is the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. We know it's true because this God is omniscient. If you ascend into the heavens, He's there. "If you make your bed in the lowest parts of the earth, He's there," according to Psalm 139. Darkness is light around God. God is so omniscient. God is so wise that He can fulfill this promise. We know it's true because He's omnipresent. Wherever we

go, God is there and He can accomplish His purpose. We know that God can fulfill this promise because of His ability to cause all things to work together for good in the lives of many of the people in the Bible. Think of Joseph thrown into a pit. His brothers wanted to kill him, and then they sell him into slavery, and he's sold into the house of Potiphar, thrown in prison. Potiphar's wife lies about him. God is there. God is able, even in the midst of those tough and difficult and inexplicable circumstances, to work it together for good, and Joseph came to the realization as he said in Genesis 50:20, as he said to his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

We can know with certainty that God will fulfill this promise, because the God who made this promise is the God who has demonstrated His ability to work things together for good in the lives of many of us. I've been a Christian now as I said since 1951, but I can look back and I can see times in my life when even as a pastor, there were times where I said, "Lord, what are You doing? What's going to happen to the church?" Well, He worked it together for good and used it in my life and in the lives of others as well. As I've reflected on my more than 55 years of Christian ministry, there have been times when the ministry has been very enjoyable, and there have been times of trial and difficulty, times when the Lord seemed near, and also times when He seemed to withdraw, times when I failed miserably and said some things that I shouldn't have said, and did some things that I shouldn't have done. But I can honestly say as I look back at some of the worst times in my ministry and in my life and see that they have been the best times, and God has used that to help me to see my need of becoming more like Jesus.

In May of 2012, just a couple of months ago, Ted Tripp and his dear wife Margie came to South Africa. Ted was in my church, the church that I pastored in 1969, and I baptized Ted and Margie at that time, and we've had a wonderful relationship ever since. They came to South Africa to minister, and we spent five days with them from early morning til late at night, and as we were driving around South Africa, we went to Kruger National Park to see some of the animals. They had never been there before. Ted asked me about the hardest times in my life, and frankly, in some ways, the last year of my life has been the hardest year that we've ever had in ministry. For six years, it was some of the best years we've ever had in ministry, but during the last year, it's been one of the hardest times in our ministry. Ted knew about the struggles that we had had, about what had happened, and he turned to me and he said, "What is it that kept you from giving up? What is it that kept you from going into despair?" And I could honestly say, my friends, that what kept me and kept my wife all throughout our many years of marriage and ministry, what has kept us in the hard times, is the fact that we know that God is in charge and that God is working all things, things which I would choose and things I

wouldn't choose, He's working them together for good in how much I need to become more and more like Jesus. He's shown me even this year through some of the hard times, how though I'm 77 years of age and been a Christian for all these years, that I still have a long way to go in becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Yes, as long as we're in this world, we will experience tribulation. Jesus promised that. He said, "In the world, you will have tribulation." That's a promise. We will be criticized. We will have opposition, but in the midst of it all, we can press on, because we know we are absolutely sure that God causes all things to work together for good, and He'll use everything that comes into our lives to make us more like Jesus so that we might more fully realize and fulfill the purpose of our redemption, and of our existence which mainly is to glorify Him. We never glorify Him more than when we're becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

Earlier I quoted Thomas Watson, who said that Romans 8 is one of the choicest feasts in all of the Bible. I also quoted Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who made the remarkable statement, saying that this is one of the most comforting statements in the Bible, and that there's no truth in all of the Bible which is higher than this. It's true, my friends, that as we go through life, there will be many uncertainties. You can count on it. There will be uncertainties – times we have to say, "I don't know." But of this one thing, you can be absolutely certain, and that one thing is that we know that God will work all things together to make me more like Jesus, because I've been called according to His purpose, and by His grace I love Him.

Father, thank You so much for Your truth. Burn it into our hearts, Lord. Make it a reality that we would not just quote this verse, but believe it, and believe it, and believe it. Help us, Lord. Help my dear brothers and sisters, most of them I don't even know that well. I don't know what they're going through. I don't know the challenges they've had. I don't know the difficulties they have physically. I don't know the difficulties they may have had in their marriages, or families, or with their children, or with other loved ones, but I pray that You would help them and help me to rest upon the truth of Romans 8:28, and make it a reality in our experience, not just in our minds that we've memorized. And to You be the honor and glory through all of that, we pray, in Jesus Christ's Name, Amen.

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