

ROMANS (8:28)

It's All Good

PART 36 – MAY 22, 2005

READING ROMANS

Here's a quick recap of the past few weeks in chapter eight:

[Verse 17] [We are] co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we **share in his sufferings** ...

[Verse 18] Our **present sufferings** are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

[Verse 20] For the creation was **subjected to frustration** ...

[Verse 21] Creation itself [is in] **bondage to decay** ...

[Verse 22] The whole creation has been **groaning as in the pains of childbirth** ...

[Verse 23] **We ourselves**, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, **groan inwardly** ...

[Verse 24] For in this **hope** we were saved. But **hope that is seen is no hope at all**.

[Verse 26] We **do not know** what we ought to pray for ...

What's so liberating about this portion of Romans, is that we're given permission (as believers), not to have to pretend that everything is going well, when it isn't; that we have our act together, when we don't; and that every request is granted, when it's not.

But now Paul tells us there's something we need to know about all of this suffering and frustration and bondage to decay and groaning and waiting and dim-witted prayers. In verse 28 Paul brings an astonishing insight. Let's read one of the greatest promises in all of scripture:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. – Romans 8:28 NIV

WHAT IT DOESN'T SAY

First off, let's look at five things this verse does *not* say:

1. It doesn't say: All things work out the way I want 'em to.

(In my ignorance) I'd like it to say that ... but it doesn't.

2. It doesn't say: All things *are* good.

Cancer isn't good. Paul isn't trying to sugar-coat any of the suffering and frustration he's just been describing. He says:

"In all things God works for the good"

3. It doesn't say: And we *hope* or we *guess* that's true.

"And we know"

Trials and troubles will overwhelm us unless and until we come to stand on this unshakable rock of truth.

4. It doesn't say: *Almost* everything.

"In all things"

Financial problems? Yes! Illnesses? Yes! Relationship issues? Yes! The results of my own sinful acts? Yes! Abuse from others? Yes! In *all things*! Because God never wastes a circumstance. God is in the business of bringing good out of any bad situation that can come into the life of a believer.

5. It doesn't say: God works for the good of *just anyone*.

In fact, if you look close, there are two conditions that must be met, in order for this promise to apply to you and me:

- A. We must be: "Those who love him"

Love for God is what defines us. We have moments of intensity and moments of weakness; but cherishing, valuing, and revering God is the abiding condition of a true believer's heart.

- B. We must be: "Called according to his purpose"

So, it's not enough to just love God; many people cherish their version or idea of God. Loving Him is only *half* of it.

ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE

Q: What's it mean to be *called* according to his purpose?

Q: Or better yet: what *is* this purpose we are called to?

We need to go all the way back to the creation of man.

When God created man, he made him **in the likeness of God**. – Genesis 5:1 NIV

But then of course, that likeness was contaminated (marred, and blemished) with the impurities of sin. [Adam's children weren't made in God's likeness]

[Adam] had a son **in his own likeness, in his own image** ... – Genesis 5:3 NIV

But here's the thing: God foreknew that Adam would sin, and that Adam's sin would tarnish God's likeness in all mankind. Therefore, God's plan to restore His children to their original design was ordained and appointed before Adam was even created. And Paul explains this in very next verse.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be **conformed to the likeness of his Son** ... – Romans 8:29 NIV

We are called to be restored to His likeness. *This* is the "good" that God is working (in all things) for those who "love him" AND who "aspire and desire to be like Jesus."

A woman was in a Bible study, learning about how God refines his people; and she was perplexed by a quote from Malachi: "God will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver." (*Mal* 3:3) She was so curious she made an appointment with a local silversmith to watch him work. He held the silver over a flame and explained this was the only way to burn away the impurities. Then he told her how important it was to keep his eyes on the process, so the silver wouldn't be destroyed. The woman asked how he would know when it was refined. "That's easy," he said, "When I can see my reflection in it."

- God wants us to reflect Jesus.

JOSEPH & JESUS

His *foremost purpose* in our lives is not to make us healthy, wealthy, or happy. His *main goal* is to refine and purify and mold and shape us back into his image and likeness.

And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness ... – 2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV

The more I reflect *on* Him, the more I reflect *of* Him. You see? If we align ourselves with God's preordained purpose, he will use every single circumstance and situation to refine us. And the Two Major Tools he uses to accomplish this are:

1. Truth – through his Word, prayer, and people.
2. Trials – through problems, pain ... and people!

Trials refine us, test us, strengthen us, prepare us, deepen our trust, and build up our Christ-like character. (1 Peter 1:6-7)

- To be over-comers we must be under-goers.

Remember our series on Joseph? His brothers throw him in a pit, and sell him into slavery; his master's wife falsely accuses him of sexual harassment; and he's locked up and all-but-forgotten in a horrible prison. And yet, when he finally confronts the brothers who were the cause of so much pain in his life, Joseph says:

You intended to harm me, but God **intended** it for good ... - Genesis 50:20 NIV

God isn't just *reactive*, he ordains what happens to us, and then infallibly brings the good of refining from it, according to his purpose. That's why Joseph could say:

But **God sent me** ahead of you ... - Genesis 45:7 NIV

Even Jesus at the cross, which involved the sins of Herod, Pilate, Gentiles, and Jews, was ultimately *God's* master work. *They* meant it for evil, but *God* meant it for good!

And what God wants us to learn in all of our circumstances and situations, is to respond the way Jesus did.

Q: And how did Jesus respond to every situation?

A: He praised God, thanked God, and He rejoiced!

Q: How do we know this?

A: Because 1 Thessalonians says:

Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will ... - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NAS

- And we know that Jesus always did the will of God.

Q: Our last big question: How in the world can we do that?!

Look closely; it doesn't say *for* everything give thanks. It says: "*In everything*"

I can't be thankful for leukemia, divorce, or tsunamis. But "in" those situations we can give thanks because we know that God is working for our good according to His preordained purpose to restore us.

- *That* is what we can be thankful for!
- And in that assurance we can rejoice.