

Message: For Those Who Love God

By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison

Romans 8:26-30

Romans 8 Sermon Series

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Our text this week is amazing. We could do an entire series on these 5 verses. Many believers cling to verse 28 in particular, *“All things work together for good.”* That’s essential. It can be hard to believe that such awful things can happen. I can tell stories about some. I’m sure you can, too. The key to a productive Christian life is the Holy Spirit. He helps us in our weakness. He prays for us with incredible depth. He searches our hearts and produces the mind of Christ within us. He transforms and conforms us into a follower of Jesus. He helps us live into the center of God’s will. He calls us in accordance with His purpose. Our favorite part of verse 28, *“All things work together for good,”* is sandwiched between two other clauses: *FOR THOSE WHO LOVE GOD* and *FOR THOSE WHO ARE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE*. To win, I must be on the right (“winning”) team. If I choose not to be on that team, those promises (*“all things work together for good”*) may not apply. Remember WHO is in charge: God. Remember He justifies us through our faith.

APPLICATION: The memory verse is ALL of 8:28: *“We know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”* We should always try to improve our circumstances; however, it is even better to change our hearts to align with God’s will. We can’t always change our situation, but we can always have the mind of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Email received from a member regarding attending Christmas Eve services: I completed the survey sent to my email, but wanted to offer an explanation as to why I plan to watch the livestream rather than attend a Christmas service in person. Please know that my husband and I love Asbury and very much miss attending church. Both of us have been advised to avoid exposure to COVID due to health issues. We appreciated that safety measures (social distancing & mask requirement) had been put in place. We decided to return one Sunday in September. Everyone we saw in and around the hallways wore masks, however, once we got into the sanctuary for the modern service, we noticed that about half of the people around us took off their masks & were talking & singing without them. We moved toward the back where there were several rows open, but

within a few minutes multiple groups of people filed in and we found ourselves in the same situation. We decided to leave. Having the rules for social distancing and requiring masks made us feel safe going but it isn't really protecting anyone if the policies aren't enforced. While I am sensitive to the fact that policing the congregants is an awkward situation for any church, this is a non-starter for us. As much as it breaks my heart, I don't see an alternative but to miss attending a Christmas Eve service with my family - probably for the first time since we had a newborn.

Respectfully done. Paul wrote to the Romans (14:13) about whether Christians could eat meat that had been offered to idols. For some, it is not an issue, for others, it was idolatry. He wrote: *Let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.* Our issue could be wearing masks. Some have refused to return to worship because we have asked people to wear masks. But we wear them because it may reduce the spread of a virus. I know some feel this is like going to eat at a restaurant –we wear them until we are seated and then remove them. We ask you, unless there is a health reason, to wear them for the hour we are in worship, except when you receive communion.

Last week, I spoke about **4 sources of suffering**: Satan, Sin/Selfishness/Unknown/Gospel. Today we talk about suffering, too, but I'll make a different emphasis. 2 words to look for in our scripture reading **Groaning**. Paul says **creation** groans. Things are not right in nature. Sin has affected all of creation. Christians should care about creation. God gave Adam the task to do exactly that. To dismiss the creation as unimportant does not reflect the teaching of the Bible. Care for the creation is part of the Christian worldview. The **church** (Christians) also groans. Things are not right in us. We groan/moan. However, the Holy Spirit groans or intercedes for us. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are praying for us. I'm unsure exactly what that means, but I find it comforting. **Predestined (v. Free Will)** Strike a balance. God must be sovereign (in charge) or He isn't God. God **knows** all there is to know about everything, but if God **knows** something does not mean He **caused** it.

I saw our 10 year old daughter, Jessee, roller-skate down a steep hill on 86th Street. Watching her, I knew she would fall. She was going too fast. She lost control, fell, and broke her arm. Dr. Mauerman, an orthopedic surgeon (Asbury member) gave her a cast. FALLING was not my will for her. I could have prevented accidents by locking her in her room and never letting her out. But locking others up is not healthy. Life has risks. It was her choice. She learned from it, too. I felt I knew what would happen (though not with a broken arm), but I did not cause it. There is a difference between knowing something and causing something. God

turns us loose and lets us make meaningful choices. The problem with free will = we all make bad choices.

There is a tension between free will and God's sovereignty. God knows who will & won't be saved. We believe God gives us the capacity to choose and that every person is not pre-determined. Does God control every human decision? Does God pre-determine who will be saved (+ who will be lost)? Do we have any say over the matter? We can cite scriptures that seem to support BOTH positions. Of course, I want to share with you some of the ones that support: "**Whoever, all, anyone.**"

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that **whoever** believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16

*This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires **all** people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.* 1 Timothy 2:3

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If **anyone** hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him, and he with me.* Revelation 3:20

We can agree that human beings are lost and that God is on a rescue mission to save us.

Romans 8:26-30

*Likewise **the Spirit helps us in our weakness.** For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.²⁸ And we know that **for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified **he also glorified.***

1) **the Spirit helps us in our weakness** We have many weaknesses. Our knowledge is limited, as is our ability to keep the Law of God. We also have a limited lifespan. But the Spirit intercedes for us. Though the Spirit helps us in our weakness, it does not mean we are problem free.

2) **All things will work together for good...if we LOVE God & are called according to his PURPOSE.** Sometimes Christians tell someone who has just experienced loss, "Oh, don't worry about losing your job, God will provide another one for you that will be better." Or... "So sorry your fiancé broke up with you at the altar, but that's okay, I'm sure you'll find a better one." That's not what this verse is about. We may get a better job after losing ours or get a better spouse than the one we

thought we had lined up, but this is not ultimately about OUR benefit and how things will break in our favor – it is about the GLORY OF GOD.

This does not say all things are good...or that something good will come from everything that happens. However, it does mean God can work all things for good if we love Him. The Greek word Paul uses for “**work together**” = the word we get for “**synergy**.” The sum is greater than the individual parts. It is many different things combining together for a good product in the end. Clearly evil exists and sin causes havoc. However, God can still work for good in the midst of evil and sin. We are trying to co-create with God – to bring “synergy” between God’s sovereignty and man’s free will.

Synergy means that ALL THINGS (the good & the bad) work for God’s glory (not ours). Many people say, “I don’t believe in God bc something bad happened to me.” That is short-term thinking.

3) **He also glorified.** God has a series of actions that will bring His people to GLORY. He foreknew. The biblical meaning of “to know” denotes someone entering relationship with another. It was God’s plan to enter into relationship with us. Then we were predestined, called and justified. It culminates in a final event – we are conformed to Christ’s own glorious body.

When Moses was born, Pharaoh gave an edict that all male Hebrew children should be killed. Bad news. But he was put into a basket, floated down the Nile, retrieved by Pharaoh’s daughter, raised in Pharaoh’s court. Good. Then he killed someone and fled. Bad. But 40 years later, God sent him a burning bush, told him to go talk to Pharaoh, gave him his brother to help, a staff to perform miracles, to get the Israelites freed. Good. Pharaoh said, “Over my dead body.” Bad. Miracles, including the parting of the Red Sea. Good. Grumbling and disbelief of the Israelites. Bad. Laws given. Good. Sinfulness = Bad. Moses had times where he was angry & afraid, bewildered & confused, depressed & doubting...but there was a synergy in his life. All things worked together for good. The end result.

The conclusion of the Book of Exodus is not about Moses or the Israelites. It was about something else:

And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 40:35 Ultimate purpose = to bring glory to God. 8:28 is not to bring US glory. As Moses learned, we bow before the immeasurably great.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18

God has a plan. God is in control. God has done everything we need for us to be saved and glorified. We cannot forgive our sins. We cannot get to heaven on our own merits. God has acted. But we must still act. We must choose to work together with God to accomplish His purpose. God has done His part. We must

respond to this gift. Paul assures his readers we are heaven bound, not earth bound. We must begin with the end in mind – this is for the Glory of God.