

Working for the Good - Part 1

Scripture: Romans 8:28-30

Introduction

The situation with churches in North America is bad. Attendance is down. Baptisms are low. Churches are closing their doors. It is not just here in Wake Forest, but everywhere in North America. While some churches thrive, others are dying. What is the problem? What is causing the decline? Some people will say it is the leadership, and in many cases, it is. Pastors and other church leaders fail to lead God's people in *being* the Church. In just about all cases of a declining church, the church has become self-serving, inwardly focused and not missions-minded. It is hard to grow when the Body is not working on those things that lead to its growth. For instance, if I focus on eating french fries, candy and soda pop and neglect exercise and eating healthy foods, my body is going to suffer. The same is true for the Church. The Church has to focus on what will make it healthy or it will die. We must have a seriously intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and desire the things that mean the most to Him. If we are to grow, it will start with a growth in our relationship with Christ, and a commitment to reach those who do not know Him. It begins on our knees and continues with our hands and feet.

What does all of that have to do with the passage before us today? Maybe you have questioned if things will ever get better. Maybe you are discouraged and have trouble trusting God to work things out for the best. Maybe something has happened that made you wonder if God knows what He is doing. The good news of the Gospel is that God has made a wonderful promise to His people and He wants you to be encouraged when things are not going well. The truth is that we are not promised freedom from trouble. We are not promised success and prosperity in this life, but we are promised that we are never alone and that God is working out things for the best. In this passage, Paul assured his readers that all things will work out for the best for those who love God and who are called by Him. No matter what we experience, no matter what happens in this life, if we know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we know that everything will be Ok. How do we know this? God said so! His Word is truth and He is faithful. When God makes a promise, you can take it to the bank.

The Promise of Good Things

The last time we were in this passage, we discovered some things about the Holy Spirit. We read that the Holy Spirit is a Helper Who is working for our good. This means that the Holy Spirit is working in our lives to ensure that good things happen. When you are suffering, or in the midst of trouble, or patiently waiting for an answer to prayer, or you do not even have the words to pray, you can be assured that God is working to bring about the best things. Look at the promise mentioned in verse twenty-eight.

Romans 8:28 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.

Isn't that a comforting passage? This is one of those verses that has encouraged Christians throughout the ages. God wrote this passage to comfort us. However, does this promise mean that everything in your life will be good? Does it mean that this good is for everyone? I would like to focus on two main questions about verse twenty-eight: 1) what exactly is the promise, and 2) who are the recipients of the promise?

The Meaning of the Promise

In the classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey discovered just how wonderful his life was despite his many setbacks and unfulfilled dreams. You might be able to relate to George's frustrations. Perhaps there are things that have happened in your life that did not go as planned. Maybe you thought to yourself that things would have been better if something else happened. Maybe it was a missed opportunity, or a loss of some kind, or some hurt in your life. For George, he found that though things did not go as *he planned*, they worked out for the good. In fact, things that he might not have otherwise wanted at the time were essential to bring about the greatest good in his life, his family and his community. At the end of the movie, George realized that his life had great meaning and purpose, even when he thought certain things were not so good.

God desires good things to happen and He is always in control. You might have a hard time believing that when something bad has happened. God working all things for good does not mean that your life will be trouble free. It does not mean that you will get that job promotion you desperately want. It does not mean you will win the lottery. It also does not mean that you will get the answer to your prayers that you want. Sometimes, the answer to our prayers is "No." What this promise does mean is that *God is working* to bring about the best outcome, even if you do not know it, and sometimes we will not know it. You may be tempted to question that God is there, or that He loves you, or that He is in control, but we should remember that God has not left His throne. He is also not overwhelmed or surprised by anything that happens. He is working for good things to happen even when it may not seem so. I'll give a few examples.

Joseph was rejected by his brothers and sold into slavery. Surely, he must have questioned what God was doing in his life. Just when things looked like they were going well, Potiphar's wife lied on Joseph and he was then put in prison. How many times might have Joseph lost faith in God? I can imagine that it would have been easy to do that. But God worked through a series of fortunate events where Joseph ended up second in command over Egypt and was able to save his family from a severe famine. God was working things out for the good even if Joseph could not understand what God was doing. As a result, Joseph's family became numerous, just as God had promised, and events were set in motion for Joseph's family to later become the nation of God.

Jonah is proof that even when we disobey God and we suffer for it, God is still working to bring about the best. God called Jonah to do what every evangelist dreams of doing — to preach to those who do not know God. Jonah was a prophet of God and he should have jumped at the opportunity to preach God's Word to the wicked people in Nineveh. However, Jonah said, "No, I am not doing that. I am going as far away from God and

what He has told me to do.” God *worked it out* that Jonah would be thrown from his little boat, swallowed by a “great fish,” and then taken to where he needed to be. Jonah finally came to his senses and preached the message God wanted him to preach. As a result, *thousands* turned to God and the city was spared. Wasn’t that a good thing?

I’ll give one more example. God called Paul to become His “instrument” to carry the Gospel to the nations, even though Paul was persecuting God’s people. Oftentimes, God calls people to Himself who would otherwise not want to have anything to do with Him. God uses the most unlikely people to do His work and to bring about the greatest good. Paul was beaten, stoned, imprisoned and even sent to Rome to appear before Caesar, and yet God used all of that to bring about good things. God used the events in Paul’s life to take the good news of Jesus Christ to people who would have otherwise perished and gone to Hell. It might have been easy for Paul to say that his troubles were more than he could bear, yet, he still had faith and hope in Christ. God knows what He is doing and He is working to bring about the best outcome even when we cannot see it. God wants what is best, and that is not necessarily what you may think is best.

The Recipients of the Promise

This brings us to the second question: Who are the recipients of this promise? If God has promised that He will work all things for the good, even if we might not realize it, does it mean everyone benefits from this promise? Will it be good for everyone? To answer that, we need to look at verse twenty-eight again:

Romans 8:28 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.*

Notice that this verse does not say that all things work together for the good for *everyone*. There are two conditions to this promise: 1) *those who love God*, and 2) *those who are called according to His purpose*. The promise that God will work out all things for good is for these people. We should not think of these people as two separate groups, but rather as two descriptions of the same group of people. God works things out for the best for those who love Him, who are also called according to His purpose. Basically, God works all things for the good for those who know His Son Jesus Christ. If you do not know Christ as your Lord and Savior, this promise is not for you. If you want to claim this promise, you need to first belong to Jesus. It is that simple!

God has promised to work out all things for good for His people. One characteristic of His people are that they will love Him. They will desire Him. They will also desire what He desires. What motivates you to call yourself a Christian? Is it that you want fire insurance? Is your faith in Jesus Christ your golden ticket to Heaven? Is it the blessings and gifts that God bestows upon those who accept Christ, or is it because you really love God? Imagine if my wife were to ask me, “Why did you marry me, and I responded, because I love what you do for me.” How will that make her feel? Wouldn’t she want me to love her and not what she does for me? The same is true for God. Do you love His gifts or do you love the Giver? That is an important distinction. Now imagine I said to my

wife, “I married you because I love you more than anyone else and I can’t imagine living without you.” That needs to be our relationship with God. If you are struggling with placing idols before God and not loving Him, then you should pray God will remove those idols and give you the right desires — that you will love Him more than anything.

The second condition of this promise is being called according to God’s purpose. If you have trusted in Jesus Christ and accepted Him as your Lord and Savior, God has called you into a relationship with Him. You may ask what is His purpose of calling you. God called you for the purpose of glorifying Him in all that you are and all that you do. The good that God is working in your life and the purpose for which He has called you is for you to become like His Son, Jesus Christ. God wants all of His adopted children to become like His only begotten Son, Jesus. That is the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit working in your life. We see this in verse twenty-nine.

Romans 8:29 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.*

The “good” of which Paul spoke is not necessarily what we think is best, but is for us to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. When God saved you, He not only saved you from your sin and death, but He also saved you to become someone different. God does not want to come into your heart, He wants all of you. God gives the Holy Spirit to His adopted children to not only comfort them in time of need, but to also conform them into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. Are you conforming into the image of Christ? Are you more like Christ today than you were yesterday? Do you love God more today than you did yesterday? Do you love the things that God desires — like loving others, forgiving others, and reaching others with the Gospel? The world needs to see a people who are radically changed by the Gospel and who are on mission for it. Is that you?

Conclusion

This passage describes how God always works for the good. This includes carrying out His saving purpose, from knowing His people beforehand to glorifying them in the end. We will take a closer look at this saving work next week, but suffice it to say, God works for the good of His people and His people are assured a glorious future. Do you believe God is doing good? When trouble comes your way, will you reject God and say that He does not know what He is doing, or will you respond like Job and say, “Though he slay me, I will hope in him.” (Job 13:15) God has promised good for His people. Perhaps a more important question, “Is this promise for you?” Have you turned from your sin and turned to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? If you have then this promise is for you. You can trust God to work out all things for the good, even if you do not understand it.

But, maybe you do not see much good around. Maybe you trust God to work all things out, but you feel as though you are walking through a valley right now. If so, are you working for the good? Are you making something good out of a bad situation or are you just complaining about it? Maybe God would work more if He had more to work with. Have you fully surrendered to Jesus Christ for Him to use you as He sees fit? Have you

submitted to the Lordship of Christ in all areas of your life? Are you showing the love of God to others? Do people in your church family and those in your community know you love God? If we are God's people who love Him and who are called according to His purpose, we will spend less time focusing on ourselves and spend more energy and time connecting with those who do not know Christ. If we are His people who love Him and who are called according to His purpose, we will cultivate our relationship with Christ, and work on reaching those who do not know Him. Good things begin on our knees and continue with our hands and feet. God is working for the good. Are you?