

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.²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Romans 8:28-30)

Does God Have a Plan for Us?

“There’s a reason for everything.” “I guess it’s all part of God’s plan.” Have you ever heard people say things like that? Have you ever said that sort of thing yourself? When I hear people say those things, usually, it’s because something bad has happened. Someone has died. There’s a surgery coming up. A job has disappeared. People are looking for the silver lining, so they take refuge in the idea that God has a plan for each of us and this disaster is a part of that plan. And, of course, the implication is that in the end we’ll come out ahead. Is that what the Bible teaches? That’s what we want to consider this morning. Just because we hear that said over and over again doesn’t make it true. It’s only true if God makes those promises to us. My friends, **does God have a plan for us?**

I. Yes, so all things work for our good.

II. Yes, and it begins and ends in eternity.

I.

Now, we have to be a little bit careful because there’s a lot of fuzzy thinking out there which simply does not agree with the Bible. When we say that God has a plan for us, that does not mean that God micromanages our lives. He gives us real freedom of choice. God did not decide from all eternity whether you should sell your house or not. You get to choose whether or not to do that. As long as you make your decision in a God-pleasing way, he promises to bless the outcome. God did not plan before the world began whether or not you should be married to the person you’re with. God gave you a choice and you made it. As long as the two of you live together as his children, he will bless your marriage. At the same time, God does guide and direct our lives. He decides what choices we have open to us and he decides how he’s going to work in our lives when we make those choices. But we aren’t robots condemned to making the decisions God preordained for us. He gives us freedom of choice.

If you understand that, then you can answer the question. **Does God have a plan for us? Yes, so all things work for our good.** That’s the point that St. Paul makes today in the book of Romans, in one of the most memorized and quoted passages of the Bible. He says, **“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.”**

In this chapter, St. Paul is talking about suffering. He makes no bones about the fact we have to face hardships. Now, you’d think that’s obvious wouldn’t you? Sadly, it isn’t. It’s our nature to believe we can live happily ever after. Our whole culture is built on the proposition that if you own a nice car and a beautiful home, if you have your two children – one boy and one girl – and that satisfying career that fulfills you, if you’re popular and respected, you will be happy. My friends, it’s just not true. God is gracious and he sends each of us a rich measure of blessings in this life. But he also sends suffering. That will be true for as long as this world lasts because this world is corrupted by sin. Sin, in us and in the people around us, is the source of all hardship and difficulty.

God never promised to spare us that hardship. Instead, he promises that **“in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** What does it mean to be called by God? It means to have the gospel come and give you faith. That’s something that God did to you and in you. We are sinners. We were running away from God just as fast as we could. But God found us and made us his. He gave us faith. With that faith, he changed our attitude toward him. Now, we love him. It’s true, we need to learn each day to love him more. It’s also true that the more we learn to love him the greater our blessings are. But God addresses this promise to every believer.

To all of us who trust in Jesus as our Savior and who are daily learning to love him better, God promises that in all things he works for our good. Nothing that happens to you is bad for you, if you are in Christ. It’s easy to say that about the good things, right? If you were raised by parents who loved you and taught you to

trust in Christ and to be disciplined and hardworking, obviously, that's good for you. But what about the bad things? What about the unemployment numbers announced last week? I know that some of us are included in those job losses. What about sickness in your family and the loss of people you love? What about stress in your marriage? Are those things working for your good? The answer is yes. All that happens to us here is part of God's plan to bring us to heaven.

God even uses the sins people commit against us for our good. If you had a marriage end because of your spouse's unfaithfulness, I'm sure that was painful. But God's promise is that he sent that difficulty for your good. If you were robbed or betrayed by someone you trusted, I'm sure you wrestled with your feelings about that, maybe even for years. I don't want to make light of the pain. And I don't want to excuse the sin of the person who hurt you. But in that hardship God worked for your good.

What did he do for you? We don't have a crystal ball that enables us to peer into the mind of God. We can't see all that God is doing now or in the future. Sometimes, as time goes on, we can see some good coming from our hardships. But sometimes we can't. We have to wait until we reach eternal life. But God promises that in all things he works for our good. We can say that the hardships we face always drive us back to Christ, who alone is able to overcome them. Sufferings actually purify our faith. Again and again, the Bible encourages us to rejoice in our suffering because in suffering, God refocuses us on him and his grace. Because he loves you, God does that for you every time you hurt.

II.

You see, our life here is all about our relationship with Christ. Faith is the most important thing in our life. That understanding is the key to understanding God's love for us here. You will never find real comfort in the idea that God has a plan for you until you understand that what matters in this life is the next life. God promised that in all things he works for our good. But we don't always understand what our good is. We want to believe that our good is the quality of life we have here. So when grandma's quality of life begins to worsen, we start wondering if Jack Kavorkian didn't have a point. When the doctors start pressuring us to unplug her ventilator, there's no discussion of the spiritual merits of suffering. We wind up torturing ourselves into making the decision that the medical establishment wants us to make: pull the plug.

Our good is not how we feel here. It's not how much we enjoy life here. Our good is not whether we go to college and have great jobs or whether our family life matches a Norman Rockwell painting. Our good is eternal life. When you look at your life that way, then you know the answer to the question, **does God have a plan for us? Yes, and it begins and ends in eternity.**

Paul says, **"For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."** Before time began, God knew us. He chose us to live with him forever. God planned to make us like Jesus so that Jesus would be the firstborn of a large family under God. How did he make us like Jesus? Paul explains, **"And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."** God chose us to believe. And God never misses any of those whom he chose. He gets his word to us and he calls us. Now, I don't know when that happened for you. But at some moment in your life – for most of us when our parents brought you to be baptized as babies – but at some moment in your life, God reached out and called you by the gospel.

Through that gospel, he reached into your heart and created faith there. He justified you. If you've been a Lutheran for very long, you've probably heard a pastor say that justify means he declared you not guilty in his courtroom. God's verdict on us sinners is that we are righteous and holy. How did that verdict come about? It would seem to have been a huge miscarriage of justice because every one of us is a sinner from way back. We were sinners at the moment we were conceived. We can't afford to get all huffy this morning and resent the fact that the guy up in front is calling us sinners again. The fact that we resent that label is proof enough that we're sinners, because God is the one who says that. I didn't make that up. If we don't want to believe we were born sinners, then we don't want to believe God. That is sin in its truest form.

God should find us guilty in his courtroom and condemn us. But Jesus stood in our place in that courtroom. God let him plead guilty to our crimes. God punished him for what we have done. God killed him in our place. Then God ruled that all our sins were paid for because our punishment was already suffered. God justified the whole world when Jesus died and rose. And God justified you and me personally when he came to us in that gospel message and he made us believers. Faith gives us that verdict that God pronounced in his courtroom. Before time began, God planned to give that verdict to you and to me.

Those he predestined, he called. Those he called, he justified. Then Paul says, “...**those he justified, he also glorified.**” Notice, he did not say, “he will glorify” but rather “he glorified” as if it were somehow an accomplished fact. My friends, do you feel like you’re in glory right now? As you struggle with the pains and hurts of this life, as you worry about whether your job is the next one that’s going away, as you stay up nights trying to figure out how you’re going to keep your house, does that feel like glory?

It doesn’t, does it? Yet, God has glorified us. He didn’t just give us an IOU for heaven, he gave us heaven itself. When I was a teenager, I desperately wanted my own car. Now, I had no idea then how much it would cost to keep a car on the road and I didn’t really need one. I just wanted one. I used to dream about my dad buying me a car. He never did, but imagine that he had. Imagine that when I was fifteen, he bought a car and registered it in my name and parked in the garage and told me that I could have the keys just as soon as I turned sixteen and got my drivers license. That’s what God has done for us. He has glorified us. It isn’t something that we don’t have yet. It is ours. Christ rose from the dead and gave us eternity with him. The only reason that we don’t see it is that we still live here in a world that hides God’s glory, like a garage hides a car from view.

But it is true that we don’t get to take the glory out for a spin just yet. We do have to wait until we leave this sinful world. The hardships and fears and sufferings of this world sometimes make it seem like that glory isn’t ours, that it isn’t there, that we don’t have it yet. But we do. And one day soon, Jesus is going to return and open up the garage and let all the world see the Lamborghini that he has bought for every one of us. We’re going to roll that glory out of the garage and we are going to enjoy it forever!

That is God’s plan for our lives. In that plan, we find the only true comfort there is for life here. My friends, cling to that comfort! This world offers all kinds of substitute comforts. It offers the distractions of sin and the entertainment culture. It offers the false promise of wealth and lifestyle and popularity. It offers the belief that if we just do this or get that or have some special person in our lives, we’ll be happy. But all of it is a lie. In this life, we have to bear the cross. We suffer with our Savior and we rejoice in the sufferings he sends us because those sufferings purify our faith. And our faith hangs on to the one thing that matters: eternal life with Jesus. That glory is yours. God’s plan is to get you to that glory. Amen.