

God's Love and God's Plan
Romans 8:28-39

Turn to Romans 8 please. God's Love and God's Plan. This sermon is our Easter wrap-up, this is where Christ's death and resurrection end up for us, the rest of the story. These twelve verses are the most triumphant paragraphs of Scripture, it seems to me.

In the first half of Romans 8, Paul wrote about how Christ gives the Holy Spirit, and how God gives us a new mind, and changes the direction of our lives. But just before our text, vv18-27, Paul has written about our troubles and our weaknesses. And that we have sufferings, but they are nothing to be compared with our coming glory.

For Us, God works all things for good – v28

And we know that for those who love God, He works all things for good, for those who have been called according to his purpose. We are those who love God, who have been called according to his purpose. For us, God works all things for good.

That is a very bold line. For us, God works all things for good. "All things" includes our troubles, our sufferings, and our weaknesses. Do we have enough faith to believe that? I have had to think about that this week. Do I have enough faith to believe that?

This is for those who are called according to his purpose, his plan. God has a plan for us, for each of us. Called according to his plan. His plan is not just to forgive our sins and give us eternal life. That's one stage along the way, but that's not yet the plan.

God makes everything, specifically including the hard things, work for the good of his plan. It's not my plan, and not your plan. He's got plans for us. We love God, and he takes it from there.

The Plan: He Makes us Just Like his Son – 8:29

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that his Son might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.

"Those God foreknew." What does that mean? In the Bible, "knowing" is almost never information, it is always relationship of some kind. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes people who will say to him, "Lord, Lord," and Jesus will answer, "I never knew you."

Jesus certainly knew they existed, and their names. It means there was never any relationship. And at this point I am groping about God foreknowing us, but what it seems to say is that far in the past, the eternal God was acquainted with us, and had some relationship with us.

And back there when God had a relationship with us, he planned our destination. It's like he put an X on the map, and said, "this is where you will end up." And where is the X? We will be formed after a pattern, and the pattern is his Son. God will shape us and groom us so that we will be like his Son. That's the plan, that's his purpose, called according to his purpose.

There's family language here. The Father makes us like his Son, so his Son can be the firstborn of his many sons and daughters. The Son will have many younger brothers and sisters. Big family, one oldest brother, many younger brothers and sisters. God wants that for his Son.

The Sequence – 8:30

And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. God has shown us five stages to his plan.

First God *foreknew* us, and then whom he foreknew he *predestined*, he marked out for the plan. And those he *foreknew* and *marked out for the plan*, he *called*. Now we enter our life time. God *called* us, and apparently everyone who gets this call answers it, comes to God. That's three.

And after he calls and we come, he *justifies* us, he declares us righteous, he gives us the final verdict on our lives ahead of time. *Justifies* is the fourth stage, and those whom he *justified*, those he also *glorified*, that's where it ends. Glorified is the destination.

In our Scripture today, God gives us three terms to help us understand our destination. The first was to be conformed to the image of his Son. God's plan to shape us so that we'll be just like his Son. And in different words, God's plan is to glorify us. That is the second way God gives us to understand where this ends up, where the X is on the map.

What does it mean that we'll be glorified? I don't know. We'll be very impressive. Hard to believe, isn't it? Go figure. But it cannot mean any less than that. Paul has written about our future glory several times in Romans 8 already (vv17,18,21). It's a big deal.

Some of you are probably uneasy with the strong sovereignty of God in this Scripture. It seems that God's plan is all that matters, and that does not seem right to you. Don't humans have free choice? Here's how the Bible handles this topic.

There are some Scriptures, like this one, that speak unmistakably about God's sovereign plan and purpose. Everything fits God's sovereign plan and purpose. But there are other Scriptures that clearly describe human freedom and responsibility. There are also several of those in Romans.

This happens right through the Bible. To the Bible writers, there is no contradiction. We say, it's either God's choice or ours, can't really be both. The Bible writers say, "you weren't listening, they are both true. We say, "impossible, can't both be true." And the writers say, "you still are not listening." Our Scripture today describes God's sovereignty, so that's the message.

Sequence: he knew us ahead of time, he marked our destination ahead of time, he called us, he justified us, and he will glorify us. The one thing this sequence shows us is that our God has long term plans for us, and he's on schedule, and he makes all things work together for the good of his plan. His plan is that we will truly be like his Son, and we will be glorified.

What is clear by now is that our destination is not in this life. God's plan for each of us takes eternity to complete. God knowing us ahead of time, and choosing us, happened before the foundation of the world, according to Ephesians and Revelation (E 1:4; R 17:8). In this life, we are called and justified. Four down, one to go.

In the next life we are finally glorified and made completely like God's Son. God's plan for us, his purpose, continues through this life, but the destination is the coming glory.

What shall we say in response to these things?

The rest of our Scripture asks four questions, all with the answer, "no one!" (1) Who can be against us? No one. (2) Who can accuse us? No one. (3) Who will condemn us? No one. (4) Who or what will separate us from the love of Christ? No one, nothing.

1, Who can be Against Us?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? That is **such** good news. When I was a little guy, my dad quoted that line to me. Wow, I said. I was 5 or 6, very impressed. Is that really in the Bible, dad? Yes. Where? "I don't know where," he said, "but I know its in there." He was right. If God is for us, who can be against us?

He did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all. God handed him over. This is a week after Easter. In the Gospels, Judas handed Jesus over to the Jewish Council, the Council handed Jesus over to Pilate, and Pilate handed Jesus over to the soldiers who crucified him. Judas to the Council, to Pilate, to the soldiers. Behind this was God.

God handed Jesus over to the whole bunch: Judas and the Council and Pilate and the soldiers. God did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all. God is telling us here how deeply he has invested in his plan for us.

What kind of price would make God dig deep into his resources? This one: *He did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all.* God is telling us how totally committed he is to getting us, you and me, to our destination. And if we need something more along the way, for God's plan to succeed, will he not freely give it? He already gave his Son freely, he will certainly graciously give us whatever else we need. Count on it people, we can count on this.

But we ask for things, but we don't get them. What does that mean, then, that he will graciously give us all things? He will graciously give us all things *to see his plan through*.

And I say to God, "God, it would sure be good for your plan, if you helped me a little more with my weaknesses and troubles. And it would make my life easier, too, but just think about your own plan, God. Wouldn't more help be better? God, just think how well I could serve you!"

God is telling us that he's being entirely free and generous with whatever we need to see *his* plan through. Not our plan. His plan. His plan is to see us conformed to the image of his Son, so his Son is the oldest brother of many brothers and sisters. His plan is to see each of us wonderfully glorified. God is telling us he spares no expense to see that through. He gives it all freely.

And when we are in trouble, and we pray, he sends his Holy Spirit. God never says "no," and he never does nothing. He sends us his Spirit to help us. And we say, "well, it sure doesn't feel like it to me!" No, it doesn't, and it didn't feel like it to Jesus, either, did it? You're in good company.

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but handed him over for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? No one can stop God from completing his plan in us.

2, Who will Accuse those whom God has Chosen? – 8:33

Who will accuse those whom God has chosen? Who will accuse God's elect? It is God who justifies. God has justified us. God has declared that we are righteous. God has given us the final verdict ahead of time. He says, "I'll tell you the final score right now: you're righteous!"

"No one can accuse me? Because God chose me, and God justified me, no one can accuse me? But God, I thought YOU were accusing me." God says, "You thought WHAT?" "I thought you were accusing me, God. I was sure you were accusing me." God says, "I handed my Son over so I could declare you righteous. Why on earth would I accuse you?"

When we do what we should not do, our conscience bothers us, and the Holy Spirit will be pulling us away from that. That is true. But there is another dark voice that says, "God is accusing you, that's what you're feeling." But that accusation is *not* God's voice. This is God's voice: *Who dares accuse those whom I have chosen? I am the one who justifies.*

3, Who will Condemn Us? – 8:34

Who then is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Here we could say, "If Christ is for us, who can be against us?"

Ephesians 5 tells us twice that Christ handed himself over to the Father for us. For our sakes, Christ handed himself over to the Father, put himself in the Father's hands, so that the Father could hand him over to Judas and the Council and Pilate and the crucifiers.

For us, the Father did not spare his only Son, and for us, the Son did not spare himself. Christ is just as committed to getting us to our destination as the Father is. Christ here is like the priest, at God's right hand, praying for us and taking care of us. Will God ever refuse a request of Christ for us? Never. Therefore, no one can condemn us.

Who will accuse us? Who will condemn us? My brothers and sisters, for many of us our head space is full of accusations and condemnations. Is that not so? We hear it from others, and we can't forget it, and our own minds find many ways to condemn ourselves and accuse ourselves.

Imagine living one month with no accusation or condemnation every entering your conscious mind, from any source whatsoever. How big of a change would that be for you? God says to us, "Look at what I've done for you, look at what my Son has done, and is doing? Who can accuse you? No one, obviously! Who can condemn you? No one! To even consider it is ridiculous!"

And I say, "Wow! What just happened here?" My brothers and sisters, God speaks to you today: no accusing or condemning voice ever comes from him or his Son. Never.

4, Who shall Separate us from the Love of Christ?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? No one! Shall trouble or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Some very difficult and painful things happen to God's people. We know that. Seven troubles are listed here, and persecution is only one of them. God knows about many troubles besides persecution.

As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." This is from Psalm 44. Ps 88 is the most despairing individual lament in Psalms, and Ps 44 is the most painful group lament. And in Ps 44, "for your sake" should be "because of you, we face death all day long."

In Ps 44, The problem is God himself. "*You*, Lord, rejected and humbled us, *you* gave us up to be devoured by our enemies, *you*, Lord, scattered us among the nations, *you* made us a joke to all the peoples. And Lord, this happened although we had not been false to you or forgotten you." It is the lament of righteous Israelites, caught up in the exile, those like Daniel and his friends.

It is a remarkable Psalm. It is a marvel to me that God has included prayers like this in his book. But listen: We want to be conformed to the image of Christ, right? So he is the firstborn of many brothers and sisters? We want to share in Christ's glory, right? Well, how did God treat his Son? He did not spare him, but handed him over, handed him over to weakness and pain, to trouble and shame.

We don't want to be handed over, we don't want to suffer with Christ. We want to be spared. People, I do not like this any better than you do, but there's no other way to take his. A few verses before our Scripture, Paul is very clear about this: *We are fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we **suffer with Him** so that we may also be **glorified with Him**.*

So I say, "I don't like this, God. This scares me, God." Remember that this scared the Lord, too. "Father, all things are possible, take this cup from me; take this cup from me, Father, yet not my will but yours be done."

In all these things, Super-conquerors – 8:37

No, in all these things we are super-conquerors through him who loved us. Paul uses the word "conqueror, victor" here, and adds a prefix that means "beyond," or "above." In 2 Corinthians he speaks sarcastically about false ministers in that church, and calls them "super-apostles." This is the same prefix, and "super-conqueror" is what he means.

We are not spared, we are handed over. We experience trouble and pain, weakness and shame, and feel so alone in it. Just like Jesus experienced. In spite of this, or actually because of this, we come out on the other end glorified, inheriting the same glory as our Lord inherited. We come out splendid, magnificent, marvelous beings! Just like our Lord.

When I watch sports, I often have a favorite team. I hope Canada will win the curling championship, I cheer for the excellent Winnipeg Blue Bombers, of course. But if I don't have a loyalty, I end up hoping for the underdog, the player or team expected to lose. The reason they're the underdog is that they usually lose, so I am often disappointed.

Jesus looked like the underdog, the big time loser. It could not have ended worse for our Lord. But see how that turned out? Lord of lords, King of kings, all authority in heaven and earth, the ruler of the kings of the earth, every knee will bow to him. Because God raised him and glorified him, and why? Because God loved him to bits!

God wants to conform US to the image of his Son, so that we will inherit the same honour and glory. That's why we have troubles. The surprise is not that we have troubles, it's that most of the time it is not nearly as bad as what's listed here. Often God spares us. But sometimes, it feels pretty bad. But remember God's love and God's plan.

This is the third picture of our destination. One, we are conformed to the image of his Son; two, we are glorified; and three, we are super-conquerors. Super-champions. Heaven's super-heroes. Those three are the X on the map, the place God's plan is taking us. And what will get us from here to there? His great love for us. His love will make us the champions of the universe.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? No one! Shall trouble or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When we have trouble and pain and loneliness and shame, God hopes we will say, “Oh, God is treating me just like his Son, he must love me very much.” Instead we think, “God does not love me, Christ is not praying for me, I am forgotten and neglected.” Jesus felt like that too. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

This Scripture, my brothers and sisters, is God going after that as clearly as he can. People, don't trust your fears. You can feel them, but don't trust them. Trust God instead.

God's plan for us is carried along by his great love for us, and by Christ's great love for us. Christ showed his love for us by handing himself over to the Father, because he loved us. And God showed his love for us by handing his Son over to the sinful and rebellious people.

And God continues to freely give us whatever we need, and Christ continues to speak to the Father on our behalf, and he is never refused. But their plan never was just to get us here, where we are now. This is just another stage, but he will certainly finish what he started, because he loves us.

PRAYER: Oh God who loves us, you must like this old hymn:

“How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He has said, who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?”

God, we do love you, and your excellent Word has given us such a foundation. What more could you say? I often doubt your love and care, as do we all. And I know you will ask me, when I see you, “How else should I have said it?” And I will have no answer. So, our great and loving Father, give us strength to grasp how great your love is. Give us strength to take hold of this. It is a game-changer, if we could rest in this. And God, we praise and thank you for your love and your plans. Our words are shabby, but we can't say nothing. We praise you. We thank you. We love you. We believe, help our unbelief. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.