Romans 8:28-30

Rest in God's Plan

Sermon final

We are in our series "Rest for the Restless" and this morning I want for us to consider what it looks like to Rest in God's Sovereign Plan. This life will beat you down. It will take you through twists and turns, ups – we feel like we're soaring on the mountain top – and downs – we feel like we are stuck in the valley. How can we praise God in the midst of the mountain tops AS WELL AS when we're stuck in the gutter? When all seems safe…and when there are **"wars and rumors of war" (Mt.24:6**)? God's desire is that we would have a strong, steadfast faith when we are doing well, and when all seems lost. He gives us promises in His Word that can anchor the boat when we are tossed by the waves.

Here is the promise to us this morning: If you are a child of God – one who "**love's God"** and one who is **"called according to His purpose"** – the promise here is that **"all things work together for good" (v.28).** Things don't always SEEM good! At times, with our limited understanding, we say things like, "that's bad news", or, "that's good news" and we really don't know do we…because we don't see as God sees. THIS PASSAGE promises us that "**ALL THINGS work together for good".**

Consider a parade. There you are on the street watching as float after float goes by you. You see what is in front of you, you know what's already passed by, but you have no idea what's coming next. Then there is the parade coordinator situated in a building up high. He looks down and from His perspective He has complete knowledge of the plan for the parade and He is able to see from His height the beginning, the middle, and the end. Everything is unfolding according to His plan.

Consider a long string of dominoes placed upright. Each one connects with the next and causes it to fall in a long string of "cause and effect". Sometimes good and bad news can feel like that – a long string of events which ultimately determines our destiny. What causes the dominoes to fall? Was it the dominoes connecting with each other or was there someone outside the chain of dominoes placing each domino in an arrangement where they would fall as planned? The answer is YES!

God has a perfect plan for the parade and each domino will fall, or stand, exactly as He intends it to. What about the choices we make? What then is our part in any of this? Are we just giant parade balloons floating by with their strings tugged so that we have no part at all but to be a display of the parade masters grand plan? Do our choices, decisions, actions have really no purpose at all? How you view the unfolding of God's plan, and your part in the plan is crucial to finding rest.

Consider the lyrics we just sang: "So when I fight, I'll fight on my knees, With my hands lifted high, Oh God, the battle belongs to You". If the battle belongs to God…what is the purpose of fighting, unless the battle in some way depends on us as well? Paul said this at the end of his life:

> **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Tim. 4:7)**

Paul fought a good fight and Paul kept the faith and Paul finished the race…and yet God was "**working all things together for good**" in Paul's life to get him to the finish line.

Do you feel the tension here? Theologian Austin Farrer called this tension the "**causal joint"** – the place where "**all things**", everything in life (including our choices and actions) intersect with God's plan.

Here's what I see in this passage as well as many places in Scripture: First, God is in total control of all things, past, present, *and future*, and has a specific plan for everything that comes to pass. Second, For His children, God singles us out as those for whom everything is working together *for good*. Finally, the fulfillment of God's plan happens through "all things" that are "working together". God's plan will be accomplished, but His plan comes to pass THROUGH Good things, bad things, evil in the world, sin, our own choices and our failures to choose – God is using it all to accomplish His purposes and plan. I want to show you each of these three points in our passage this morning.

1. **God has a plan and it will always come to pass**

Look at v.28 again:

> **And we know that for those who love God *all things* work together for good, for those who are called *according to his purpose*. (Rom. 8:28)**

God is in control of "**all things**" and everything is happening "**according to His purpose**". The context of this verse is sufferings, so that "**all things**" are things of the worst kind: Paul talks about the "**sufferings of this present time" (8:18**) and their "**groanings" (8:26**) and the "**charges**" they were facing for their faith (**8:33**) as well as the coming threats of "**tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword**" (**8:35**). How on earth can we see "suffering" as "**working together**" for "**good**"? When you hear of missionaries slaughtered in a foreign country because of their faith… do you think, "that's good!". No. And yet Paul says God uses "suffering" to "**work together for good".** Maybe there are some very difficult things happening in your life right now…and it's hard to see from your perspective in the parade how God can work these things together for good. One of the keys to resting in God's Plan is to know "God has a plan and it will always come to pass".

Consider some ways that the Bible speaks of God's absolute and pervasive control of ALL THINGS:

God is in control of seemingly random events: The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD. (Prov. 16:33). At the craps table in Las Vegas…God is in control of every role of the dice to accomplish His purposes.

God controls the desires of men, even men of great influence: The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He will (Prov. 21:1). The same God who moved the heart of Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem with fire **(2 Kn. 25:1)** is the same God who moved the heart of Nebuchadnezzar to repent **(Dan. 4:37).**

God oversees events that we don't take note of - Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (Mt. 10:29). There really is no such thing as a random or coincidental event – God has planned all and oversees the unfolding of all events. When the sparrow falls to the ground – God caused the sparrow to die.

God is in total control of the smallest and largest details in the universe - But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. (Mt. 10:30). When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Psa. 8:3-4) Everything orbits around each other, objects collide with objects. People collide with people, and planets collide with planets. Dominoes topple onto the next and cause a sense of randomness, and yet God is guiding all of the complexity, with all power and precision from the planet off in the universe somewhere that we haven't even discovered yet…to your desire to purchase a cup of coffee this morning.

One Sunday morning (January 5, 2003) I purchased a cup of coffee at Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside California and it caused me to lose my seat in the sanctuary, only to be seated in the last seat next to my wife. Did I meet my wife because I bought a cup of coffee or did GOD SIT ME NEXT TO MY WIFE? Yes! God worked *through* my desire to purchase a cup of coffee to sit me next to my wife. My choice was real and had an amazing consequence (I can't imagine what my life would be like had I not sat next to Lorrie than morning)…and I attribute meeting Lorrie to the God who "works together" "all things" for "His purpose".

This passage teaches us that your salvation from start to finish is solely owing to God's sovereign plan: One day in your life you made the choice to follow Jesus. All of a sudden, miracle of miracles, you BELIEVED! **Was that your choice, or was God working in you to produce that choice through you? Yes! Look at v.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*." (Rom. 8:30)**

God's plan for YOUR SALVATION is not ULTIMATELY DEPENDENT upon your choice…that's really good news that you can rest in and be assured in. Notice that each of the events (like dominoes) unfold in a series of events IN TIME. God is outside of time! He created TIME. From His perspective it's a PLAN (singular) but it happens THROUGH series of events.

First, God "predestined" you – the word means "predetermined", or "to decide upon beforehand". If you believe it's because GOD CHOSE YOU! **Second, He "called" you -** one day, the Holy Spirit came and broke your rebellion and resistance to God, opened your eyes to see Jesus and the cross He bore for your sin, and all of a sudden you believed because He called you and you followed! **Third,** He **"justified"** you – through your faith in Jesus and through your response to surrender and follow Him you were **"justified"** or "declared to be righteous". God forgave all of your sin and gave to you the righteousness of Jesus as a gift and God looks at you this morning and says, **"justified!". Paul says in v.33 – "who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies(8:33).** ***Did you put your faith in Jesus and were justified, or did God choose you first and you were justified? Yes!*** **Finally, and this is Paul's main point here, "you were glorified**". This is speaking of our future glorification in Heaven - because God is the one who caused each event in the past, we can be confident that He will cause us to be glorified in the future.

Now there are a lot of events and decisions you make, and collisions with others – good, bad, ugly – in time that happen in between these events in v.30. But Paul's point is to show that God is in total control of the beginning, the middle, and the end of your destiny. Can you imagine if it all depended upon you? People don't like the doctrine of predestination because it removes control from their hands. You don't want the ultimate control! No matter what evil, what good, what sin, what sickness, what unfortunate events, what trials and tribulations come your way you can rest in the fact that if you believe and chose to follow Jesus God has a plan to get you to a final state of glory and His plan WILL NOT FAIL!

2. God's plan for His children is always good

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. (Rom. 8:29)

There is a very important word here, "for". Paul is giving an argument and reason why "all things work together for good". The reason why all things, even suffering, can be seen as "**good**" is because all of it God uses to conform us into the image of His Son. The **"good**" is not always pleasant or pleasing in the moment…again, these Christians were facing suffering. But the suffering was producing something very very **"good"** – they were becoming more like Jesus. God's plan FOR HIS CHILDREN (disclaimer) is to make you more like Jesus and that's a very good

plan. Everything in your life right now God is using to make you more like Jesus and He has all power and authority at His disposal to make it so!

Now there is a **"good"** in **v.29**, but then there is an even GREATER good in this verse. God is using everything to make you more like Jesus…. **"IN ORDER THAT" –** there is a greater purpose, a greater good **– "in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers".** The word firstborn as it is used here doesn't mean "born first". The word **"firstborn"** would be better translated**, "preeminent", or "renowned", or, "foremost", or, "elite", or "superior"…** we are made more like Jesus, ***so that*** Jesus would be the greatest of a family of brothers and sisters. God's ultimate good in your life is to make you look more like Jesus so that Jesus would look really really good!

God is far more concerned with your holiness than your happiness. He is using everything in your life RIGHT NOW to make you look more like Jesus and one of the best ways to make you more like Jesus is through suffering…so Rest in God's Plan in the midst of suffering – He is working in you to make you like Jesus so that Jesus Christ, the preeminent one, would look really really good and be exalted in your transformation. God "foreknew" you – He knew you before you were even born… and He "predestined" you to be made like Jesus. So take heart because God's plan for His children is always good.

3. God's plan comes to pass *through* all things working together

The NASB really captures the idea of the "causal joint" – where God's plan intersects with our choices and the events of life:

> **And we know that *God causes* all things to *work together* for good… (Rom. 8:28 NASB)**

God's plans don't come to pass *in spite of* the choices we make. God's plans come to pass *THROUGH* the choices we make. The words "**work together**" is a single compound word that demonstrates the "joining together" of God's plan and "all things". We make decisions, and those decision have real effect, but ultimately God is working through our decisions in such a way where our choices are real, and God's plan will ultimately come to pass. ***This is where the mystery lies, but one of the best places to consider this "causal joint" is prayer.***

Let me ask you: If you've been walking with the Lord and have been sitting under the authority and teaching of His Word you have asked the question: "do my prayers matter?" God has a plan and it will come to pass. Why pray? Some people respond, "because God wants us to have a relationship and intimacy with Him." That's definitely true…but is that all that prayer is or does our prayer actually have an effect? James seems to think the prayers of Elijah had an actual effect:

> **the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (Jam. 5:16)**

John tells us (1 Jn. 5:14-15) if we pray according to God's will we have what we ask for…seeming to imply that we can pray correctly and incorrectly and that when we pray rightly – things happen! That's more than just intimacy with God. Jesus said, "ask and it will be given to you!" (Mt. 7:7). What if I don't ask…will it not be given? Seems to be the case!

Consider the story of Hezekiah. The story is told in Isaiah 37-39 – it's an amazing story and a great place to consider this "causal joint". Judah's enemy, Assyria, has sieged Jerusalem. And they are threatening King Hezekiah and Judah. Isaiah gives the king ***"good news***" that the Assyrians will be wiped out…and Hezekiah takes the threats of the King of Assyria and cries out to God in prayer in the temple. As the story goes, a single Angel goes into the camp of the Assyrians at night and wipes out 185,000 soldiers…a single Angel. ***Was it God who brought about the victory? Yes! Did Hezekiah's prayer have an effect? I would say yes it did.***

Jerusalem is spared from the attacks of Assyria. Not long after, King Hezekiah is approached by Isaiah with "***bad news***", "You're going to die Hezekiah." Hezekiah goes and pleads with God again in prayer to give him more time, and God mercifully grants him more time. ***Was it God who gave him more time, or was it the prayer of Hezekiah that caused God to grant him more time? Yes! Do you see the intersection between Hezekiah's praying and God's plan?***

Time goes on, and because Hezekiah's life is spared through praying he has a son - Manasseh. Manasseh becomes one of the most evil kings of Judah. We read in 2 Kings 21:9 –

> **Manasseh seduced them to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord had destroyed before the children of Israel. (2 Kg. 21:9)**

Was it because Hezekiah prayed for more time from God that Manasseh is born, or was it because God had a plan for the wicked king Manasseh to be born and to reign? Yes!

Also, during the years of Hezekiah where God spared his life, he pridefully showed a group of Babylonian envoys his treasure house, his whole armory, his storehouses. These same Babylonians would come years later and plunder and burn Jerusalem to the ground. ***Was it because Hezekiah was granted more years through his prayer and because of his decisions to show everything to the Babylonian envoys, or, was it because God planned for Babylon to plunder and destroy Jerusalem as a punishment for their sins? Yes!***

God has a plan, and yet His plan unfolds THROUGH the choices we make. Our choices are real and have a real effect, and yet God's ultimate plan is good and will unfold exactly as He wills it to unfold.

Rest in God's good plan Christian!

God has a plan, it will come to pass. If you are God's child you can rest in His plan…He predestined you, and He will bring you to glory…and all along the way you will look more like Jesus. All things – the good, the bad, the ugly – God is using right now in your life to conform you into the image of Jesus. The greater purpose is so that Jesus would be exalted in and through your life.

Work hard! For God is working through you

You are not a puppet…you have a purpose and your choices matter. Pray hard because God will use your prayer to deliver, to redeem, to bring about transformation, to change your heart. *Preach the gospel as though it depends on you…knowing that ultimately it depends on God.* God has a plan to reach every last soul, He knows them by name, and He knows when the last one will believe before He returns. You and I have the great privilege to participate in God's plan to reach the world with the gospel because God works "through you" to preach and to bring the message of the gospel to the world. This passage shows that WE are "called" BY GOD…and yet listen to what Paul says in Rom. 10:14:

> **How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? (Rom. 10:14)**

If you don't preach…they won't hear! What about the unfolding of your salvation in life? *Do you work out your salvation, or does God work out your salvation. (what's the answer church?) Yes!*

> **Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12-13)**

This is the way the Bible describes the causal joint – our working and God's plan. We work with all our might, but when we work we realize that it's only because GOD is at work in and through us. Paul had a very healthy understanding of this so that at the end of his life he could say with integrity**, "I have fought the good fight" (2 Tim. 4:7),** and yet when he worked with all His might he said:

> **I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Cor. 15:10)**

In closing, this promise is for those who "love God" and are "called". How do you know if you are called? People who are truly called will truly follow. This morning if you are here and you

have not yet surrendered to Jesus…call upon the Savior and surrender your future into His hands.

Pray.