

Known by God

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[0 : 00] If you have a copy of God's Word or a bulletin, go ahead and turn with me to Romans chapter 8.

We're continuing on in our series of Romans, and we come to what, if you're a Bible reader, is probably a familiar passage. If you're here as a visitor, you're probably like, those Presbyterians are always talking about this.

Let me assure you that you're simply getting the next section in God's Word. As we march through Romans.

Romans chapter 8, verses 28 to 30. This is the Word of the Lord. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good.

For those who are called according to His purpose. 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.

[1 : 08] And those whom He predestined, He also called. And those whom He called, He also justified. And those whom He justified, He also glorified.

This is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray. Lord, we're thankful for Your Word to us. We need Your help. We need Your Spirit. To drive out both distraction.

And to help us understand. To help us apply Your Word to our hearts. We pray that we might see Christ through them.

And it's in His name that we pray. Amen. Have you ever had a bad day? Of course you've had a bad day. But was your day like Alexander?

Alexander and his terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day. Now, you might hear some chuckling because it's the title of a popular kid's book and also a movie.

[2 : 08] I haven't seen the movie, so I can't speak for anything in it. But I know in the book that Alexander certainly has a bad day. He starts out by having gum in his hair.

Because he was chewing gum and he went to sleep. And then his brothers win prizes in the cereal boxes that they eat. Or they don't eat a box, they eat a cereal that the box has the prize in.

He doesn't get a window seat on his ride to school. He gets in trouble for singing too loudly or poorly. And he forgets a number while he's counting. So it's not going well for him at school. Have you had a bad day like Alexander?

Maybe not that bad. But you've certainly been forgotten. Like Alexander's friends who forgot him on the playground. And then his mom who forgot the dessert in his lunch.

How could she? Maybe you've not been like Alexander. But you've had unfortunate circumstances. Like you've had cavity at the dentist.

[3 : 10] Like Alexander. Or like Alexander, your mom takes you to get new shoes. And you're thinking, yes! Except they're the ones you don't want. And they're uncomfortable. And to cap it all off, you've probably never had to eat lima beans for dinner.

I don't really understand that one. I love lima beans. And then you're forced to wear train pajamas. Oh man. Maybe you like trains. Maybe you like lima beans like me.

Maybe you don't really care if you sing poorly or off-key. Or forget numbers at all. But you've probably had a bad day. Right? You've all had them. Now whatever those circumstances look like in your life, I can't know.

But the Lord knows. But maybe you've not had a bad day. But you've had a bad week. You've all had those as well. Maybe a bad season of life. Maybe a bad year.

You've missed out on success. You've not gotten the promotion that you were owed that you thought you deserved. You don't have that relationship yet.

[4 : 15] You're not married. You don't have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Maybe you've lost someone that you love. Family. A friend. Maybe you've missed out on riches.

Maybe your mom forgot the lunch. Or the dessert that was supposed to go in your lunch. Whether they're trivial or great. You've all had bad days.

Bad seasons. Bad years. Maybe you've inherited something. Not riches. But you've inherited the misfortune of your family name. Maybe you've gotten the short end of the stick.

And you wonder how much more you can bear. Lord, if this keeps going on, I don't know what I'm going to do. I see no end inside. I see no relief.

Lord, are you even there? Do you care? As I struggle with sin again and again. Maybe it's suffering.

[5 : 16] A bad diagnosis. Of pain. Of darkness. Of fear. Of failure. Again, God reminds us that whether it's a bad day, a bad season, a bad year, whether it's trivial or great, that what?

He still reigns. That's what Paul is reminding us in this text. He reigns in these circumstances of life. And he reigns also over the things that are most important.

Salvation. But he reigns still. And this morning, we're going to look at this text under those two headers. If you're a Bible reader, this is a text that you're not unfamiliar with.

You might even have it posted on your mirror. Because this is one of those texts that is familiar and brings comfort. And if I'm honest with you, this is a topic about which I am most sure.

Now, as pastors, we get asked all kinds of questions all the time. Whether it's from our own kids, people on the street, our neighbors. And I will tell you, there are two things that I am extremely sure about.

[6 : 29] One is God's word is true. And the other is this text this morning. It's at the heart of this text that God reigns. First, let's look at the circumstances.

Remember that this verse, even if we have it plastered on our mirror or on a calendar in our kitchen, those aren't bad things.

But it comes with some context. There's something that goes before it and something that comes after. And oftentimes, when we write it on a yellow sticky note or we put it on a scene, maybe in a calendar, we lift it out of its context and it gets a little difficult.

It also gets difficult because this speaks to something that Alexander knows well, that our own hearts know well, of whether it's a bad season, a bad day, or life is difficult.

It's something that we all know from experience. It's something that we have experienced today, this week, and we experience all the time when something doesn't go well.

[7 : 38] And Paul says that as well. He says about his own spiritual life. Think about how far we've come in Romans. As I mentioned, we're marching on in Romans, and we've come to this point where Paul has been wrestling with his own internal sin, not the circumstances out there, which we'll get to in a moment, but the circumstances of life, how creation groans, how sin affects all of life.

And until that point, when we are transformed, we wait with certain hope. We wait for glory because we know it will come to pass, as Scott prayed. And we've been given his spirit until then.

And in the midst of all of that difficulty and darkness and horrible, no good, bad days, it makes us question the certainty of this hope. It makes us question, does God really know?

Or is Thomas Jefferson and all those people that helped found our nation, whether they had faith in Christ or not, that God sets everything up and then walks away? Paul has a very different view of that.

He says he reigns over all things in all circumstances. Look with me at verse 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.

[9 : 04] Now, when we look at this verse, there's two things that we have to keep in mind. There's two kind of distinguishing marks. The first is our status. Status before God.

Not in the eyes of this world, but in God's economy. Paul is clear from the outset that our relationship to God matters. Love for God is kind of the dividing line in this verse.

He says, for those who love God, right? All things work together for good. Paul makes a big point that the condition of your heart and how we relate to him matters.

And that makes sense, right? Because he spent the last couple chapters marching through the difference between those who think they're justified by keeping the law and those that are justified because God has revealed and opened their eyes to the gospel and they love him in response.

And Paul is pulling forward this idea that those who trust in God are marked by love for him. Just as we read in the Old Testament, known by God and loving God are very, very similar.

[10:15] Think back, even in Romans itself. We see all this present suffering is transformed by what? A future orientation to glory.

That only makes sense if we're adopted into God's family. That future glory, that certain hope transforms what happens in the here and now. And that's why Paul is calling it out.

There's wrestling with it, yes, but we can't lose sight of what will happen in the future. And it only makes sense if we love God. Now the question is, do you love God?

Well, perfectly, of course not. But do you love God? Do you love him because he saved you?

Because you see the beauty of Christ dying on the cross and the hope of the resurrection, and in response, you love him?

If so, Paul is talking to you. If not, Paul is not talking to you. I know that seems really stark, but the reality is it leaps off the page at us.

[11:21] And he's going to qualify it here in a second and say it's not just love for God, but something further. Now that's the first thing that we have to keep in mind when we're talking about circumstances.

The second thing is the nature of these circumstances working together. If that's true, that those who love God relate to all these circumstances differently, then we have to look at how God rules over all these circumstances.

That doesn't change. So what does Paul say here? He does not say everything is easy for a Christian. In fact, he kind of says the opposite. He does not say success is your watchword.

He does not say that if you're a Christian, if you put your faith in Jesus, that you'll be wise and wealthy in the eyes of the world. That your kids will never disobey. That you'll be rich.

That you'll be famous. That you'll be praised in the streets. And yet, some of us think that. And yet, that's pervasive in our day.

[12:30] Because there's a version of Christianity, and I would argue not Christianity at all. In fact, Paul's experience is very much the opposite. He's not wealthy, wise, prison in all the streets, and all that stuff.

Right? What does he get? Not that. There's a version of Christianity that says if you put your faith in Jesus, all of that will happen.

And the witness of Scripture is very much not that. To be honest, that ceases to be Christianity at all. But how does that help us for those that love God?

Instead, Paul says that all these things, good things, fun things, sad things, horrible things, things that we don't want to say have happened, all of those work together for good.

Now, they might not be good in and of themselves. We talked about that in Sunday school this morning, right before worship. God uses things that are evil for good, for your growth and holiness, for your dependence upon him as a father, to increase your love for him, to loosen our grip on this world and all those things that our hearts really, really want.

[13:50] And seeing glory is more important than the thing that waits for us after this world. Now, if we're honest, that's something that we see time and time again in Scripture.

That God uses these things. God uses difficult circumstances for his own purposes. Think of the example of Job as a person, right? He loses all this stuff, all these tragedies befall him.

And suffering is not isolated to the wicked as his friends think, but it comes home to him, the righteous. And that's where his friends struggle.

And that's where we struggle if we're honest. We can't see through all the suffering to the question that our hearts really want to ask. Why is this happening, Lord?

That example of Job is helpful, but another one should come to mind when we think about God ordering all these things for good. Think of the example of Joseph.

[14:55] Joseph, yes, the son of Jacob. He's thrown or sold into slavery in Egypt, and he's falsely accused and thrown into prison. And instead, not like the county of Monte Cristo who wants to get his revenge, what does he do instead?

He has reason to respond with revenge, but instead, God uses all of that evil to do what? We get this in Genesis 50.

As for you, he's speaking to his brothers who come groveling to him, thinking that he's going to destroy them. As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.

That's not saying Joseph going to slavery in Egypt is good, but in the ultimate cosmic sense, his grand design, he's accomplishing his purpose and using it in Joseph's life and the life of Israel, his people.

That even when it's evil, God uses it for good. And Paul echoes that same idea here in Romans 8. We should reflect Romans 8 when we think about our own lives.

[16:05] It's not that these isolated actions are all good and we just paste over it with the veneer of happiness and smiling. No, we can cry out that this is not good, but we have to know that God uses it for his purposes, for the good of those who are called according to his purposes.

Now, is that different than those who love God? No, it's kind of like a parenthetical phrase that he's saying those who love God are also those who've been called according to his purposes at the end of verse 28.

Paul's not describing a different person. He's describing the same person called for his purposes. That's the lived experience of a Christian.

Loving God is kind of the subjective description of it. But from God's perspective, he's called them into his kingdom, into his purposes.

If you think about it, that follows the pattern that we see in the life of Jesus. He's always calling people. Now, when we hear the word calling, we think, I'm going to pick up the phone.

[17:16] Well, I'm showing my age by even picking up the phone like that. Maybe it's more like this, right? But I pick up the phone, and what happens? Either that person answers, or they hit ignore.

And we think of calling like that, that it can be ignored. But instead, we need to have the idea of calling of Jesus saying to Lazarus, and come forth, and calling him is something happening. It's not calling and being dismissed. It's calling and it coming to pass. Just as Jesus calls forth Lazarus, his disciples, he calls them to follow him.

Now, I don't know where that finds you this morning. If you've got drug in here, my friend, and you're like, man, those Presbyterians are always talking about how God reigns and calls people. But again, this is straight from the text, and it's really, really clear. There's a call in each of us, to each of us, that cannot be ignored.

[18:23] There's a call to put your faith in Jesus that we must obey. And when we do, all of those things work together for good.

Follow the call of Jesus this morning. In the call of Jesus, there's this pattern of transformation. And when we look at it, we see that lives change.

That Joseph's life, his circumstances, don't necessarily change, but God uses them to accomplish his purposes for his people. And the same is true for us as individual Christians.

We're not called to ease. We're not called to avoid suffering, even though that's what we want to do. But God transforms it for good.

And that's why we can speak with certainty that whatever comes to pass in our individual lives is certain because of God. And we'll return to that in a moment.

[19:32] Now, that doesn't change the fact that that's really stinking hard. But Paul means it as a comfort in our lives. So why, then, do we struggle?

We struggle because maybe we don't believe that. We struggle against sin in our own hearts. Or maybe we're like Alexander where we can slip into complaining and discontent.

But when we do so, we deny a fundamental truth of doctrine. We deny the fact that God is reigning as a king over all these things. And what happens is we get a view of God that's not king, but he's a school janitor.

He's just kind of cleaning up all of our messes. That is not the view of God that Paul gives us. The picture here is definite, deliberate, and ordered, a king ruling over all things and people.

The second thing we can't forget is that life is hard. Circumstances and things that happen are often evil and the result of sin.

[20:39] And the Christian life is hard. We know that enough from what Paul has said so far. He struggles internally with sin, but he has a sure and certain hope.

The other thing, and this is really popular in our day, we often want to avoid sin because we think if we're a Christian we will not suffer. Paul tells us that's not true.

But there's this voice, really it's a recovery of this voice, that says suffering is the purpose. It's kind of this recovery of this modern stoic idea.

Suffering is not the goal. The goal is glory. There's some truth, some common grace truth in this, that we should work hard and do things like that in stoicism and these other voices. But suffering is not the goal. Paul reminds us the goal is glory. And suffering is transformed when we keep that in mind.

[21 : 38] So God reigns over circumstances, transforming them from things that just seem random and inconvenient or evil. And Paul tells us he uses them for good.

What else does God reign over? He reigns over salvation. Now I said earlier that when we lift Romans 8.28 and the following verses out, we often shed 29 and 30.

We don't put 29 and 30 on a calendar in our kitchen and we often don't put that on a sticky note on our mirror. And when we lift it out of context, I love this line.

An angry pastor has argued that we remove the teeth of this promise. We hold on to the comfort but it doesn't feel comforting because we don't bring the oomph with it.

The oomph is from 29 and 30. And we neglect the great theology that should hold us fast in 29. This is what Paul says.

[22 : 41] 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.

Now you might say if you got drug in here this morning, you Presbyterians, you Reformed people, you Protestants are always talking about God reigning in predestination. Again, it's here in the text. Now inevitably, I won't say everything that there is to be said about this verse. The good news is Romans 9-11 does and we're going there soon.

This is a movie trailer. It's a little snippet. It's a teaser of what's to come. That God is working not just in circumstances, but in the most important arena in salvation of our souls and our own lives. And he begins this verse with a reaffirmation of foreknowing. If you were paying attention to our Old Testament reading this morning, we talked about God knowing.

[23 : 43] God knowing and God loving are very closely related. But what did it say when it talked about Israel? God didn't love them because they were great and mighty.

He didn't love them because they would do the right thing. He loved them as one has said even though they were deaf, even though they were dumb, and disobedient.

It's not as if God looks to the future and says, man, you're deaf, dumb, and disobedient. I love you. And of course that's what he says because he loves them not because of what they've done or will do, but because of his action.

We are deaf, we are dumb, and we are disobedient. God knows that and God loves them.

God knows that about us and loves us anyway. That's what he means by predestined. Because if we're up to us, the deaf, dumb, disobedient ones, we go our own way.

[24 : 53] We trip and fall over our own shoelaces in the cosmic sense, in the big things of life, in the little things of life. Now what is not meant by this verse?

It's not meant, as many have done, and many tried to do, in saying that God sees all these things in the future and loves you because of all these things that you will do in the future.

No, he loves you even though you're all those things, deaf, dumb, and disobedient. He doesn't look forward and say, you put your faith in Christ and that's why I love you.

Instead, he loves you because he's God and loves you and knows you. He doesn't look forward and say, on account of your faith, because you chose him.

No, that's not what this verse says. There have been many who've tried to do justice to that idea by kind of reworking the language. And this is really clear.

[25 : 55] And it's really clear because if we're up to Paul or up to you or up to me, we would fail. Unless we think in this broader context, Paul is talking about the certainty that's secured by God himself of this future glory.

The future glory that transforms us from this earthly body into one that is like the image of his son. That's what he says. that Christ might have many brothers.

The firstborn of many brothers. It's secured by Christ and we're transformed to look like Christ.

That's the driving point of verse 29. That's the driving point of Romans 8.

That there's a future glory that's coming that's been secured by God himself. And it doesn't depend upon you because you're not really trustworthy.

I'm not really trustworthy. because I often love sin more than I love Christ. But what greater privilege is that to be counted as brother to Christ?

[27 : 03] Think about that. The great hope that we have. The certain hope that will be transformed into the image of his son has been secured by God himself.

It's not simply God moving as a first mover in the transformation of his children and then we pick it up all along.

What does he say? In verse 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.

It begins at his choosing and then he calls not like on the phone for a call that we can dismiss. But he beckons us from death to life.

What he starts he completes and it lands at glorification being made perfect. No more sin. No more darkness. No more sadness.

[28 : 04] If you notice in all of this who does it depend on? Not you. Not me. Not our neighbor. But it depends on God. All of this.

God is the one who's doing the work. He predestined. He called. He justified. He glorified.

That's an important reminder for us that our lives are not really about us. It's about God. And a story of salvation is no different. That he is the one walking out these purposes.

Because if it were up to us we would fail. my life my salvation is not about me. Your life is not about you. It's about God.

The most important things in our lives the most important thing is God and the work that he's doing. Now Paul is not saying this as a corrective.

[29 : 04] It's really important here. He's saying it as a comfort. As a reminder of the hope that we should have. Because when we deny this and we think back to Romans 8 28 and we don't have God as reignings sovereignly over circumstances in our salvation everything that we walk through becomes not just a trial but a double trial.

We're wrestling with did I make a mistake here? Yes you made a mistake. That always the answer. But should I have done something differently? Did I mess up God's plan?

No! God reigns supreme and when we lose sight of that we kind of lose sight of all of these things. But God has promised to us he's called each of us to worship him and follow him in faith in the midst of circumstances that he's working together for our good his glory but he provides us comfort in the midst of that.

Comfort because he has secured that future glory. That's the reminder he gives us. Often in our worship we remind our hearts with the words of not the shorter catechism but the Heidelberg catechism and ask this question what is your only comfort in life and in death that I am not my own but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

[30 : 41] He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil and he watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven in fact all things must work together for my salvation.

God reigns and he reigns now. Let's pray. Lord we're thankful for the reminder from your word even when things are difficult that you're working all things together for good for those that are called according to your purposes Father me remind our hearts in the midst of discomfort in the midst of trial and suffering that I have have that I have that I