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Andrew M. Davis

Sermon Notes

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God's Eternal Purpose, Our Unshakable Joy

Romans 8:28-30

I. Deep Mysteries: God's Eternal Decree, Our Present Suffering

A. God's Purpose in Romans 8: Eternal Security in an insecure world:

vs. 1 *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*

vs. 39 *"[nothing] in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord*

1. What is the "love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"?
2. FOUNDATION of our security
3. ROOT SYSTEM too

B. Ultimate Security: God's Eternal Decree Before Time Began

If you are a Christian, it is because God chose you before the foundation of the world... and no matter what terrible things you may go through on this earth, nothing can change the final outcome of your life

Before:

Your ancestors... John Hancock... Pilgrims (Mayflower)... Columbus (Santa Maria)... Roman Empire... Alexander the Great... Pyramid of Cheops or the Sphinx...

Before God said "Let there be light"...

"He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world"

C. Christianity a MYSTERIOUS Religion

1. Mysterious how God could become fully man

2. Mysterious how the prophets could predict the future
3. Mysterious how Christ could have a resurrection body
4. Great mysteries also around your salvation

you are commanded freely to repent, trust, obey... to choose this day whom you will serve

YET salvation is clearly portrayed as an act of God from start to finish

D. Paul's Assurance: beginning in present, back to past, ahead to future

1. PRESENT SUFFERINGS... God providentially causes all things to work for good for His purpose
2. PAST DECREE... God has predestined you before the foundation of the world
3. FUTURE COMPLETION... God will persevere with you to the end that you will be perfectly conformed to Christ

PROVIDENCE... PREDESTINATION... PERSEVERANCE

ALL ADD UP TO TOTAL ASSURANCE OF SALVATION... God is doing a mighty work in you, all the universe is at His powerful disposal, and His decree and His power combine to give you COMPLETE ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

E. Difficult Doctrine

1. "Master of my fate, captain of my soul"

In 1894, William Ernest Henley (1849-1903) lost six-year-old daughter Margaret. "Invictus" means "I have not been conquered":

OUT of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

2. Spurgeon on sovereignty

“There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God’s Sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all. There is nothing for which the children ought more earnestly to contend than the doctrine of their Master over all creation—the Kingship of God over all the works of His own hands—the Throne of God and His right to sit upon that Throne. On the other hand, there is no doctrine more hated by worldings, no truth of which they have made such a football, as the great, stupendous, but yet most certain doctrine of the Sovereignty of the infinite Jehovah. Men will allow God to be everywhere except on His throne. They will allow Him to be in His workshop to fashion worlds and make stars. They will allow Him to be in His almonry to dispense His alms and bestow His bounties. They will allow Him to sustain the earth and bear up the pillars thereof, or light the lamps of heaven, or rule the waves of the ever-moving ocean; but when God ascends His throne, His creatures then gnash their teeth, and we proclaim an *enthroned* God, and His right to do as He wills with His own, to dispose of His creatures as *He* thinks well, without consulting them in the matter; then it is that we are hissed and execrated, and then it is that men turn a deaf ear to us, for God on His throne is not the God they love. But it is God upon the throne that we love to preach. It is God upon His throne whom we trust.”

3. Christians should LOVE doctrine of predestination

II. Context of Assurance: Present Suffering

vs. 28 *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose.”*

A. Present Suffering Most Bitter

1. Daily public tragedies

Illus. September 11 terrorism, Volcano erupts in the Congo displacing 400,000 people; ongoing war between Palestinians and Israelis, daily scenes of grief

2. Daily private tragedies too

Private tragedies played out daily at Duke & Durham Regional Hospital: cancer test comes back positive, accident victim cannot be saved, infant child died of SIDS...

CRY!!! “WHERE IS GOD IN ALL OF THIS????”

3. Christian suffering

Romans 8: 23 We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly

B. Future Glory Most Comforting

Romans 8:18 *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

C. Spirit-filled Meditation on God’s Greatest Promises & God’s Sovereign Power

vs. 28 *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.*

III. Text Overview: Flying Over the Peaks of God’s Sovereign Plan

A. Magnificent Promise: All Things Work Together for Good

vs. 28 *“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose.”*

This text proclaims to all believers, “There is a purpose for everything! Not a tear is shed in vain, not a twinge of pain is wasted! Even our own sins and disobediences work together to accomplish God’s perfect eternal plan!”

1. God’s activity assumed
 - a. deism excluded
 - b. blind evolutionary forces excluded

Illus. Farmer got sleeve caught in farm equipment, machine relentlessly, remorselessly chewed up his arm

2. God works everything out for His plan!! The is WORK to be done!

Illus. WALKMAN gears and components

Illus. Pharmacist

3. Even terrible suffering is used by God

CROSS OF CHRIST: The blackest sin in the whole annals of human wickedness is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Yet by that terrible crime God saved all His children from hell!

4. What “good” do all things work for?
 - a. possibly and sometimes for temporal good

Illus. Spurgeon... Protestant leader about to be executed for his faith... “All things work for good” leg broken

b. BUT true understanding is to see the “good” as “eternal, spiritual good”

“...those who are the called according to his purpose”

Purpose = eternal glory in Christ Jesus

B. Subjects of the Promise: True Christians

1. Those Who Love God

- a. OT “those who love God” = those who keep His covenant, i.e. the Jews
- b. completely combined with obedience to His commands

TWELVE TIMES in Deuteronomy, God commands Israel to love Him and obey His covenant

1 John 5:3 “This is love for God: to obey his commands.”

BUT no one naturally loves or obeys God! “Those who love God” would be empty if God did not transform our hearts and cause us to walk in His commands

vs. 4 [for those who] who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

2. The Called According to His Purpose

- a. “called” = called by the Holy Spirit
- b. transformed from within so that we can respond to the Gospel

NOT a calling with the ear, but a spiritual calling in the heart, regenerating you and raising you from the dead

C. Nature of God’s Eternal Purpose

vs. 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.

Paul: goes from present suffering, back in time to predestination, ahead in time to final destination: perfect conformity to Christ

All things work together in your life to make you conformed to Christ!!!

D. Steps to Achieving God’s Eternal Purpose: The “Golden Chain”

vs. 30 *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

1. Steps Described

- a. God Foreknew His Elect Children
- b. God Predestined the Same People He Foreknew
- c. God Called the Same People He Predestined
- d. God Justified the Same People He Called
- e. God Glorified the Same People He Justified

Illus. A train with a destination... everyone who gets on at the start will get off at the final destination... not one will be lost

God's elect! Chosen by His grace, deserving only His wrath, but they receive lavish grace instead

2. Absolute Guarantee: What God Starts, He Finishes!! No One Gets Lost

Illus. Camp director on parents day: "Over 95% of your children are still alive and healthy!"

God's reputation, His name is at stake... He has promised to save you to the very end... not simply to start the salvation process, but to bring every one of you through to ultimate glory

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

God is absolute actor here... no room for human pride!

vs. 29-30 *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 God predestined, God also called; those God called, God also justified; those God justified, God also glorified.*

No one can break this Golden Chain tying us to God!! TOTAL SECURITY

Look at each step

III. God's Eternal Plan

A. Foreknowledge

1. People in view here, not programs, methods, possibilities, strategies

God foreknows PEOPLE... "Those PEOPLE God foreknew..."

2. God foreknows them, NOT FACTS ABOUT THEM

Man-centered view of foreknowledge: God knows THAT you will someday believe

- a. the basis of God's choice of a man, therefore, is man's choice of Him
- b. this is a perversion of the gospel!!

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you

3. God foreknows PEOPLE in a covenant love relationship

- a. to "know" here means more than to know about someone
- b. Matthew 1:25 says the same thing

KJV: Matthew 1:24-25 "The Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel had bidden him, and took unto him his wife. And knew her not until she had brought forth her firstborn: and he called His name Jesus."

KJV: Luke 1:34 "How shall this be, seeing that I know not a man."

- c. Amos testifies to this "knowledge"

KJV: Amos 3:1-2 "You only have I known of all the families of the earth..."

- d. Judgment Day : Christ knows and doesn't know
 - i) knows every single sin everyone has ever committed

Matthew 12:36 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.

- ii) YET doesn't know people who committed them

Matthew 7:21-23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

"I never knew you" means "I never had a covenant love relationship with you."

God's "foreknowledge" = God's determination to love us in a covenant relationship in Christ before the world began

B. Predestination

Word clearly there in Bible!! Read it off the page!!

Not possible for a Bible-believing Christian to reject predestination. It is taught in the Bible... it is deep, and we will never understand it. Even worse... we have a natural disposition against it

1. Word means "Determine/decide beforehand"
 - a. root word related to boundaries... we get our word "horizon" from it
 - b. horizon is the limit of what we can see
 - c. God chooses our inheritance... **conformed to Christ**
2. Clearly operating concerning the death of Christ

Matthew 26:54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

Acts 2:23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.

Acts 4:27-28 Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had predestined should happen.

God's plan worked out even the smallest details of Christ's death... betrayed by a friend for 30 pieces of silver, garments gambled for, wine vinegar to drink, etc.

In the same way God has caused all things to work together for good in your salvation as well

3. Who is "predestined"?? The "elect"... the "chosen"

Romans 8:33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.

Romans 11:5-6 So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. ⁶ And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.

4. Ultimate purpose: final glory in the image of Christ

vs. 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.*

- a. chosen not simply to begin
- b. chosen to finish!! In the end, we will be conformed to Christ

Ephesians 1:4-5 *For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ^s he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will*

5. Highest end: Christ in His glory surrounded by innumerable people

vs. 29 *“predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.”*

- a. God originally created mankind in His image
- b. salvation perfectly restores that image and makes it even more glorious
- c. conformed perfectly to Christ in His glory!

C. Called

vs. 28 *“The called according to His purpose...”*

vs. 30 *“those He predestined, these He also called...”*

- 1. Two kinds of calls
- 2. General call of the Gospel

Matthew 22:14 *“Many are called, but few are chosen.”*

Romans 10:18 *“Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”*

- 3. Effective, regenerating call of the Holy Spirit

2 Corinthians 4:6 *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*

Illus. Christ and Lazarus

When someone preaches the true Gospel, the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the elect a new work of creation... he gives them a new heart, and they respond to the Gospel with faith and repentance

This is the effective, powerful call that Paul means here... called out of darkness into light; called from spiritual death to spiritual life

D. Justified

1. Everyone who is justified has previously been foreknown and predestined
2. Thus, no one who is justified will lose their justification
3. Complete and total assurance!!

E. Glorified

1. "Conformed to the image of Christ"
2. "Firstborn among many brothers"
3. Perfect in spirit
4. Perfect in body as well

Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.

IV. Application: Unshakable Joy, Deep Humility

- A. **JOY:** Rejoice even in suffering: All things work together for good... the gears of God's eternal plan are turning for your final glory in Christ
- B. **ASSURANCE:** Realize your salvation is guaranteed, if you are a child of God
- C. **HUMILITY:** Realize that this is all of the Lord... not by your goodness, faith, trust, or achievement
- D. **WISDOM:** Think properly about your life on earth, and the trials that are inevitable... these things **MUST HAPPEN** to get all the elect of God saved and home to heaven