

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **The Promise of Security, Part 1**

Scripture: Romans 8:28

Code: 45-64

I want you to open your Bible, if you will, with me to Romans chapter 8 again. I appreciated the song sung earlier, obviously taken from the last part of Romans chapter 8, this great monumental portion of God's Word. One of the early fathers said, "If the whole of Scripture was a feast for the soul, Romans 8 would be the main dish." And that's really true, and particularly verse 28. The wonder of this blessed chapter is summarized in verse 28, and we come to that verse in our ongoing study of Romans. The verse is familiar to all of us. Let me read it to you in a way that maybe a little less familiar, but will bring to you the basic significance of the verse.

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." That is a monumental statement. I don't exaggerate when I say to you that, without hesitation, I could preach on that one verse probably for three months. You say, "We know, we know."...But it's true; and this glorious verse prepares our hearts for the magnificent benediction that begins in verse 31 and runs to verse 39. That great unequal paean of praise, that hymn of glory that concludes this great chapter. Our hearts are prepared for that by the great significance of verse 28.

Now, remember that Paul has been giving us the truth of salvation, justification by grace through faith, with all of its features. He started really in chapter 3 verse 21, and chapter 3 and 4 and 5 and 6 and 7 and now 8, and he's still talking about the great truth of salvation. In chapter 8, his major emphasis is on the security of salvation, the justification is eternal, that we are secure in Christ forever; and he gives to us the full facts about that security. He starts out in verse 1, as you know, with a promise of no condemnation. He concludes, as he begins his great hymn of praise in verse 34 by asking the question, "Who is he that condemns?" And then answering it, "No one." So it is the no condemnation chapter. It is the promise that our salvation is eternal.

Now, what we've learned above all things in the eternality of our salvation is that it is secured to us by the marvelous ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who becomes the agent of our security, for it is He who has sealed us...And so, in another sense, we can say it is the chapter about the Holy Spirit. Combining the two, the chapter deals basically with security in the Spirit. We are secure in Christ. Our justification is forever, because of the marvelous working of the Holy Spirit. Because, first of all, verse 2 says the Holy Spirit "frees us from sin and death." Verse 4 says, "Because He enables us to fulfill the law." Verses 5 to 11, "Because He changes our nature." Verses 12 and 13, "He empowers us for continual victory." Verses 14 to 16, "He confirms our sonship," and verses 27...17 to

27, "He guarantees our glory."

So the Spirit then secures our eternal salvation by freeing us forever from sin and death, by enabling us to fulfill the law, changing our nature, empowering us for victory, confirming our adoption in...in this great, magnificent text of 17 to 27 we've just completed, He guarantees our glory....and we learned last time that the Spirit of God does this in verses 26 and 27 by praying for us, interceding for us in a divine language which knows no utterance; and "He that searches the hearts...that is God...knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to God's will."

And so we're secure because of all that the Spirit of God does for us...And because of that, listen, beloved, because of that, we know...that all things work together for what? For good. Say it. For good. It isn't just because God says so. It's because God said so, and the Spirit of God makes it so...

Now, this great text is a promise. It is the most glorious promise imaginable. I mean it's breathtaking, staggering, and it needs our close and careful attention. It is brief, but it is heavy laden with the gold of divine truth. It is so precious. It is so valuable that its price is absolutely incalculable. This one promise is absolutely unbelievable. You would never believe it to be true; and as we talk about it, you'll stagger your way through a comprehension of its vastness.

Now, I wanna share with you four elements of the promise of security in verse 28. The extent of it, the recipients of it, the source of it, and the certainty of it. Let's talk about the extent of our security. By the way, verse 28, really, in a way, sums up the whole chapter. It boils it down to one incredible promise; and I want you to see the extent of this promise. Now, listen. I'm gonna pull a phrase out. "All things work together for good." That's the extent. That's how far reaching our security is. That is a comforting statement. There could never be, in my mind, a more reassuring statement than that to a believer. There is nothing that I could imagine that could bring more hope and more joy and more trust and more confidence and more happiness and more freedom to a Christian than to know that, no matter what the pain, what the problem, what the trial, what the Tribulation, what the anxiety, it all works together for good.

It's a staggering thought. The extent of this thing is beyond our ability to grasp. It is comprehensive. The context, by the way, puts no limits on the all things. None. There are no confining factors. It doesn't say, "All suffering" or "All trouble" or "All good things" or "All righteousness." It says, "All things." It is unqualified in its comprehension. It's the same all things, for example, of 2 Corinthians 4:15, which says, "For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might, through the thanksgiving of many, redound to the glory of God." It is the same all things in terms of Greek terminology, as 1 Corinthians 3:21. "For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollus or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come -- all are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." It's just as unlimited as that.

And then look at Romans 8:32, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us...what?...all things?" Same all things. Yeah, all things...Whatever the extent of our life situation, whatever the extremity, whatever the difficulty, whatever... whatever the pain, the problem, the intensity, whatever the overwhelming character of our trouble, whatever, whatever, whatever it is, it all works together for good...

The word work together is an interesting word. It's the word sunargay. We get the word synergism from it. Synergism is to bring all things together for a common goal or purpose, function. Everything in life is brought in a marvelously divine synergism to come together to accomplish an ultimate end.

Thomas Watson, the wonderful Puritan, suggested that the term can refer to medicine; and he likened it to a person who was a pharmacist or an apothecary who would take several poisonous ingredients, put them together, temper by the skill that he had learned, and out of that would come medicine to heal the sick. And so it is that God can take all the various poisons, all the various good and bad things of life, and bring them together in a divine, medicinal synergism, and cause them to be for the ultimate healing and wholeness of the soul...

I love Psalm 25:10. It says, "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, unto such as keep His covenant." That's wonderful. No matter what road you're on, no matter what path you take, "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to those who keep His covenant." Now you say, "Are you telling me, John, that all things are in themselves good?" No, it doesn't say that. Doesn't say all things are in themselves good. It says, "All things...what?...work together for good." No, all things in themselves are not good. Many things are bad...but even those work together for good. Boy, that is just, in my heart, the greatest thrill imagined. Doesn't matter what happens. Doesn't matter what happens.

Now, what do we mean by good? What kinda good is this? Well, interestingly enough, it's a very important Greek word, agathon. We get Agatha from it, which is a name. Means goodness. Agathon basically means that which is morally or inherently good. That which is, in and of itself, good qualitatively. The other Greek word most common for good is kallas. Kallas means good on the outside. Nice to look at, and so on the one hand you have outward goodness. On the other, you have that inward goodness, and the word here is agathos, which is to say it is ultimately and intrinsically and morally good, not just superficially good.

In fact, the truth is, it may be superficially bad. On the surface, it may not look good at all; but, ultimately, there will be inherent in it good...So this is the truest kind of goodness. Paul chooses the right term. It is the purest, truest kind of goodness. Now lemme give you a thought. When he says, "All things work together for good," I think he has two things in mind. Good...now follow very carefully my thinking...good here and now, first of all; and good ultimately in glory, second of all.

Now what does that say? It says that no matter what happens in my life now, God will work it together in a divine synergism to produce something immediately, temporally, in this world for my benefit; and, more than that, it'll ultimately work together for my good. Did you grab that one? If every single thing you do in your life ultimately works out for your good, then what could ever cause you to lose your salvation? What? Nothing. Nothing, and that is why he launches off the way he does at the end of the chapter, because he has just been totally devastated in his own mind by the inspiration of the Spirit of God delivering to him such an incredible truth...It's just staggering.

"All things work together for good." God causes that to happen. Good, here and now. Good, ultimately in glory. Deuteronomy 8:16, God reminds the people of Israel of some things. He says, "Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions and drought, where there was no water, who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint." Then verse 16, "who fed thee in the wilderness with manna which thy fathers knew not, that He might humble thee, and that He might test thee, to do thee...ready for this?...good at thy latter end."

God dragged Israel through 40 years of destitution, 40 years of deprivation, 40 years of difficulty, 40 years of wandering to do them evil? To do them what? Good. To refine them. Everything ultimately comes together for the good of those who are the children of God. Listen to Jeremiah 24:5. I wanna show you this is not an isolated truth, isolated to Romans. Jeremiah 24:5, "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans...listen to this...for their good.'" For their good.

A refining process again, "For I will set Mine eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them again to this land; and I will build them and not pull them down. I will plant them and not pluck them up. I'll give them an heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God; for they shall return unto Me with their whole heart." He sent 'em away for their good, for their good. Everything, even those things that appear to be evil, are for the good of the Lord's people.

Second Corinthians 4:15 we read earlier. Let me read it again and follow on with the succeeding verses. It says, "All things are for your sakes. Everything is. So because of this...verse 16 says...we faint not, for though our outward man perish, though we be in great difficulty outwardly, the inward man is renewed...what?...day by day." Now what do you...do you hear what that says? I mean our flesh, our humanness may be perishing. We may be in dire circumstances in our humanness; but inwardly, we are constantly being renewed, which is to say we never grow old. We never drift away. There's a constant renewal, and so we consider, then, that, "Our light affliction, which is only for a moment, is working for us a far greater and exceeding weight...eternal weight of glory."...

God makes everything good. Now, it isn't automatic. Go back to Romans 8. It is not automatic, doesn't just happen because God says so. It happens because the Holy Spirit is working it out. It happens because the Holy Spirit is constantly interceding on our behalf. Because the Son of God is constantly interceding as Hebrews says. Romans 8 deals with the Holy Spirit's intercession, and Hebrews 7 and other places deal with the intercession of the Son of God. It doesn't just happen because of the decree of God. That's where it's initiated, but it's carried out by the intercessory work of both the Holy Spirit and the Son Himself.

So through the yearning of the Holy Spirit in unutterable groaning, says he, carries our case, as it were, before the throne of the Father, as He comes in intercession on our behalf. Through His work, we are...put into the position where no matter what happens in our life, everything works together for good. And, beloved, that truth is so powerful. If everything works together for good, then nothing can work for our bad. Nothing can ultimately harm us. There can never be any condemnation. There can never be any loss of salvation, or that verse is a lie. You can't say all things, but that's what it says.

Now, what are we looking at in these all things? Just give you some simple thoughts, and you might wanna jot some of these down if you can. You might need to get the tape, 'cause they're gonna come pretty fast...Basically, first of all, just to touch base with this, good things work together for good. Good things work together for our good. We don't wanna miss that. There are good things working for our good...

What are those good things? Well, first of all, God, God. God works for our good. You think about His attributes, for example. God's power supports us in our trouble, doesn't it? The Bible says in Psalm...rather in Deuteronomy 33, "Underneath are the everlasting arms." And we know that Daniel, Jonah, three Hebrew children were supported by the power of God. We know the Apostle Paul could say in 2 Corinthians 12, I think it's verse 9, "My...strength is made perfect in...weakness." in other words, God does good to us. He infuses us with power. In Acts 1:8, He says, "You shall receive...what?...power after the Spirit has come upon you."

So good things like God's attributes. His wisdom is at our disposal. God's wonderful goodness. In...in Romans 2, we read where it said, "The goodness of God leads thee to repentance." So good things work out for our good. The good leading of God, the good wisdom of God, the good power of God on our behalf.

We can talk about the promises of God. They're good things. When guilt comes to us, we are reminded of the promise that the Lord is merciful and gracious. When disobedience comes, we remind ourselves of Hosea 14:4, where God says, "I will heal their backsliding." Or Micah 7:18, which says, "Who is a pardoning God like Thee...who passes by transgressions?" When trouble comes, we remember Psalm 91:15, "I will be with thee in trouble." When deprivation comes or want, we

remember Philippians 4:19, "My God shall...what?...supply all your needs." Or Psalm 37:25, "I have not seen God's people, the righteous, forsaken or His Seed begging bread." So we can count on God's attributes. We can count on God's promises. Those are good things that work for our good.

Another thing is the Word of God. The Bible works for our good. It's part of the all things in its comprehensive sense. Acts 20:32 says, "Paul commended the Ephesian elders to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." The Word of God is a source of goodness. Prayer is also a source of goodness. Prayer is a good thing that works for our good. As we pray, God's power is released in our lives.

Angels, angels work for our good. Hebrews 1:14 says they're, "Sent forth as ministering spirits to minister to the saints." And other Christians work for our good. I love 2 Corinthians 1:24, Paul writes, "We are helpers of your joy. We mutually work for each other. We stimulate one another to love in good works," it says in Hebrews 10:24. So I just wanted to get sorta that covered and put it aside. There are good things that work for our good. God, the Word, angels, other believers, prayer. They work for our good, but I don't think that's the real thrust of the passage, though those, in fact, are true.

The real thrust of the passage is to go beyond that, because that's obvious. We know God is working for our good, and we know that prayer works for our good, and angels work for our good. That is holy ones, and other believers are committed to working for our good. We know that, but what we sometimes lose sight of is the second point I wanna emphasize, and that is that bad things work for our good. That's the issue. Bad things work for our good...

Now, get it straight. This is not to say that bad things are good, because bad things are bad. That's why they're called bad. We don't...we don't wanna redefine them. We don't wanna invent a new theology. Bad things are bad. Sin is sin, and evil is evil, and it isn't gonna change. So bad things are not good, but they are used by God to work for our good, and that is marvelous, because that is to say that God is so absolutely sovereign and so totally in control that the worst of things, the vilest of things, the most evil of things, the most heinous of things, He can overrule and work to our good; and that's what it means to be in the family of God, to have this amazing confidence that no matter what comes into your life, be it good or evil, it will, by God, be overruled, put together in a divine synergism, ultimately come to your own good here and now and in glory forever. Amazing thought.

Now, I...I tried to think of how to divide up bad things; and I found basically three categories. Three areas where bad things work for our good. First one is suffering, suffering. Now, in and of itself, suffering is a bad thing. I mean it is a result of the curse, right? If there had never been sin, there would never be suffering. There would never be pain and death and sorrow and crying and all that. So we must attach that to evil; although, in itself, the suffering may not be evil, it is a result of an evil world, a fallen world. So the first bad thing that works for our good is suffering.

Ruth 1:21, you remember what it says there? "The Almighty has afflicted me." God actually brought an affliction. Do you remember what Job said? "The Lord gave and the Lord...what?... has taken away." Jeremiah 24:5, I read to you earlier. God says, "I'm gonna take you captive. I'm gonna take you to the land of Chaldeans. You're gonna suffer there. It's for your good." Our suffering can be for our good. God is in our suffering, working out of that evil thing tied to our fallenness and our cursed world a good purpose.

Now, lemme just say this. Sometimes our suffering is brought on because we're being chastened by sin. Sometimes it's not. Every time you suffer, it isn't because you've been sinning, and you're getting chastened. Sometimes you're just suffering so He can refine you in general. I mean it may not necessarily be dealing with some specific sin. It's just that He's refining you in general. He's testing you. He's building your strength. He's proving you, so you'll come out after you've been tried, like gold. So some...some suffering is directly due to the fact that you're sinning. Some is directly due to the fact that God is refining...is refining...

But we know that all suffering basically exists because of sin...Now, some suffering...some suffering may be God's way of simply opening you up to Himself, turning your attention, turning your focus. Suffering has many purposes...many purposes; but through it all, God works a good result. You can read James 1, and you'll find it there. I'm not gonna go into all of the Scriptures. They're myriad. Where it says, "Counted all joy when you fall into various trials," and so forth and so on; and we're gonna talk more about that in a moment. Because you're being tested.

First Peter 5:10 says, "After you've suffered a while, the Lord make you perfect." It's part of the perfecting process. You see, it's through suffering that we learn kindness and sympathy and compassion and patience and gentleness; and we learn to look on God and trust Him with faith and depend on His power and need His grace and rejoice in His mercy and all of that. See, those are all things we learn through suffering; and so suffering can turn to our good.

Many Biblical instances of that can be pointed out. For example, Joseph, perhaps a classic illustration. His brothers threw him in a pit. His brothers sold him. He was thrown into prison, but the end of the story of Joseph is it all worked out for good. I mean if Joseph had never come to Egypt, if Joseph had ever got thrown into the prison, if Joseph had never interpreted the dreams, then Joseph never would've been in...been there to tell those people there was a famine that they could've prepared for, and their civilization would've been wiped out. And if Joseph had never been put in the pit and sold into slavery and gone down there and gone through that and been made prime minister, when the famine did come and his brothers came down there and wanted to get some grain, they never would've been able to get it had he not been the prime minister. Their own brother who sympathetically gave them everything they needed. You see, God took all those evil things, all that suffering that He went through, and worked it ultimately to His own good and the good of people

around Him.

Manasseh, the king, was chained, and in 2 Chronicles 33:11 and 12, it was for his own good, obviously, because it says, "When he was in affliction, he sought the Lord and humbled himself greatly, and the Lord responded to him." So suffering can draw us to God, and that's good. Suffering can purge out sin in our lives, and that's good. Suffering can teach us what other people are going through, and so we can be compassionate, and that's good. See?

Job lost everything. I mean the guy lost everything. Just an absolutely unbelievable set of circumstances. Lost everything. Only thing that stayed was his wife; and, as things went along, he may have wished that she had gone and everything else had stayed. She made some dumb suggestions; but he lost everything. He received ulcers. He had boils all over his body. He was involved in catastrophe without parallel. His barns were destroyed. His cattle was stolen. His children were murdered, and through it all, all...all it came to in the end was that he said, "Lord, I thought I knew who You were, but now I see You. I had heard of You with the hearing of mine ear, now mine eyes seeth Thee, and I repent in dust and ashes. O, God, for the first time, I see You...he said...I see You." And it cost him everything; and through that, of course God gave him back more than he ever lost.

The Apostle Paul, you know, was burdened by his thorn in the flesh, 2 Corinthians, and he pours out his heart for God to deliver that thorn in the flesh; but it was through the thorn in the flesh that he saw more perfectly the power of God made manifest through his weakness. Even in his blindness on the Damascus road, he was drawn to Christ. So suffering is good. Suffering rather can be worked for our good. Suffering in itself, being bad, can be overruled to bring about good, can be used by God to bring about good.

Lemme just see if I can categorize some of the things I've said in general. Some reasons why suffering works for our good. No. 1, it teaches us to hate sin. It teaches us to hate sin... Luther...Luther said he never understood the imprecatory psalms until he suffered. In other words, he never understood why David cried out vengeance on his enemies until he, himself, had suffered from those who hated God. Suffering teaches us to hate sin. Thomas Watson said, "A sickness usually teaches a lot more than a sermon." And one of the things that sickness teaches is a hatred of sin. I see Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, and Lazarus is dead, and it says that, "Jesus was moved in His own Spirit." Says it in other terms, but that's the idea. There was boiling in Him an anger, and that anger was attached to sin, because He was standing there watching the disintegration of a family. All the tears and all the pain and all the sorrow in the death of a loved one, and it was tearing Him up, because He knew that was just one out of millions of scenes like that. And when you go through suffering, you learn to hate the thing that brought that about, and that's a great lesson to learn.



Secondly, suffering is good because it teaches us to see the evil in us. It teaches us to see the evil in us. Boy, when you start to suffer, you're gonna find out what's really going on inside, aren't you? And when everything is going fine, I mean you're so pious you're looking for the first vacancy in the Trinity. You know what I mean? You're just ready to go right into Heaven, see. Take the next ascended step to glory, but as soon as things begin to collapse around you and struggles and troubles and pain and anxiety, then you start to shake your fist at God. "What are You doing up there, God? You know, wait a minute. This isn't the way the script was supposed to be written. This isn't the way they tell me on...on Christian TV." See...

But you begin to see impatience, don't you? Begin to see doubt. You find out whether you really trust God when you're being wheeled in there to have that cancer surgery or that triple bypass...You say to yourself, "Ahhhhh, I don't know I believe God for this or not." You see, when you go through suffering, you're gonna see the evil in your heart. That's very good to learn, isn't it? Whenever you're taken through suffering, you find out how short your fuse is, where your temper is, how much you trust God, how strong your faith.

Thirdly, suffering works for our good, because it drives our souls to God. It drives our souls to God. In prosperity, the heart is easily divided. That's what Deuteronomy 6 was saying. You get into the land. You got all you want. You forget God. When you're prosperous, your heart is divided. Listen, suffering immediately drives out the world and sends a child of God right into God's presence...I mean you're going along in your life real fine. Everything's great. Man, you're preoccupied with your house, your car, your job, your business, your wardrobe; and then one of your children becomes terminally ill...Everything changes in your value system; and your heart is driven to seek God; and the suffering of bearing that pain, that's good. That's good.

Another thing, suffering works for our good, because it conforms us to Christ. It conforms us to Christ. I believe, in suffering, we, in a small way, enter into the fellowship of His suffering. I understand just a little bit, just a small bit of the meaning of the suffering of Christ, because I've suffered. You may understand more, because you've suffered more; but suffering brings us into identification. I think that's what Paul was celebrating when he said, "I bear in my body the marks of Jesus Christ." He knew what it was to be beaten up. He knew what it was to be pummeled because he believe, pummeled by rocks and rods and whatever. He knew all of that; and, in a sense, he was identifying with the reproach of Christ, bearing it in his own body; and so suffering can be a welcome friend, even though, in itself, it is reflective of an evil thing. It's turned to our good, because it conforms us to Christ. It helps us to understanding better His own heart and His own pain and His own suffering; and that draws us into a deeper intimacy with him who suffered so supremely for us.

And may I suggest another thing? Suffering works together for good also because it drives out sin. Suffering drives out sin. Suffering is a fire that burns the dross. Suffering is a fire that reveals the pure gold, the pure silver, it refines us. Job 23:10, Job had it right. He said, "Look, when He has tried

me, I will come forth as gold." Suffering drives out sin...You know, when you enter into suffering, you enter into the pain of suffering, and you're forced to pursue God, and your soul cries out to God, and you begin to see the evil in your heart unmasked as you struggle with your suffering. There's a marvelous purifying process that goes on...

In Zechariah 13, God says He's gonna take Israel through the Tribulation and two out of three are going to be...says in verse 8..."Two parts shall be cut off and die, but the third shall be left." This is the refining of Israel in the end, "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. They shall call on My name, and I will hear them. I will say, 'He is My people'; and they shall say, 'The Lord is my God.'" In other words, there will be a driving out of sin, a purification, a new holiness in the process of trial, struggling.

Another thing, I believe also suffering works together for good because it reveals to us that we are sons of God. It is a confirming thing. In Hebrews, you might turn to it for just a brief moment, Hebrews chapter 12 and verse 7...and you will recall, I'm sure, this wonderful passage. It says this, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons." What do you mean by that? Back up to verse 6, "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." Verse 8, "If you be without chastening, of which all are partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons at all."

In other words, when you see yourselves going through suffering, and you know the Lord is chastening you and refining you, you oughta be glad, because He's making you all the son you oughta be. I mean I...I have two sons, and through the years, we have chastened our children; and we have disciplined our children; and it is because we wanna refine them into the sons that we want them to be; and that confirms their sonship. They have little question about who their father is, because they're so familiar with the discipline exercise. They know where the source of discipline comes from, and they know the loving father's purpose in mind. I hope that's so in your own life, in your own family. It's certainly true in God's family, as He exercises discipline and chastening, it is to refine. So when it happens to you, you can look up and say, "I...I bless God that I'm His child."...

And, in fact, because all this is true, all these things that I've mentioned to you, because they're...they're all true, we can say with Job, "Happy is the man whom God corrects." Job 5:17. "Happy is the man whom God corrects." So suffering is good. It's good because it refines. It's good because it purges and purifies, and we...we saw all of those things that really work together for good. It teaches us to hate sin, teaches us to see the evil in us, drives our souls to God, conforms us to Christ, drives out sin, confirms our sonship; and so, "Happy is the man whom the Lord corrects."

Lemme give you an illustration of this that we discussed in our series on worship. Turn to Jeremiah 48...A very obscure verse...that'll be less obscure, perhaps, after we look at it tonight. Here in chapter 48 of Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah gives a diatribe against Moab, pronounces a curse and a

judgment on Moab, and it says Moab is cursed in verse 10; and then verse 11 tells why. Most interesting. "Moab has been at ease. Moab has been at ease from his youth." You know what Moab's problem was? Never had any trouble. That nation of people never had any warfare, never had any suffering, and so was never refined..."And has settled on the lees or the dregs and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed."

What in the world does that mean? That's what I said until I read a little bit in a book about how the Israelites made wine. They took the grapes, and they crushed the grapes, and out of that they filled their wineskins with the juice, and they let it, of course, remain in there; and as it remained there, obviously with no refrigeration in that part of the world, it would ferment; and the dregs or the sediment or the lees, as it's called, would sink to the bottom; and after a period of time, obviously, they would take the top off; and they would pour what remained on the top into another wineskin and set aside the dregs. And in this wineskin, there would still be still yet a longer settling, and there were less of the dregs, but still some remained; and those would settle to the bottom of that...bottom of that second wineskin; and then a third would be taken at the proper time; and the best wine remaining on the top would be poured into that third one; and that went on and on from wineskin to wineskin to wineskin until finally there was no dregs in the bottom at all. And that's the winemaking art that reveals the sweet, clear wine.

The dregs would all be collected together; and that is where vinegar comes from; and you see what it's saying in the text. "Look, the problem with Moab is Moab never got poured from trial to trial, from suffering to suffering to suffering to suffering, so that the bitterness could fall out, see? So that the sourness could come out. So now there's no sweet wine remaining." But, in effect, God is saying, "With Israel, I have poured Israel from problem to problem to suffering to suffering and, ultimately in the end, Israel's gonna come forth sweet." The scent will be as sweet as the taste...

In Psalm 119, I...that great psalm known primarily for its length, but should be known for its exaltation of the Word of God, there are three verses that I will read to you. You don't need to look them up if you don't want to, but I wanna read them to you. Psalm 119 verse 67 says this, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I've kept Thy word." Boy, that is good. "Before I got afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word." Verse 71, here's his conclusion. "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Thy statutes." Verse 75, "I know, O Lord, that Thy judgments are right, and that Thou in faithfulness hast...what?...afflicted me." Suffering is a direct result of sin in the world. In itself, it is bad. God overrules it for good, but not in the case of everybody...

Second...not only is suffering working together for good, but struggling. Let's use another word with an S, struggling. That's just my S word for temptation. The battle with sin. You say, "You mean the evil of temptation works together for good?" Yeah, it does. Really does. Everything does. I mean we gotta put it in there. Everything does. That's what it says. You say, "You mean when I'm

tempted, it's working together for my good?" That's right. Lemme tell you why. First of all, temptation sends us to our knees to pray. Is that good? It's good, isn't it? See how God overrules that? Temptation sends us to our knees to pray. You know how it is when the animal sees the hunter -- he runs all the faster to safety; and when the believer sees the devil coming, the roaring lion, he just takes off as fast as he can, hopefully into the presence of God. So even when you're being driven by Satan and you're being assaulted by temptation, God overrules that to good very often by driving you into His presence by the very temptation itself.

Another reason why temptation can be worked for our good is that it devastates our spiritual pride. It devastates our spiritual pride. In effect, it slays our false justification. The idea that we're okay. Now, when you're struggling with sin and temptation, you're facing the fact of who you really are, and you have no place for pride. It shows how really weak you are.

And, thirdly, we could say that even struggling can work together for good, because it teaches us lessons to use in helping others, doesn't it? You know, when the Lord was tempted, three times Satan came to Him in Matthew 4 and Luke 4; and when Satan came to Him, he tempted Him, and the Lord responded, and the Bible recorded that whole thing; and I think the reason is so that the Lord could show us how He handled Satan's attacks; and when we go through those same things, we're able to help others. It's the same thing that Hebrews tells us about Christ. That He, being tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin, is able to nurture us in our temptations, in our struggles.

So even our temptations can work together for good, because they teach us lessons we can use in helping others. And then another thing, struggling can lead to good, because it causes us to lean on the strength of Christ. It causes us to lean on the strength of Christ. That's much like being driven to God, just maybe seeing it from a new covenant perspective. It causes us to lean on the strength of Christ. Psalmists so often cried out to God, and in the New Testament, we know the Apostle Paul lived in utter and incessant dependence on Christ's strength, which he found totally satisfactory.

And then one other thought. I love this. The struggle of temptation works together for our good because it makes us desire Heaven...Did you ever just feel like you'd like to get outta here altogether? Sure you do. Sure you do. And when, especially, you get into some of kinda horrible struggle with temptation, like Paul cry out, "O wretched man that I am. I...I can't do the things I wanna do. I do the things I don't wanna do," and you begin to desire Heaven. You begin to long for Heaven. You begin to reach out for the glory. I think Paul had it in mind when he said, "Look...he said...to depart and be with Christ is far better, isn't it? For to me to live is Christ and to die is... what?...is gain." So even temptation works together for our good. It sends us to prayer. It breaks our pride. It teaches us so we can help others. It causes us to lean on Christ, and it causes us to desire Heaven...

There's a third thing. Suffering, struggling, and here's the third thing, sin. You say, "You're kidding." No, sin. You say, "You mean to tell me that sin could work together for good?" Yes, that's right. Well, I can handle the suffering part, because that's the result of the world's fallennes; and I can handle the struggle, 'cause that's the battle that maybe proves us strong; but sin works together for good? Well, it says all things, and that's an unqualified all things.

You say, "Well, how can it?" Well, not by the character of sin, 'cause sin is wretched, filthy, vile, and always will be. It's by the fact that God overrules it and turns the bitter to sweet, and the dark to light. God literally overrules our sin for our good; and, friends, let me tell you something. I believe that that is really the heart of the passage. That is the ultimate securing reality. No matter what comes into the life of a Christian, it ultimately will be worked together for our good. So nothing can be worked together for our evil, even sin.

No, I'm not lessening...the ugliness of sin. I'm not lessening the beauty of holiness. I'm not saying that sin doesn't deserve eternal hell, but it does. It...because it does. All I'm saying is God overrules it in the case of a believer. That's all. He overrules it...

Lemme see if I can't illustrate that to you just very briefly. The sins of other people work for our good. The sins of other people work for our good. You say, "How?" Lemme tell you how. For example, they generate holy wrath, and that's good. When I see sin in other people, I sense in my own heart a holy indignance against that sin, don't you? That's good. So sin in others can generate a holy wrath, and they also cause us to be stronger in our opposition to sin. When I see what sin does to other people, I...and I begin to become holy in a...in a holy anger set against that sin. Then I also strongly oppose that sin.

And then one other simple truth. I become more thankful that the Lord has delivered me from it; and so I believe that the sins of the others work for our good by bringing about, not only a holy hatred of sin and a strong aversion to it, but a deep thankfulness for salvation. For salvation. That we've been delivered from the things to which others are captive.

But let's go to the main point of the whole thing. I believe our own sins work ultimately for our own good. "Oh, my," you say, "it's impossible." No, no. God is so powerful, so absolutely sovereign that even the sins that we commit are overruled. They're evil in themselves, but their consequence is eliminated that...now listen to me...the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is not that the Christian doesn't sin. It is that the Christian sins, and the consequences ultimately are eliminated. Now, the immediate consequences of chastening are not, but the ultimate consequence of damnation is...and instead of sin leading to our damnation, God, by the grace of Jesus Christ, given to us, and be cause he already paid the penalty for our sin and bore all the punishment, ceases with the ultimate consequence of that sin; and in its place overrules it and puts our good.

For example...sins can work for our good, because they make us look...upward...to glory. We've been reading that in Romans 8, how the whole creation does what? Roams, cries out for redemption, the redemption of the body. When we see sin in our lives, we cry out for deliverance. That's good. Something else. Sin in the life of a Christian will drive 'em to God. When you see sin in your life, where do you go? To the Lord to confess, to repent. Is that good? Yes, it's good. It's good to be communion with Him.

Furthermore, sins in our own lives, God overrules, and they wind up being great lessons to teach us humility, to take away any false pride or false self-righteousness. So they make us look to Heaven. They drive us to God. They take away our false piety, and they humble us...They fill us with praise for forgiveness. So even sin, God overrules...

Sin in our life also makes us hate sin. We hate what we see, and that's good. Good things then. Good things. Things like God's nature, God's promises, God's Word, prayer, angels, other believers. Good things work together for our good, and bad things do, too. Bad things like suffering and struggling and sin work for our good. Why? Because they teach us to hate sin. They teach us to see our fallenness. They teach us to desire God. They teach us to conform to Christ, to be prayerful, to be humble, to help others, to be thankful, to love God's grace, to long for Heaven.

See, God eliminates the ultimate damnation of our sins, because Christ already took that and uses our sins as means to teach us, to make us better in this life. And, ultimately, in glory, we are like Jesus Christ, for we pay no consequence there. He's paid it all...

Now, I really want you to emphasize this in your thinking. This is twofold, as I said a few moments ago, and I'll draw it to a conclusion with this thought. We are looking at a good that is not just temporal, but eternal, so that all things in this life are working together for our good, as we've been mentioning to you, because of what God teaches us through these things. But I want you to notice we've got to go one step beyond that. All things work together for good. Beyond the temporal into the eternal, and that, dear friends, is the major thrust of this verse. It is not primarily telling us that struggling and suffering and sin have a temporal goodness as a product. It is saying that all hell blasting us, and all of our humanness activated can never alter the ultimate glory that is ours in Christ. That's what it's really saying at its heart. The others are corollary to that.

Say, "How do you know that?" Verse 29, "For or because whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." In other words, whomever God chose before the foundation of the world, He chose to ultimately be like Christ after this world has passed away. You see the point? That's the point. And what is our ultimate good? What is the ultimate moral, intrinsic goodness of man, that he shall be like whom? Christ, who alone is good.

And so it says, "For whom He did foreknow, He did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren." Just the first of a whole group.

"Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He called; and whom He called, them He also justified; and whom He justified, them He also...glorified." See any dropouts? No dropouts.

I'm not telling you this, because I have some denominational background. I'm just telling you what the Bible said. You see, the whole point is this -- all things work together for good, because God has predetermined that that'll be the case. That we who were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, shall end up like Jesus Christ. That's the ultimate good. That's what that verse is saying. It's a verse not only to promise us that temporal good will come out of difficult situations, but that all the sins of this world and the struggles and the suffering can never change the ultimate goodness of being in the image of Christ someday in God's presence...Great truth. Great truth...Well, that's one phrase out of four...Let's pray...

Lord, we are so overwhelmed by this. I am, and I know Your Spirit's penetrated all of our hearts with this truth. It's so comforting, so securing...such grace. We...we would not abuse that. Thank You, oh, God...that all things...good things, bad things...suffering, struggling, even sin, is overruled in the divine synergism that takes everything, works it together, for our good here and now as we are conformed more to the image of Christ; and for our ultimate good, as we are in His image, because that's the plan. Thank You, Father, for that plan... that the ones You did foreknow, You did predestinate; and the ones You predestinated, You called; and the ones You called, You justified; and the ones You justified, You glorified. Thank You for that. Thank You for the blessed Holy Spirit who works that plan out by His ongoing intercession on our behalf...and thank You for the Son of God, our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ who also intercedes and is ever our living and faithful high priest...

May we who have received such an eternal salvation demonstrate gratitude with a life of obedience...that shows beyond shadow of a doubt that our salvation is, indeed, real. And may You be glorified, oh, Father. Receive our humble praise and thanks...

While your heads are bowed for just a...a moment before we welcome some new members as we part tonight to enjoy some fellowship. If you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ, you have seen tonight the wonderful, comforting, thrilling hope of a Christian. And if you wish to know that same hope, that everything in your life, no matter what it is, works together for your ultimate good and glory, because Jesus has paid the penalty for sin and offers salvation, eternal salvation to those who come to Him in faith. If that's the desire of your heart, I just pray that you'll open your heart to Him right where you are...

Christian, be joyful. Christian, be thankful. Christian, be comforted, be hopeful. Take whatever comes down the path in life and put it in that...limitless bag called Romans 8:28, and know that

someday it'll turn to gold...Be thankful. Father, we ask that You'd bring those that you desire to come; and, Lord, in all of our hearts, fill us with gratitude and great encouragement and freedom...and joy, because of this great promise. We thank You. In Christ's name. Amen.

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