

Date: 1/1/2023

Title: A Promise that Fills us with Hope

Passage: Romans 8:28

Speaker: Rev. Tony Thomas

Introduction

- Good morning and Happy New Year! - We trust you all enjoyed your Christmas and holidays
 - And couldn't be more excited to start 2023 with all of you in worship this morning
- And while I think it was really important that this Fall we went through our vision and mission messages for our Launch Team, I'm actually really excited to have the chance to start doing messages that are more traditional sermons where we can get into the Word together
- Now, as I was preparing and prayerfully thinking about what message would be appropriate for the New Year
 - One natural inclination as a church planter would be to do a message for 2023 that is like a "fire up the troops" kind of message
 - * A "let's take this city for Jesus" type of message!
 - And honestly, there wouldn't be anything wrong with that - we need that kind of Word and I certainly will have messages like that to preach
- But, as I think you know - I turned 40 on Dec 20
 - And I like to think of my personality as generally-speaking - I'm an optimist - I generally am hopeful and excited about the future
 - BUT, even though that's my general bent - I would say, after 40 years of life
 - * The Lord has been gracious to help me not just be a "pie in the sky" dreamer about life, but also be a realist about life too
 - In my 20s I had ALL these hopes and dreams of what would happen in my life, the things I would do for the Lord - so up HERE were my EXPECTATIONS
 - And by my 30s - reality of what actually happened in my life was down here - this was REALITY
 - And anyone know what we call the gap between expectations and reality? - It's called DISAPPOINTMENT
 - Now, here's the danger though for us as Christians
 - * In our 20s maybe we're dreamers, but then 30s and 40s and beyond - we turn into pessimists!
 - And that's NOT GOOD either!
 - * So what's the Biblical balance - I would say we want to be Biblical optimists
 - Which means - we are ALWAYS hopeful about the future...but we're not ignorant of the realities of suffering and pain and hardship in this life
 - And so, as I prayed, the Word the Lord placed on my heart for our church was not a message about - "Hey look at ALL the amazing things God is going to do in our future!"
 - * But a message about, "Can we trust God even when everything seems to go wrong in our future?"
- Because here's my hope and prayer for the members of Joy of All Nations:

- I'm praying we'd be a church that is made of granite rock foundation that will stand, not be sinking sand when the waves of trials come crashing down on us
- I'm praying we'd be a church with roots dug DEEP into the ground and bears fruit even in the extreme heat and drought because we're planted by streams of water
 - * And so KNOW THIS, I want to preach this message for us - NOT BECAUSE I don't want to be hopeful for the future
 - No, its precisely because I want to be hopeful for the future that I believe this is God's good Word for us this morning
 - Because I think long-term flourishing and fruitfulness comes from Christians who have rock solid conviction and faith in Christ that carries them through the times of darkness
- And so that's my hope and prayer for our church - that we wouldn't be a flimsy, shallow church, but one that has weight and because of that weight - we'll make by God's grace a substantial impact in our city
- And so to build up a weighty church this morning - we'll be looking at one verse – Romans 8:28 - a well known and beloved verse
 - Now, I need ALL the promises of God every moment of my life...but I'd say...we need this specific promise ESPECIALLY when EVERYTHING in life is going wrong
 - * Romans 8:28 is meant to be like a GIGANTIC BEDROCK meant to hold us up in life...when the entire world seems to be giving way
- **Outline**
 - 1. The conditions of the promise
 - 2. The glory of the promise
 - 3. The implications of the promise

1. The conditions of the promise

Transition

- Now, before we get into the glory of this promise – represented by the words “We know that...in all things God works for the good”
 - We need to deal with two conditions that are given for this promise
 - * So this promise is not COMPLETELY unconditional...we need to understand then what are the conditions
 - So that we know when and to whom this promise applies
- There are essentially two conditions listed:
 - 1. “For those who love God”
 - 2. “For those who are called according to His purpose”

1. “For those who love God” – The promise is freed from godlessness

- Now, this condition is vital because Paul is rescuing this promise being used by people who want it to mean that...whatever happens in their life and however they live their life
 - It means that “life is just going to work out”
- Don't you hear unbelievers say that all the time? And also a lot of Christians just say that...but the foundational thinking is just so worldly

- So what wrong interpretations does this condition – “For those who love God” correct?
 - ◉ 1. This promise does NOT apply to unbelievers
 - * An unbeliever does not love God and therefore this promise that all things will work for their good is false
 - * Now, IF an unbeliever repents and places their faith in Christ...we can say that this promise applies to them – and even their past as a non-Christian...God’s promise reaches into their non-Christian past and can use and redeem that for their good
 - * BUT, if a person is an unbeliever all their life...the honest truth is that the EXACT OPPOSITE of this verse is what is true
 - All things will work together for their BAD if they don’t love God!
 - Because if they live their entire life rejecting Christ...everything they’ve done on earth will be disobedience and will merit God’s wrath for all of eternity
 - ◉ 2. This clarifies what the “good” is
 - * Now, there is a great danger of loving this promise as an idolater of the prosperity Gospel
 - * Because people might take this verse to mean...”God is work all things together for my good”
 - So...I’m going to make the last second shot, I’m going to a full ride for college, I’m going to have a great marriage, my kids will never make mistakes or disobey, and I’ll have great health and lots of money, and even though 2022 was terrible for the stock market - God will work it together to increase my portfolio for 2023
 - * But, this verse IS NOT SAYING that the “good” promised is external circumstances of life
 - When the condition is for those who LOVE GOD, not those who LOVE STUFF!...its saying that this promise is for people who say – I LOVE GOD...so GOD IS MY TREASURE...GOD is my greatest GOOD!
 - So the thing God promises to work all things together to give us...is not STUFF ultimately, but it is GOD HIMSELF!
 - * So, your life might be a train-wreck from a worldly perspective...but as long as God is giving you God...it means He is still keeping this promise
 - ◉ 3. This is not condoning being spiritually passive
 - * The other danger is to take this verse to mean...that I can just kind of relax in Christian life...I might fight to spiritually grow here and there
 - But you know I’m going to sin and mess up and whatever...its OK, I’ve got this great promise to rest upon
 - * But that’s NOT the heart of this verse or the surrounding context
 - In Romans 8...Paul is ASSUMING a Christian life that is being lived radically and with suffering
 - ***Romans 8:17 - 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.***
 - * So Paul’s assuming A TYPE of Christian in Romans 8...a Christian that’s going HARD after God...to the POINT of suffering and self-denial

- And so Paul wants to lay some bedrock foundational promises of hope in Romans 8:28 for THAT type of Christian
 - * Because a Christian that is running after God...is going to face hardships, persecution, disappointments, suffering, self-denial
 - And so Paul wants us as Christians to be sustained with hope in the face of that suffering
 - And THAT's why we have a promise like Romans 8:28 (and really all the incredible promises of Romans 8)
 - OK, so the first condition – this promise that God works all things together for good
 - Its “for those who love God” – which means Christians where GOD is their highest good and treasure and are living radical and suffering and self-denying lives for Him - so that makes the promise free from it being for godless people
- 2. “For those who are called according to His purpose” – The promise is grounded in grace**
- Now this condition is almost the pendulum swing to balance the previous condition – “for those who love God”
 - Because a danger with the previous condition is
 - * Does this promise become MORE valid the MORE I love God?
 - So if I love God with 90% purity...then things will work together for my good 90%
 - But if I love God with 10% purity...then things will work together for my good 10%
 - If the promise works like that...then the promise becomes grounded UPON OUR FAITHFULNESS, not God's faithfulness and grace - and there is NO COMFORT or ASSURANCE in this promise!
 - BUT, this is a promise of God that IS grounded in grace...and we know that because of the condition – “for those who are called according to His purpose”
 - * Now what does that mean?
 - Well, the key is in understanding what the word “called” means
 - And the best evidence we have to understand it comes from the context where in *Romans 8:30 - 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.**
 - So...the “call” is referring to what theologically we call the effectual, regenerating call of God by which God made us born again
 - A Biblical illustration of this “effectual call of God” is the resurrection of Lazarus in John 11...where Jesus CALLS – “Lazarus, get up!”
 - * And the CALL of Jesus...resurrects dead Lazarus to life
 - Now, Lazarus made no contribution to HIM coming to life - it was SOLELY the will and determination of Jesus and then His Almighty WORD...that brought life to Lazarus!
 - And that's the way to understand this CALL for us...our spiritual resurrection was the same way

- ◉ v.30 says we were “predestined” and then “called” - so our coming to life as a Christian - every single one of us - is BY SHEER GRACE
 - * And so that means, this promise God makes to us in Romans 8:28 is for “those who are called”...meaning - your calling into spiritual life as a Christian was by sheer grace
 - And thus this promise is also yours invincibly - by sheer grace
- So to fix that earlier illustration...this promise is saying...IF YOU ARE A BORN AGAIN CHILD OF GOD
 - ◉ Whether you’ve lived like a prodigal, whether you’ve failed, or whether you lived like the Apostle Paul
 - * This promise is for EVERY child of God...WITHOUT EXCEPTION!
 - So if you are a child of God...no matter how many times you mess up as a child of God
 - God is not the accounting department saying - well in 2022 you really just loved me 10%, so I’ll work out 10% good for you...OK maybe we’ll give you a 12% good as a Christmas bonus
 - NO! God is saying in this promise
 - I am working ALL THINGS together for your good...100% of the time...for 100% of your life...no matter the performance of your Christian life!

Transition

- Now, you might be wondering...man, these two conditions – “for those who loved God” and “for those who are called according to His purpose”
 - ◉ They seem contradictory
- But no, they don’t contradict...BUT they live in tension as almost a paradox
 - ◉ Because the one condition – “for those who love God” is freeing us from godlessness and being a stagnant Christian
 - ◉ But the other condition – “for those who are called according to His purpose” is freeing us from pride and self-sufficiency and legalism and driving us towards confidence in God’s grace
- And one of my aims for JOAN is for us to be SO grounded in Scripture that we learn to live in that holy Biblical tension...that I stand by grace and grace alone as a Christian...but that grace makes me a Christian that lives for and loves God
 - ◉ And so for THAT Christian...we are now ready to unpack the glory of the promise

2. The glory of the promise

Transition

- So lets look at the GLORY...and when I say “glory” it is a synonym for “beauty” – lets look at how BEAUTIFUL and GLORIOUS this promise is for us
- And we’ll just break it down unit by unit...1. “we know that”, 2. “all things”, 3. “work together”, 4. “for good”

1. “we know that” – Glorious assurance

- Here we see the glory of having personal assurance of this promise

- I mean this promise that ALL THINGS work together for good...its ASTOUNDING isn't it?
 - And in a lot of ways...its KIND OF unbelievable too right?
- I mean...think of ALL the horrible things that have happened in history to Christians and even in your own life
 - And God has the AUDACITY to say all of that is going to come together for good!
 - And so you look at things like persecution and martyrdom of Christians or the loss of a child in childbirth or to a car accident
 - * And you can't help but wonder...WHERE IS GOD?
- But this verse says...Christians by the Word and through the Spirit...there's SOMETHING that RISES UP in our hearts in the midst of all the chaos, in the midst of all the darkness
 - And it SPEAKS and PREACHES to our circumstances and to others and to our very own soul..."I know this is messed up...BUT I KNOW SOMETHING and I SEE SOMETHING BEYOND my circumstances...I KNOW that in all things God works for the good"
- Now, let me also insert something here about...WHY as Christians this assurance and certainty is not just this "pie in the sky sentimentalism"
 - Because someone can just look at our lives as Christians that believe God is going to work everything together for good...and they might be like
 - * You're a fool – and on what basis do you have to even believe something that foolish?
- So we have ask ourselves, is there some sort of OBJECTIVE REASON we can have this assurance?
 - Well, I believe Romans 8:32 is one of the most AMAZING verses in the Bible...deserves its own sermon actually...but it helps us see the GROUND of why we can trust God's promises
- **Romans 8:32 - He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?**
 - The argument here is - I gave you MY SON! The most infinitely valuable being in the universe was given for you!
 - * That's OBJECTIVE reality right? - The cross and resurrection HAPPENED 2000 years ago!
 - And so the LOGIC of this verse is saying...IF I DID THAT...that means all the wrath is removed and NOW I AM OBLIGED BECAUSE OF CHRIST to POUR OUT grace upon grace upon grace upon grace on your life!
- Do you realize that is happening to us...RIGHT NOW???
- If you have trusted in Jesus Christ...I don't care how you are doing with Jesus right now
- But the OBJECTIVE REALITY of the cross and being IN CHRIST means that RIGHT NOW...there are unending streams of grace flowing to you...grace upon grace upon grace
- What God is saying...when you look at the cross...that is the INFINITE, UNBREAKABLE GUARANTEE that every promise I make to you is rock solid, granite assured to come true
 - * That's why Paul also writes in **2 Corinthians 1:20 - For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.**

- So, is Romans 8:28 true?
 - The Christian looks at the cross of Christ and says, “YES” it’s true!
 - * And that’s why this verse, “*And we know*”
- One of the glories of this promise is that we can have this REAL assurance and peace in the midst of storms and chaos of life
 - That’s how Horatio Spafford could write in the midst of losing his 4 children in a sunken ship tragedy...”whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say...it is well, it is well, with my soul”
- So, “*we know that*” – we have personal assurance, and next it says, “*all things*”

2. “all things” – Glorious comprehensiveness

- Now this part of the promise is astounding...because of its comprehensiveness
- When God says “all things” He means ALL THINGS!
 - Its not just our good works and faithfulness that contribute to all things working together for good...but its EVERYTHING!
 - * Our health and our sickness, our prosperity and our hardships, our blessings and our injustices, our faithfulness and our failures!
 - EVERYTHING...is included in this promise
- And what this means is...if you are a child of God...you have NO RIGHT to claim before God that something in your life is beyond repair
 - You have no sin done against you, no difficulty you are in, no sin you have committed... where you can come before God and tell Him...”well, I know you’re pretty good and fixing things...but this one...nope sorry, not this one God”
 - * And God says “NO! WRONG! You have NO RIGHT to say that to me...because I have said “all things will work together for good” and ‘ALL THINGS’ means ALL THINGS!”
 - There is a glorious comprehensiveness to this promise
- So the glory of the promise is “*we know*” – glorious assurance / then “*all things*” – glorious comprehensiveness / and next, “*work together*” – glorious wisdom and power

3. “work together” – Glorious wisdom and power

- Now, a point of confusion and sometimes frustration for people...especially suffering people
 - Is when people kind of throw Romans 8:28 at them flippantly - “hey everything will together for good”
 - * And so a word of wisdom for us as a church...quoting Romans 8:28...even though its true...usually isn’t the wisest counsel to quote when the pain is most sharp for a sufferer
 - The Bible just tells us to weep with those weep
 - And Biblically, we are ALLOWED to say...THIS THING that is happening right now...IS NOT GOOD
 - * This promise of Romans 8:28 is not glossing over evil, pain, suffering, sin, hardships...and calling it good

- NO - the promise of Romans 8:28 is not to call evil things good, but to say that God “works those evil and hard and sad and painful things together” for good
 - * God will take our pain and trials and failures...and SORT THEM OUT OVER TIME in such a way that He will bring beauty and meaning and good out of them in His wisdom and with His power
 - Now, part of that beauty can often be seen on earth...but many times, MUCH OF IT...actually happens and will be complete and perfect only in heaven
 - **Illustration: Ratatouille**
 - The movie is about a guy who doesn’t know how to cook...and puts all these terrible ingredients into this soup he is cooking
 - * But, there’s this mouse who knows how to cook...and somehow he puts all this other stuff in to fix the mess this guy has made in order to make it an exquisite dish
 - The promise that “God works all things together” is describing something like that
 - In this pot called “our life”
 - * We put in sin, unwise decisions, sins done against, trials, sickness, tragedy
 - And we look inside and say...this is disgusting...NOTHING GOOD can come out of this!
 - * BUT, we have this master chef who is in ABSOLUTE CONTROL of this mess called our life
 - And He in His timing is adding all these ingredients which will mix together with all the bad things done to us and even the bad things we’ve done ourselves
 - And He has the WISDOM AND POWER to still turn it into something beautiful
 - God “working all things together” in our life means there is a master chef over our life...and He is cooking a masterpiece of grace and beauty over our life
 - So the glory of the promise is **“we know”** – glorious assurance / **“all things”** – glorious comprehensiveness / **“work together”** – glorious wisdom and power / **“for good”** – glorious love
- 4. “for good” – Glorious love**
- The final glory and the highest glory of this promise...is that all things work together...”for good”
 - And really this is God’s love...because as we shared earlier...what is the greatest good that God can give to you and I if we are a Christian?
 - The greatest good that God can give...is Himself
 - And what God is essentially promising is...I promise that EVERYTHING that happens in this universe will work itself out in such a way...that I will give MORE of myself to my children
 - I am not promising them good health or wealth or fruitfulness in ministry or lack of tragedies...at least in this life...that will be there in heaven
 - * But until then...I promise them this...”**Behold, surely I am with you ALWAYS to the very end of the age**”
 - And I think the way this relates to this verse is...when have you gotten to know God the best in your life?

- Have you gotten to know God best in the mountaintop experiences?
 - * I think yes...those times are great
- But I think the testimony of all seasoned saints of God is...the times that we get to know God best...is not in the mountaintop, but in the desert and in the valley
 - * When everything else is stripped away...and all we have is God
- Its in those valleys of life where God whispers Romans 8:28 to us and says..."Isn't this valley "good"?"
 - * Because right now...its just you and me
 - In those valleys...God is seeking to get us to a place where through the deepest possible pain and heartache we can say:
 - "Thank You God for leading me to the valley so that all I can have is You"

Transition

- So we've looked at "The conditions of the promise", "The glory of the promise" and finally we will look at "The implications of the promise"...and we'll try and make it practical and applicable to end

3. The implications of the promise

Transition

- There's a lot of implications and applications to this promise, but let me share 3 briefly
 - 1. This promise is given not to serve sin, but to provide hope
 - 2. This promise frees us from fear towards fearless love
 - 3. This promise helps us trust God to make all things beautiful in His time

1. This promise is given not to serve sin, but to provide hope

- We kind of discussed this earlier, but a danger with such a magnificent promise of God where He works all things for good...and even He works in spite and through our sins and failures
 - Then, there's a temptation for the sinful nature to take that to mean we can sin without consequences or as if God is light on sin
- And that's a sinful and WRONG inference from this verse...this promise is NOT given to serve sin, but to provide hope to us that have sinned, that are facing struggles, and are facing opposition in our living for the Lord
 - The promise is not saying...its OK to sin...but its saying don't be discouraged, despondent, and defeated after you sin
- So don't take Romans 8:28 out right before you are tempted by some sinful tendency and say...well, I guess I'll just sin because God will work it out...that's evil
 - But instead you take Romans 8:28 out after failure and in darkness and trials...and preach to your soul that God is still for you and not against you and is working for your good

2. This promise frees us from fear towards fearless love

- Often in our lives we are captured by fear and anxiety and guilt - we feel like what we do and what people do and what circumstances do DICTATE our lives...but we don't believe it is GOD who ultimately dictates our lives and he dictates it for OUR GOOD according to Romans 8:28

- ◉ Remind yourself that the sentence of your life has not reached a period, but its merely a comma...the story is not over yet
 - * If you are still breathing...it means God has a plan for your life
- **Illustration: Carpet Weaver**
- The father is a carpet weaver and is weaving a carpet
- The son is looking at the carpet and the carpet looks terrible and complains, “Dad, what are you making? It doesn’t look good!”
 - ◉ The Dad says, “Just wait, be patient”
- And a few hours pass and again the son says, “Dad, its getting worse, what are you doing?”
 - ◉ The Dad says, “Son, be patient, I’m not done yet”
- Finally the Dad is finished and the son looks and says, “Dad, is this it? It looks all wrong”
 - ◉ Then the Dad takes the carpet and flips it over to unveil a stunningly beautiful design and the son’s breath is taken away and he says under his breath - “Its beautiful”
- God is in absolute control of our lives and is weaving a story that doesn’t seem to make sense now - but one day the carpet will flip and we’ll see the beauty and perfection and we’ll taste in part here on earth, but fully in heaven - the supreme goodness of God’s grace towards us

Conclusion

- Beloved in Christ - I don’t know all of what 2022 held or all of what 2023 will hold
 - ◉ But I know One who holds the future and One who holds us in His Hand safely and securely
 - * So whatever does come - lets face it with faith
 - Let’s let this promise be like granite beneath our feet
- And slowly but surely, I believe the rock solid people of Joy of All Nations - will expand the kingdom of God in this city
 - ◉ And I am 100% optimistic that God will do that
- Let’s pray