

Secure in all things

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[0 : 00] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with a glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope, that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

[1 : 26] And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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.

And those whom he predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified. And those whom he justified, he also glorified.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died.

[2 : 41] More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, For your sake we are being killed all day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In his book, *River Out of Eden*, the atheist Richard Dawkins argues that the world is random. You can try and make sense of life if you want, but there's really no point.

The universe, he says, is one with no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference. I wonder if that's how you see the world.

[4 : 09] Some people get lucky, other people get hurt. But we're all just bags of chemicals rattling around for a few years before disappearing forever in the abyss.

The suffering we experience now is nothing but bad luck. There's no reason behind it. It's all just random chaos. Well, the good news of the Bible is that the world is not random chaos.

There's a God behind it all. There's a reason for our suffering. It's not pointless. If you've been here for the last few weeks, you'll know that we're looking at the book of Romans in the Bible and Romans chapter 8 together.

And you'll see last week that the reason the world seems to be in chaos is because God cursed the creation in Genesis chapter 3. But he didn't abandon it.

In Romans 8 verse 20 to 21, we saw that God did it in hope of the creation being completely restored when Christ returns and makes a new world. The creation is groaning, but the groanings are like childbirth.

[5 : 12] Its groanings have a purpose. They're not random. They're pointing forward to the day of being restored to the God who made us. If you were here last week, you might remember the set of scales that I had.

Remember the scales. Have a look at chapter 8 verse 18 that we read again today. The present sufferings of our present time are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us. God wants us to feel the weightiness of the glory so much of the new creation that the sufferings of this present age are as nothing. On a pair of scales, the new creation will far outweigh the sufferings of our present age.

But we might still wonder if they're pointless. I mean, are our sufferings just something that we have to get through? Are they a painful inconvenience?

Or is there any purpose to them? We're going to have a look at our passage today in two halves, and it's there on your handout on the back if you want to follow along.

[6 : 21] So the first thing I wanted to see is that God works all things together for our good to get us to the new creation, and that's from verses 28 to 30. In just three verses, Paul has packed in some of the most glorious truths in the Bible, and so I want us to spend a bit of time together thinking about them.

So first we have a look at verse 28 with me. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. Or as it can also be translated, God works all things together for the good of those who love him.

Now to say that God works all things together in a certain way implies that God is in control of all things. I mean, how can God work all things for good if he's not in control of them, if the world is just random chaos?

Yes. Time and time again through the Bible, it tells us that God has our lives in his hands. The world is in God's hands. It's sometimes referred to as God's sovereignty.

God's absolute sovereignty over every detail of creation. Now perhaps you're sitting here thinking, well hang on, how can God be in control of everything? I mean, what if I decided to eat cornflakes for breakfast rather than porridge?

[7 : 41] Is God in control of that? Well the answer the Bible gives us is yes. Proverbs 21 verse 1 says that the king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord.

He turns it wherever he will. The king's heart is not so much about who the king's in love with as about what he chooses, his will. And according to the Proverbs, God controls the king's heart like a stream of water in his hand.

It's like a lock on a canal. When you open the lock, the water flows through. And when you shut it, it stops. And it's great news, isn't it, for our world that the heart of kings and rulers are in God's hands. Boris Johnson, Vladimir Putin, Donald Trump, their hearts are in God's hands and he turns them wherever he chooses. Even though human beings make real choices, the Bible says that God is in control of them.

But hang on, what about evil then? What about the evil choices people make? Is God in control of them too? Well, if you were here last year, you might remember we looked at the book of Genesis in the Bible, in our growth groups, our small groups at church.

[8 : 59] And you might know that Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. But he ended up saving them from famine. If you've got a Bible with you, why don't you turn to Genesis chapter 50 and verse 20.

It's on page 52. Have a quick look at Genesis chapter 50 verse 20 with me. Because talking to his brothers, Joseph says these words.

He says, As for you, you meant evil against me. But God meant it for good. To bring about that many people should be kept alive as they are today.

See, even though the brothers intended to do evil against Joseph, God intended it for good. God himself is not evil. Neither can he do evil. But he is sovereign over evil.

Finally, have a look in your Bibles at the New Testament and the book of Acts. Acts chapter 2 and verse 23. It's on page 1097.

[10:07] And to look at another really important part where we see this. Acts chapter 2 verse 23. Acts chapter 2 Here, Peter is talking about Jesus' death on the cross.

And he says, verse 23, This Jesus delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. You crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

So God intended for Jesus to be crucified so that we could be friends with God. He was sovereign over the evil of the cross as Jesus hung there in agony so that we could be rescued.

So do you see how fundamental God's sovereignty is not just to people's decisions or evil but our very salvation, our very way of being friends with God through Jesus' death on the cross at the hands of evil men.

Now we've had a bit of a think about God's sovereignty partly because it's so fundamental to who God is. If God's not sovereign, he's not God. But it's also, I guess, because people find it very difficult to believe, either because they want human beings to be in control of their life such that human beings have completely free will outside of God's control or because they don't want God to intend suffering in any way.

[11:33] Now how do we hold these things together? Well the Bible teaches that God is completely good. He's completely righteous. He's not evil. He doesn't delight in suffering. But he is suffering over evil.

And human beings make real choices for which God holds us accountable. So do talk to me more about that afterwards if you'd like.

So going back to Romans chapter 8 verse 28 together we've seen that God is sovereign. God works all things together because he's sovereign. He holds the universe in his hands.

But have a look at the next part of the verse. God works all things together for good. I don't know if you've heard the phrase everything happens for a reason.

It's a kind of mantra that people say to themselves perhaps to get through the ups and downs of life. And I guess the idea is if you look back on your life at the ups and downs you can sort of see how they've all worked themselves to get you to the point that you're at now.

[12:40] Now there is something to that of course because the Bible says that there is a God who is in control of everything. And often we can look back can't we and see how God's used things for our good even our sufferings.

So like Joseph we might be able to look back and say God sold me into slavery but he used it to bring about great blessings. The problem is we can't always say that can we?

Sometimes we look back at our life and we think where's the good? If God was working everything for good where's the good? This seems to have made things even worse. It hasn't turned out for good it's turned out for harm.

If everything happens for a reason well I'm none the wiser. What's God doing? Whether it's broken relationships health problems financial insecurity we can't always look back with Joseph and say what Joseph said that he understood why God did things.

But the question is what is the good that God's working all things together for? Is it to give me a better house? Financial security? To climb the career ladder to never get sick?

[13:52] No. Have a look at verse 28 again with me. God works all things together for good. For verse 29 for those he foreknew sorry for for those who are called according to his purpose.

And then verse 29 for those 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. And those he predestined he also called those he called he also justified and those he justified he also glorified.

The good that God is working all things together for is to get us to the new creation. To be glorified is to have a resurrection body as we saw last week.

And there's an unbreakable chain of events. So if you're predestined then you're foreknown. If you're foreknown you're called. If you're called you're justified and if you're justified you're glorified.

Now according to the Guinness Book of Records the longest domino wall was made up of over 250,000 dominoes and involved an international team, people from different countries of domino enthusiasts.

[15:06] You can watch dominoes falling for what seems like forever on YouTube if you want in an ever increasing elaborate pattern of falling pieces. And I guess the amazing thing about a domino

wall is that provided it's set up correctly, one piece knocks all the rest down.

There's an unbreakable chain of cause and effect from the first domino to the last domino. Nothing can stop it. And there's something of this idea here.

Nothing can break God's chain of getting his people to the new creation. Everything in the world is set up according to God's sovereign plan. So look back at your life.

Now you might think that there are lots of possible lives you could have lived. And I guess theoretically that's true isn't it? But in reality God chose this life for you.

Like dominoes falling over it might feel out of control. But God has carefully laid each piece with one purpose to get you to the new creation.

[16:19] I don't know if you've noticed the language of verse 30 but it says that those God predestined and called and justified he also glorified. You might have expected it to say he will also glorify.

After all we're not in the new creation yet. But such is Paul's confidence in the unbreakable chain of events that it's as good as done. It's as if it already happened.

As if we're already in the new creation. That's how certain it is because nothing can stop God's plan. He's laid every piece. He's in control of every detail of creation.

Isn't that great news? We can let go of regrets about the past. Missed opportunities, even bad decisions. Things we wish we had never done. Because God is working everything for our good. to get us to the new creation. Now the Bible has a lot more to say about suffering. But remember the set of scales from last week. Verse 18, the sufferings of this present age are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

[17:27] And our passage today says that God is sovereign over getting us to the new creation. To glory. He's sovereign over our sufferings and he's sovereign over the new creation.

Richard Dawkins thinks that the universe has no design, no purpose, no good, no evil, nothing but pitiless indifference.

But the good news of Romans 8 is that the universe has a creator. So it has a purpose, it has a design. There is good and there is evil and God's sovereign over them both.

He's not full of pitiless indifference, no he's full of compassion. He holds our sufferings in his hands. He's making us, verse 29, to be conformed to the image of his son.

And remember, Jesus suffered before he went to glory. And so, if we're Christians, will we. Maybe you're here this morning and you're not quite sure what to make of the God of the Bible.

[18:29] You see the design of the universe all around you and you think, there really might be a God. God, the world seems too chaotic, too full of suffering.

There may be a God behind it all, but what about the suffering of the world? It just seems too much. Well, see the claim of the Bible, both that God is sovereign and that he's working through the chaos of life to bring about good purposes.

So it's not that God is far too removed to care about our suffering. And it's not that he's too weak to do anything about it either. No, he has it in his hands. If we belong to him, he's using it to get us to the new creation.

Well, so what? What if God is working all things for our good to get us to the new creation? I mean, how should it change our day-to-day lives? I guess it's what Paul asked, doesn't it, in verse 31.

Have a look at 31 with me. Paul says, well, what then should we say to these things? What we should say is that we are invincible.

[19:38] Because nothing can separate us from Christ and the new creation. And that's the second thing I want us to see from this passage, from verse 31 to 39. Nothing can separate us from Christ and the new creation.

Have a look at verse 31 with me. Paul says, if God is for us, who can be against us? Imagine you had a whole load of superheroes with you.

You've got Spider-Man, Hercules, Wolverine, the Incredible Hulk, Batman, Superman. You'd feel pretty powerful, wouldn't you? You'd say to yourselves, if these superheroes are for me, who can be against me?

No one can defeat them, and they're protecting me. So I feel pretty invincible. I guess in a similar way, Paul says, if God is for me, who can be against me?

Now there are lots of things and people that are against Paul. He mentions them in verse 38. Have a quick look at verse 38. He says, there's all kinds of things against me. Death, life, angels, rulers,

the present, the future, demonic powers, even space and time itself.

[20 : 49] But like present suffering and future glory, it's not worth comparing. If God is for him, no one can seriously be against him. I guess Paul could have started verse 31 saying that he was trusting in God through his sufferings because of the promise of the new creation.

He could have said that, couldn't he? But instead, he just explodes into an excited shout of triumph and essentially says, I am invincible because nothing can separate me from Christ.

If you charge me with anything, God has already declared me justified. Even if you kill me, that will not separate me from him. In fact, nothing in all creation can separate me from Christ.

Let's have a look at what he says together. Verse 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?

Paul says that God will give Christians all things. The new creation is so glorious that it's like being given everything. I wonder if you've ever thought about that but God is infinitely generous.

[21 : 59] He's not just going to give us a piece of land with a shed to live on. He's already given us the most precious thing, his son. So he's going to give us all things. As we saw last week, the reason we find it hard to compare our present sufferings and future glories is because we don't think the new creation is that great.

But Paul says it's like being given the world. And what if someone brings a charge against us? What if they tell us, we're not living wholeheartedly for Jesus enough.

They tell us that we've messed up too much, that God's really quite fed up with us. Verse 33, who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Jesus Christ is the one who died more than that who was raised, who is at the right hand of God and is interceding for us.

Echoing language of chapter 8 verse 1, Paul says that there's no condemnation for Christians. I guess it's a bit like a judge who gives you the verdict of not guilty and then comes down from the court bench and stands next to you in the dock and he acts as your defence barrister.

[23 : 18] And basically there's nothing that anyone can say, is there? He's justified you and he's advocating for you and interceding on your behalf. So Paul asks in verse 35, who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? Perhaps you're sitting here this morning and you think, yeah, maybe they would.

Maybe if I faced intense suffering in life, I couldn't keep going as a Christian. Maybe if I was persecuted by my family or I didn't have enough to eat or to wear or my life was in real danger, maybe would I really keep loving Christ then?

Well, Paul's point, of course, is that it's not down to you. Christ will not let go of us. Remember the unbroken chain of dominoes.

If God has poured out his love for you in Christ, he will get you to the new creation. Paul doesn't say that Christians won't suffer. He doesn't say that God's working all things together for our good to give us an easy life.

[24 : 34] And he quotes Psalm 44, which we read earlier as an example of this. Have a look at Romans 8, verse 36, in which Paul quotes this psalm. He says, as it's written, for your sake, we're being killed all the day long.

We're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Psalm 44 was written to express the grief over the ruin of God's people.

Many of the psalms, as you'll probably know, talk about God exiling his people because of their rebellion against him, their rejection of the God who made them. But Psalm 44 is unusual because it seems to protest the psalmist's innocence.

Have a quick look at Psalm 44, verse 17, again, which we've read. It's on page 564, if you want to find it. Psalm 44, verse 17.

The psalmist says, all this has come upon us though we have not forgotten you. We've not been false to your covenant. Our hearts have not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way.

[25 : 50] See, this isn't like Joseph looking back at his life and saying, fine, I understand why you did what you did. God intended it for good. No, it's the psalmist saying, what are you doing, God?

Why are you doing this? We haven't rejected you. So why does it feel like you've rejected us? Our suffering doesn't seem to make any sense. But he ends in verse 26 with the hope of rescue.

He says, rise up, come to our help, redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. love. So let's go back to Romans 8.

And we see that in Paul quoting Psalm 44, he's saying that we triumph even over suffering that we don't understand. Even though suffering doesn't make any sense, even that doesn't separate us from Christ.

So Romans 8, verse 37, Paul says, no, not even that. We can't be defeated by anything. We are invincible. We're not just like a conquering Roman army. We're more than conquerors.

[26 : 55] Verse 37, in all these things we're more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now I don't know how invincible you feel this morning, I guess most of us feel pretty fragile at least some of the time. If you push us over, we fall.

If you cut us, we bleed. If you shoot us, we die. How can we feel as invincible as this? How can we feel as invincible as Paul does, of having superheroes surrounding him?

Well, by knowing that it's only through Christ that these things are possible. He says, we are all these things through him who loved us. It's only through Christ that we're safe.

Some of you might have seen the 2006 film V for Vendetta. It's a bit old now, but it's set in a dystopian totalitarian future, where a masked anarchist called V tries to start a revolution.

[28 : 09] There's lots of Guy Fawkes masks, and he persuades the whole population to wear Guy Fawkes masks and march on Westminster. The revolution is a success and the House of Parliament are destroyed.

During the protest, V is confronted by a man called Mr Creedy and he points a gun at him, at his mask, and he says, are you ready to die? V responds to him by saying this, he says, behind this mask, there's more than just flesh.

Behind this mask, there is an idea, and ideas are bulletproof. In other words, even if you kill me, the revolution will live on, because ideas are bulletproof.

And I guess that feeling of invincibility is similar to being in Christ, but it's not just an idea, it's reality. Being a Christian is bulletproof, because not even death can separate you from Christ.

and the new creation. We've seen that God is working all things together for our good, to get us to the new creation. And you see, it's because he's sovereign, that he can guarantee it.

[29 : 24] He can guarantee it, like an unshakable chain of events, an unshakable chain of dominoes, nothing can separate us from Christ and the new creation. Many of you will know the story of Jim Elliott, who was an American missionary who was killed in 1956 as he tried to reach the Juan people of Ecuador with the good news of Jesus.

He'd been building up contact gradually over a number of months and everything seemed to be going well until he was unexpectedly killed. His death, only age 28, seemed pointless.

It didn't seem to achieve anything. It didn't make any sense. He famously wrote in his journal, he's no fool who gives what he can't keep to gain what he can't lose.

He knew that not even death could take away Christ from him. After his death, his wife Elizabeth came to work with a tribe that had killed her husband for another two years and she began to reach them with the good news of Jesus because she also knew that her life was in God's hands and in time God used her husband's death to get many more people to the new creation because to be a Christian is to be bulletproof.

Not even death can separate us from Christ and the new creation. So Paul ends by saying that nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.