

ALL Things for Good

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[0 : 00] Allow me to say for a moment that it's a privilege for me to be here with you. I trust as we together sit under the ministry of God's word that he will speak into our hearts.

The word of God comes not merely to inform our minds, it comes to claim our hearts and to transform us from the inside out.

God does not want to leave us with mere notions of the truth. He wants us to be captivated by the truth, not only captured by it, but captivated by it.

He wants, through his word, to bring us to embrace his son, the saviour Jesus Christ. Paul writes in Romans 8 verse 28, And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Let me set Paul's words in their wider context. If you have a Bible before you, you'll notice that he writes in verse 18, For I consider that the sufferings of this present time, the sufferings of this present time.

[1 : 27] Paul wants these Christians in Rome to know that the Christian life does not escape the sufferings of this present time.

We live from the moment we breathe our first breath till the moment we breathe our last breath. We live in a fallen world. We live in a world in active, willful rebellion against God.

We live in a world where death has come as the result and fruit of sin and brought misery in its wake. We live in a world where the prince of darkness appears at times to have the upper hand. He never has. He never has. He is always bound by the sovereign purpose and will of God. But there are times when it seems that all hell has been let loose around us.

We see the fruit of that in many areas of life, not only in the macrocosmic scale of nations at war and convulsions in nature.

[2 : 37] We see it more personally in the ravages of illness in our lives and in the lives of those that we love. The sufferings of this present time.

Paul wants us to be realistic about the Christian life. We are not yet in heaven. We are not yet in heaven. The Lord Jesus described the whole course of his earthly life as the time of my temptations in Luke 22.

From womb to tomb, he experienced affliction and opposition. He was despised and rejected by men. He was a man of sorrows.

And he is the pattern of faith. He is the one true man of faith. And as it was with the Savior, so it will be with the people who are united to the Savior.

But Paul wants, having said the sufferings of this present time, he wants to provide rich encouragements for the church in Rome and to us here this evening.

[3 : 49] And so he provides three encouragements. He tells them, first of all, that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

He is saying, yes, there is suffering. But one day that suffering will end. And one day God will bring us into the nearer presence of his glory.

This is our destiny. And when suffering comes and appears at times to overwhelm you and engulf you, remember this. It is not worth comparing with the glory that is yet to be revealed in you.

And you see then Paul balances the sufferings of this present time with the eternal weight of glory that God has prepared for those who love him.

But more than that, in verses 26 and 27, he says, not only do we have the prospect of future glory, we have the present indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

[4 : 58] Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. Paul can be very unflattering about the Christian life.

He knows that the Christian life is a blessed life, a privileged life, a life like no other under the heavens. But he knows that the Christian life is a life beset with weakness. The weakness of remaining or indwelling sin. The weakness of being susceptible to the temptations of the world, the flesh and the devil.

But God has not left us alone to face those temptations and trials. The Holy Spirit helps us. And so in our present sufferings, we not only have the future hope of glory.

We have the promised help of the Holy Spirit. The verb that Paul uses here, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

[5 : 59] It's actually a 17 letter Greek double compound that we translate help. Help seems so anemic. So weak a translation. But it's almost impossible to translate what Paul is saying here.

He's saying something like this. The Holy Spirit comes alongside us. But at the same time stands over against us to support us.

And you think, well, that seems a little counterintuitive, Paul. How can he be alongside us and with us? And yet at the same time over against us, helping us.

Well, for this reason, Paul would say to us, I'm sure. The Holy Spirit is God. He is not contained within you. He is the sovereign Lord who stands, as it were, above you and over you.

But at the same time, he draws near to you in your times of need. And he says, let us carry the burden together. Let me get under the heavy end of the weight.

[7 : 09] And let us go on together. It's not that he simply picks us up and carries us on. Because we have a responsibility before God to go on in the way of faith.

But the Spirit has been given to help us. To support us. To strengthen us. And Paul specifically highlights our need for the Spirit's help in prayer.

We do not know what to pray or perhaps how to pray. But we have one who intercedes for us.

In the midst of our groans and sighs and tears. We have a heavenly helper. Remember the promise of the Lord Jesus.

John 14. I will send you another counselor or comforter to be with you forever. One of the same kind.

[8 : 11] And actually the word denotes. I will send you someone just like me. You know in the ancient world. If you were arrested for any crime.

And you needed someone to defend you. You didn't call a lawyer. You called your best friend. And the language that the Lord Jesus is using in John 14.

Is the language of a best friend who comes from him. To minister to his people. And so Paul is saying yes there are the sufferings of this present time.

Life at times can be grim. It can be hard for the man or woman of faith. But one day it will all give way to glory.

And until that day the Holy Spirit has been given to help you. And support you. But then he has this third encouragement.

[9 : 12] Verse 28. And in addition to this. We know. That for those who love God. All things work together.

For good. This must be one of the most remarkable verses in the Bible. I wonder if like me. There are times you read the Bible.

And you stop. And you think Lord can that be true? Can that really be true? You know if Paul had said. And we know. That in many things.

God is working for the good of those who love him. We could say. Well yes. I can go that far. Or even if the Apostle Paul said. We know that in most things.

God is at work for the good of those who love him. We might say. Well Lord. Most things. But okay. Yes. But Paul is unambiguous. He says. Because we know.

[10 : 07] That for those who love God. God. All things. Nothing excluded. Nothing excluded. All things. Work together.

For good. It's a breathtaking statement. Paul doesn't say. I hope. That all things work together for good. He doesn't even say.

I know. That all things. Work for the good of those who love God. He says. We. The community of faith. We know.

That all things. Work together. For the good of those who love God. Now Paul is a pastor. And he well understands.

If he had left it there. God's people would be perplexed. We would be asking. Paul. You might know that. But I don't know that.

[11:07] What do you mean. We know. What grounds do you have Paul. For saying this. Where lies your assurance. Where lies your certitude.

That all things. Nothing accepted. Nothing accepted. The dark. Things of life. The bewildering things of life.

The puzzling things of life. The sadnesses and tragedies of life. How is it Paul. That you can say. We know. That in all of these things.

God is working for the good. Of those who love him. Well in verse 29. Paul gives us three reasons. Three assurances.

That undergird. His statement. We know. That for those who love God. All things. Work together.

[12:04] For good. Number one assurance. Our assurance. That this must be so. Lies in God's. Eternal. Love.

Look what he writes. For. Whenever Paul writes. A for. You should stop and say. What's that there for? For. Paul's for's.

Are very. Critical. To his. Thinking. And his theology. For. Those whom he. For knew.

How do we know. That all things. Work together. For the good of those. Who love God. For. Those whom. He. For knew.

What does Paul mean here? What does it mean. For God. To foreknow. Well. There are.

[13:02] Fine Christians. Who wrongly. I believe. Say this. Well. God. Look down. The corridors. Of time. And history.

As only he can. God. Saw. Who. Those men. And women. Boys and girls. Would be. Who would believe. In his son. And embrace him.

As Lord. And saviour. God saw. That they would do that. Therefore God. For knew them. That is to say. Loved them. God's. For knowledge.

Of them. Was the result. Of their. Trusting. Christ. And loving God. Well. I believe that.

To be profoundly wrong. For any number of reasons. But let me just mention. One thing. In particular. Granted. That God. Did that. He looked down.

[13:57] The corridors. Of time. And he. Chose. To save. Those. Who would. Believe. In his son. When he saw. Their response. To the gospel. My question.

Would be this. Where did the faith. Come from. That brought. Men and women. Boys and girls. To believe. In the Lord. In the Lord.

Jesus Christ. It didn't arise. From themselves. Because we are dead. In trespasses. And sins. And the Bible. Tells us. Faith is the gift.

Of God. Ephesians 2. 8. God grants us. The grace. Of faith. To believe. Eve. No.

What Paul means. Is this. Those. Upon whom. God set. His special. Love. He also predestined.

[14:51] Let me show you. From scripture. Why that's the case. When we read. In Genesis. Chapter 2. That Adam. Knew. Eve. It didn't mean.

That Adam. Was mentally. Conscious. That she existed. It meant. That he knew her. Intimately. She had been.

Created. For him. She had been. Brought. To him. She was. Bone of his bone. And flesh of his flesh. And he knew her. Intimately.

There is a. There is a marriage. Sexual. Overtone. To the language. There was an intimacy. Of connection. And committedness. Jesus. Or think of those.

Striking words. In the book of Amos. Amos chapter 3. Where God speaks. To his covenant people. And says. You only. Out of all the families. Of the earth. Have I known.

[15:51] Now clearly. God doesn't mean. He didn't know. Mentally. Cognitively. All the other families. Of the earth. God knows all things. He knows all things.

Without thinking all things. He knows. No. What he is saying is. You only have I known. You only have I. Brought and. Drawn to myself.

And entered into an intimate. Familial relationship with. You only have I set my love upon. Uniquely. Or think of the Lord Jesus words.

In Matthew 7. On the last day. That final day. The great. Day of God's judgment. Jesus says. On that day. Many will come to me.

And they will say. Lord Lord. Did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not cast out demons in your name? Did we not do many mighty deeds in your name? And what will Jesus say to them?
[16:50] I. Never. Never. Knew you. Now he didn't mean. I don't know who you are. What's your name again? He meant. I had no living connection with you.

I had no intimate. Personal relationship with you. You were not one of mine. Now when Paul says here.

For those whom he foreknew. He is saying for. How do we know that all things. Will work together for our good? If we are among those who love the Lord. For God has loved us from times eternal. We have been the object of God's love. His gracious. Choosing. Discriminating love from times eternal. A few years ago.

I was at a minister's conference. And a very dear friend of mine was preaching. One of the. Finest preachers. Finest men that I know. And I was being. Greatly blessed.

[17:53] By his ministry. And suddenly he said something. That just riveted me. And I've never forgotten. He was quoting some words of a.

Dutch American. Biblical theologian. Called. Gearhardus Vos. Anyone heard of Gearhardus Vos? If you do. Read anything he's written.

Great stuff. And Gearhardus Vos. Wrote these words. The reason. God. Will never stop.

Loving you. Is because. He never began. And I sat there. And it literally.

If I can speak metaphorically. And literally at the same time. Blew the socks off me. The reason. God. Will never stop. Loving you. Is because.

[18:50] He never began. There wasn't a point. At which God. Began to love you. And he was actually quoting. Jeremiah 31. Verse 2. I have loved you.

With an everlasting love. If it's everlasting. It has no beginning. And by definition. It has no end. The reason. He will never stop.

Loving his people. In Christ. Is because. He never began. To love them. He loved them. With an everlasting love. And that's our assurance. We are the object.

Of God's love. I would move. Heaven and earth. To do good. For my four children. Their spouses. My grandchildren. Please God.

God helping me. I would do anything. To secure their good. And who am I. Compared to the Lord of Lords. And the King of Kings. Who has all power.

[19:42] In heaven and earth. At his disposal. Who is the omnipotent God. Who knows all things. Who is perfectly wise. Who knows. How to secure.

My present. And my everlasting good. I am the object. Of his eternal love. And he will literally. Move heaven and earth. To secure.

The good. Of his people. And we need to. Meditate more. On the love of the father. John Owen.

The great English Puritan. If I could encourage you. To read anything. Of John Owen. It would be. Volume 2. Communion with God. And in that volume.

Early on. Page 32. I think. He says. Many Christians. Think. That the father. Loves them. Because of the sacrifice.

[20:38] Of the son. He says. That's blasphemy. It's turning the gospel. In its head. God doesn't love us. Because the savior.

Died for us. It was because. God so loved. The world. That he gave. Unto death. His only begotten son. And so.

Owen says. Some Christians. Think. There is no sweetness. In God. Except what was purchased. At the high price. Of Jesus blood. The cross. Did not secure.

Sweetness. For the believer. It secured. Our justification. Our sanctification. Our glorification. But the sweetness.

In God. For his people. In Christ. Predates. The cross. From times. Eternal. He set his love. Upon us. And Paul.

[21:35] Is saying. When you're going. Through trials. That are unimaginable. When you're going. Through sufferings. That seem. To just. Overwhelm. And engulf you. Like a flood.

Remember this. God has loved you. With an everlasting love. And it is God. Who has loved you. But then he goes on. To a second reason. Not only. Can we be sure. That all things. Will work for our good. Because we are the object. Of God's eternal love. But secondly. Because he has predestined.

Us to be conformed. To the image. Of his son. Predestination. Is one of the most. Comforting truths. In the whole bible. God doesn't ask us. To understand it. He doesn't ask us. To fathom it. He doesn't leave us.

[22 : 29] To be perplexed. And bewildered by it. He simply says. Understand this. That life is not a lottery. I have predestined.

You. To be conformed. To the likeness. Of my son. Now I hardly know. Any of you. Two or three. I know relatively well. But I want to tell you.

Tonight. That I know. What God's will. Is for your life. I don't mean. I know who you should marry. Or. What job you should take up.

Or whether you should get out of bed. Tomorrow morning. God's will. For your life. His revealed will. For your life. And mine. Is to conform you.

To the likeness. Of his son. And if God. Has predestined. That purpose. Nothing will deflect. Him from it. He will pursue.

[23 : 27] That purpose. Relentlessly. Until he achieves. His perfection. Whatever God. Is at work. In your life. Whatever he is doing.

In your life. Tonight. He is doing it. If you're a Christian believer. To conform you. To the likeness. Of his son. You may not understand it.

You may say. Lord. What on earth. Are you about. In my life. The psalmist. Prayed that. Didn't he? You've picked me up. Now you've thrown me away. Don't you just love.

Reading the psalms. Wouldn't the church. Be absolutely. Impoverished. If the psalms. Weren't one of the great. Principal. Pulse beats. Of our worship.

And of our life. There's such a humanity. About the psalms. And the psalms. Are there. Was it Calvin says. The psalms.

[24 : 22] Are an anatomy. Of all the parts. Of the soul. The highs. The lows. The whys. And the wherefores. And they're there. Because God wants us. To understand.

That the life of faith. Is a variegated life. It's not even. It's punctuated. With problems. And hardships. And pains. And trials. It was for our saviour.

And yet. In the midst of it all. God. Is pursuing. A purpose. It. Is breathtaking. Isn't it? God is seeking.

To make. Every believer. Who has ever lived. On the face of this earth. Conform. To the likeness. Of his son. And what is the likeness.

Of the Lord Jesus Christ. What is the moral likeness. What was the defining feature. Of his life. Behold my servant. Whom I have chosen.

[25 : 20] He was obedient unto death. I've come from heaven. Not to do my own will. But the will of him. Who sent me. The conformity. To Christ. Is conformity. To a life.

Of all. Round. Whole. Hearted. Gladly. Given. Obedience. To the sovereign Lord. Who loved me. And who gave. His son. For me. Isn't it a bit. Life a bit like. Watching. A master. Sculptor. You know. You've maybe seen programs. There's. Barely an atom of art. In my being. But. You watch a sculptor. Take a block of marble. Then he begins to chisel it.

And you almost want to say. Stop. You're ruining something. Beautiful. These chisel marks. Are just defacing. This block of marble. And then slowly.

[26 : 16] But surely. You. You think you begin. To see something. And. More clearly. The relief. Begins to become apparent. And. You stand amazed.

That these chisel marks. These painful. Hammer blows. Are creating something. Something beautiful. Something. Magnificent.

Or perhaps. With a more Hebridean analogy. You. You watch someone. With a loom. And you. You see the reverse side. And you see all these. Tangled skein. Of.

Of wools. And colors. And you think. What on earth is that? And then you see the other side. And you think. My. I never knew. You were making something.

As beautiful as that. We can be sure. That God is working all things. For our good. Because of his predestinating purpose.

[27 : 14] That doesn't mean. That we won't be perplexed. That there won't be days. When. It seems that. Darkness.

Is our food. And all the lights go out. But you see what Paul is doing. He's looking to anchor our lives.

In God. He's saying. Anchor your life. In who God is. And what God has done. And what God is doing. So we have the assurance.

That God has loved us. With an everlasting love. We have the assurance. That God. Has predestined us. To be conformed. To the likeness of his son. And every chisel blow.

Is not random. Never a random stroke. But then thirdly. We have the assurance. That God.

[28 : 12] Has purposed. To glorify his son. That's what I think he's saying. In the last phrase. Of verse 29. He also predestined. To be conformed. To the image of his son.

In order that. He. Might be the firstborn. Among many brothers. If someone asked you tonight. As you leave this place of worship.

What is the gospel? I wonder what you would say. When I'm teaching at. The theological seminary in Edinburgh. Sometimes pause in my classes.

And put questions to the students. And this is the kind of question. I would put to them. What is the gospel? I think many would say. Well. The gospel is that.

God so loved the world. He gave his only begotten son. Whoever believes in him. Will not perish. But have everlasting life. That was the text. That brought me. To faith in Jesus Christ.

[29 : 09] But you know. That. Is part. Of the gospel. But it's not actually. All of the gospel. I wonder if anyone here tonight.

If you were asked. Did you leave this place? Someone calls you. And says. Tell me. What is this gospel? This good news? I wonder if it would cross your mind. To say. Let me tell you.

What the good news is. God. Has an ultimate purpose. To glorify his son. And to make him. The firstborn. Of many brothers. You see.

The gospel is not. Ultimately. About you. And about me. Why does God save sinners? Why did he save you? Me. Me. Me. Why did he save you?

Simply to save you? No. To rescue you from hell? Not ultimately. To bring you to heaven? Not ultimately. He saved you in order that. Jesus Christ.

[30 : 07] Might be the firstborn among many brothers. That God would have a new creation. Populated. With creaturely. Images. Of his son.

Why did God create. The heavens and the earth. Out of nothing. In the space of six days. And very good. Why did God do that? Because he had an ultimate purpose.

You and I are God's proximate purpose. You see. The gospel is not ultimately. Ultimately about you. Or about me. It's about the Lord.

Jesus Christ. It's about God's resolve. To glorify his son. There are many texts in the Bible.

That. Mean. Especially. A lot. To me. And no doubt to you. In these past months. I've thought often of. Those words in Hebrews 2 verse 11.

[31 : 09] And if you're in my class. At Edinburgh Seminary. I would say. What is Hebrews 2 verse 11? You don't know. Well. You're shaman. You should know. Hebrews 2 verse 11.

He. Is not ashamed. To call us. His. Brothers. I read that. And I think. Lord. I didn't know.

The gospel. Was so glorious. Not only. Do you forgive me. And save me. And make me your child. You make me. A brother.

Of your son. Jesus Christ. And he is not ashamed. Isn't that amazing? Not ashamed. To call. A sin. Stained. Forgiven.

Sinner. His brother. And we are all. His brothers. Male and female. Together. Just as we are all. Sons of God.

[32 : 03] Sisters. Yes. There's a reason. For sons and brothers. Isn't there? He is not ashamed. To call us. His brothers. So what's our assurance.

That all things. Will work together. For our good. Because. God's ultimate purpose. Is to glorify. His son. To make us.

The creaturely. Analogues. Of his son. To make us. Creaturely. Reflectors. Of his son. To fill heaven. With images. Of the God man.

Jesus Christ. Maybe for some of you. In past days.

Life has been very hard. Maybe you're still living. With the perplexity. Of those times. Or maybe even today. There are things happening.

[32 : 58] That leave you. Confused. Bewildered. Even doubting. I love. The psalms. For many reasons. And one of them is this. The psalmists.

Are never. Reluctant. To express. Their doubts. Their honest. And maybe that's. True for you. And you think.

I can't make sense. Of my life. God loves you. With an everlasting love. He is predestined. To conform you. To the likeness. Of his son. In order. That he might be. The firstborn. Among. Many. Brothers.

You see. The gospel. Is bigger than us. That's why. Paul begins. Chapter one. Paul. An apostle. [33 : 54] You know. I know it better in Greek. Than I do in English. Paul. An apostle. Separated. Unto the gospel. Of God. Separated.

Unto the gospel. Of God. Right at the outset. He's saying. The gospel. Is from God. And it's ultimately. About God. And we've been caught up. Into that. It's the amazing thing. The amazing thing. That's why. We can never. Hear. The gospel. Too often. It's an infinite depth. And we'll have eternity. To explore it. But until then. Let us trust him. Who loves us. With an everlasting love. Who is conforming us. To the likeness. Of his son. And whose ultimate purpose. Is to glorify his son.

[34 : 47] And maybe you're sitting. Tonight thinking. You know Ian. I would love to be. Caught up into that. That's something. Magnificent. What.

Must. I do. Do you know. The amazing thing. It's so amazing. You wouldn't believe it. If it wasn't in the Bible. The way. You are caught up.

Into that. Is to believe. On the Lord. Jesus Christ. Let me close. By quoting some words. Of Horatius Bonner.

Upon a life. I did not live. A death. I did not die. Another's life. Another's death.

I stake my whole eternity. May God bring us all. To be caught up. In his eternal purpose.

[35 : 43] To glorify. His son. Let us pray.