

When Does It Get Good March 29, 20 Sermon

Good morning! I'm Pastor Doug and I am glad you are with us this morning wherever and whenever you are worshipping with us at Longview EPC. Today we are going to look at another familiar passage. It has been a source of great comfort for God's people when everything around us seems like it is shaking and breaking. Look with me at Romans 8:28-29.

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.

Would you please pray with me? God, thank you for giving us your Word. We ask you to speak to us now so that we can really hear it. Give us attentive minds and hearts to receive what you have for us. Thanks Jesus! It's in your name we pray. Amen.

Many years ago I had to go and get a new driver's license. It was right after Julie Lynn and I had moved to a new state, so she went together. I was in this transitional time in my life. For the longest time I had been able to get away with not wearing glasses, but now I was having to wear them all the time. So, when I got out of the car headed into the license office, it was strange to her that I did not have my glasses with me. She asked me about it, and I told her that I didn't need them. That I could pass the vision test without them. And so together we walked into the license office WITHOUT my glasses. She went first. Paperwork completed. Questions answered. Vision test completed. Picture taken. Here is your new license. Then it was my turn. Paperwork completed. Questions answered. And now for the vision test. I put my head down into the little box and read the letters and numbers that showed up. I thought I was doing great as I responded to each question. After 4 or 5 questions, the lady administering the test stopped and paused, and then she asked a revealing question: "Sir, do you wear glasses?" I thought I was doing fine identifying those little, blurry squiggle marks as letters and numbers but her question told me the opposite. I had failed the test. And now I had to make the long walk of shame back to my car to get my glasses. Sigh.

Just as I tried to make sense of those little, blurry squiggle marks as letters and numbers, we try to see what God is up to in our lives and in the world. But like my near-sighted eyes betrayed me that day, our human insight betrays us. As people, and because of who God is in relation to us, we have a **very difficult time actually seeing God at work**. In tough times like these, it seems it is all the more difficult. Look around you and you can see the challenging circumstances. Loved ones waving through nursing home windows. Fathers not allowed to be at the bedside of their injured teenagers. Wives separated from their quarantined husbands.

In the midst of these trying times, we need assurance from God. We need something to help us see when we are blind to what he is doing in the world and in our lives. Just as I needed glasses physically, we need them, spiritually. In Romans 8:28-29, we find that **because of God's providential love we can trust him to do good work.**

Today we will be looking at two specific lenses through which we can learn to see what God is doing in the world and in our lives. Paul gives us these verses in order to help us to see.

First, we must trust the Worker in all things. Commentator Douglas Moo, points out that in Romans chapters 5-8, the grand theme Paul is highlighting for the Roman church is that the justified believer, the believer declared righteous in Christ, can be confident that they will experience final salvation because of what God DOES for them.

Do you see? There is work that must be done, therefore there must be a worker to accomplish it. But what does a worker use to complete their task? Tools. Instruments. Equipment. What God uses is listed here is "all things". I know that really doesn't narrow it down for you and me, but Paul doesn't want to narrow it down.

The beauty of this promise in Romans 8:28 is that Paul means for it to blow our minds. Think about this, God himself is not bound by anything, but he uses ALL THINGS to accomplish his work in his people. "All things" are tools for the work he is doing in those he loves. They are instruments for good is what it says here. But what does he mean here by "good"?

This is where we can get out of line very quickly. Remember, I told you that Romans 5-8 is meant to focus on the confidence that a believer can have in their final salvation. Well, in this particular section Paul is building the case that God is at work in "all things" to accomplish his good work in the lives of those he loves. But as humans we often have an expectation that it be what we want right now. And this is wrong. When we read this text and tell each other that all things work for good and think it means our personal comfort or business success or relational harmony or anything like that we are dangerously missing his point here!

Instead, we need to recognize Paul is talking in spiritual terms here. He is talking bigger here. The "good" he is talking about goes to the final salvation we have in Christ. THIS is what is truly good. We can find great delight in things of this world but those things in themselves are NOT an indicator of God's good work. In fact, for some this "good" Paul talks about here may not be visible until eternity. Paul is talking ultimate good, of finding one's deliverance in Christ, alone. Of being rescued from the power of sin and death. Of being healed and made whole as a new creation in Christ. This is very good! But we have to learn to see it that way.

The Puritans were a group of English Protestants who pushed against the Church of England in the 16th and 17th centuries. Their focus was on finding their footing in the Bible as the sole authority for dictating faith practice. They were known for their thoughtful prayer and meditations thoroughly steeped in Scripture. One collection of Puritan prayers is a book called *The Valley of Vision* edited by theologian Arthur Bennett. I want to read you a portion of the first prayer in the book to help us see for ourselves what “all things work for good” means. Here is part of that opening prayer:

Let me learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, that to have nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, that to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision.	Let me find thy light in my darkness, thy life in my death, thy joy in my sorrow, thy grace in my sin, thy riches in my poverty, thy glory in my valley.
--	---

The Puritans saw something. They had vision in the valley. They recognized God was using ALL THINGS—high and low places, beauty and brokenness, giving and receiving—to do good in them, even when their circumstances did not show it. We need vision like that, and we will only get it when we are able to trust the Worker in ALL THINGS.

In order to apply this to our lives, we need to stop trying to figure out what God is doing—especially in the hard times. We think if we can just figure out what he is trying to teach us, then our suffering will go away. What would it mean for us to simply trust him in the midst of the everyday “things” of our lives without trying to figure him out? Just look for him to work and see what he gives us along the way.

We have seen that **because of God’s providential love we can trust him to do good work**. One of the lenses through which we see him at work is when we trust him in ALL THINGS. There is another lens for us. And it is evident at the end of verse 28 through verse 29 when it says:

...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...

The second lens is that we must trust the Worker to accomplish his purpose. Notice that all things work together for good for those who love God—we get that—and for those who are called according to his purpose. What purpose? What is he talking about here?

We see in verse 29 that God's purpose for his people is both relational and transformational. Notice it says that those God foreknew—this is a relational word. It means that God knew his people before they knew him. This means God chose to love his people not because of what he knows they will accomplish or what they can do for him, but just simply because he chose to love them.

For instance, I loved both of my boys before they were born. And before I knew anything about them at all, I loved them. That is a remarkable thing in itself that love comes out like that to little babies from a father. But think of how much greater it is that knowing all there is to know about us, God chooses us anyways! He chooses us because he is love.

Now this purpose is not just relational it is also transformational. God not only loved his people before they knew him, he also decided beforehand to remake or renovate his people out of that love. The people of God are being conformed to the image of His Son—Jesus. The word “conform” here simply means God is making us “like” Christ. He has decided ahead of time he wanted the best for his people and the best for them was for them to become more like Christ. Not clones. Not robots. But actual people with actual personalities who become more and more similar to Jesus. The Worker's purpose is to make those he loves like Jesus.

Home renovation shows are some of my favorite reality shows. It is fun to see the drastic changes that take place in a home to really make it right. In fact, many times the most drastic remodels are what is needed to get the house looking that way it ought to be. CS Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity*, describes the purposeful work of God in our lives.

“Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house **from the one you thought of** - throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.” This is what happens when love and decision meet in our lives, God has a purpose for us that is all about making us like Christ.

Romans 8:28-29 is a comforting text for us as Christians. It gives us lenses to see we can trust God in ALL THINGS because he is PURPOSEFULLY WORKING to make us more like Jesus. He went all the way to the cross for you. He came all the way back from the grave for

you. This is how much he loves you. **And because of that love we can trust him to do good work.** Let's pray together.