

“Destination Glory”

Romans 8:1-39, Revelation 21:3-4 & 22:1-5

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Prayer for Understanding Almighty God your word is a fountain of truth, a wellspring of love and living water for our souls. Helps us to drink deeply of your living, quenching word. Amen

The Apostle Paul tries to explain why suffering exists when God is pure grace and all powerful. Last week in Romans 6 and 7, Paul explained that when we are at the end of our rope, freedom grows from being honest about the mess of our life and accepting God’s grace to bridge every gap making us whole. Paul explained God is carrying us from a miserable life to life saving resurrection, from the country of sin to the country of grace, from old tyranny to the freedom of God.

In Romans 8, Paul explains that bad things happen and ultimately all will be glorious, life is messy and nothing can ever separate us from God’s love, we are not in control and our love expands forever, all of creation is painfully constrained and will be set free to enjoy grand harmonious adventures.

The Apostle Paul wrote: **Romans 8:1-39 MSG With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ’s being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death. God went for the jugular when God sent Jesus. God did not deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In Jesus, God personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that. The law always ended up being used as a Band-Aid on sin instead of a deep healing of sin. And now what the law code asked for but we could not deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us. Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God’s action in them find that God’s Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what God is doing. And God is not pleased at being ignored. But if God has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of God. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won’t know what we are talking about. But for you who welcome God, in whom God dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God’s terms. It stands to reason, does it not, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, God will do the same thing in you that God did in Jesus, bringing you alive to God? When God lives and breathes in you (and God does, as surely as God did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With God’s Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ’s! So do not you see that we do not owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There is nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. God’s Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go! This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It is adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike “What’s next?” God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who God is, and we know who we are: Parent and children. And we know we are going to get what is coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with God, then we are certainly going to go through the good times with God! That is why I do not think there is any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. The created world itself can hardly wait for what is coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens. All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult**

times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it is not only around us; it is within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We are also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, do not see what is enlarging us. But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy. Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we do not know how or what to pray, it does not matter. The Holy Spirit does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. God knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. That is why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. God knew what God was doing from the very beginning. God decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love along the same lines as the life of Jesus. Christ stands first in the line of humanity God restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in Jesus. After God made that decision of what God's children should be like, God followed it up by calling people by name. After God called them by name, God set them on a solid basis with God. And then, after getting them established, God stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what God had begun. So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God did not hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing self to the worst by sending Jesus, is there anything else God would not gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture: They kill us in cold blood because they hate you. We are sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one. None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I am absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us."

A famous verse is embedded in today's Scripture reading. It is often quoted in response to that troublesome question of why bad things happen. It goes like this: **Romans 8:28** "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose".

Pastor, Professor, Biblical Scholar and author Carl Wilton writes: "On first hearing those words, you may think this is a promise of good luck bestowed on those who believe in God. It does say, "all things work together for good." Is not Paul saying, if you believe, then you will have good luck and a suffering free life? It is an appealing thought, is it not? And it probably explains why this verse, or at least the first half of it, has made it onto a huge assortment of bumper stickers, T-shirts and coffee mugs. But Paul is not saying that at all! "All things work together for good ..." does not mean only good things will ever happen to you. The key to the meaning of that promise lies in what follows: "... who are called according to God's purpose." God does have a purpose for the world, a purpose much bigger than any individual person. We are all part of that divine purpose together, not separately. It surrounds us. It is the universe we inhabit, the air we breathe and the life we live."

Pastor Leslie Weatherhead encourages us to "think of God's purpose like a great river, rushing to the immortal sea. Within that river are scattered bits of debris. Logs and branches float and spin upon the surface. Rocks and pebbles are borne along beneath, scouring the stream bed, bumping up against each other, and sometimes causing damage. Does God, who made the river and charts its course, manipulate every bit of floating wreckage and jetsam? And do the random collisions of those pieces of debris make the least difference to the river's larger purpose? Of course they do not. Within the great plan, things happen that we can only explain as accidents. They cause us no end of consternation and make us wonder why God delivers such afflictions upon us. But, in the larger view, they are part of a greater movement for good."

When random tragedy happens. Is the suffering part of God's plan for someone's life? No God is pure grace, joy, and love. God only puts goodness into our lives and the cosmos. God is orchestrating a human river flowing to a realm of eternal pure glory. And the people in the river at times randomly, violently collide causing suffering; and, they are still on the journey to glory. Our poor choices sometimes cause suffering for ourselves and sometimes others. And often, suffering is sheer randomness, some obstacle in the river impaling an

individual or an entire group of people. We are all on a journey to perfect eternal life and much of life is random, chance, haphazard. Love gives free will. God does not manipulate the chaos raging in the river. God is guiding the river to complete goodness.

In the midst of suffering, sometimes it is tempting to blame God or think God has abandoned you or feel that God does not care or lament “what ifs” or wrestle with “if onlys”. Jesus promised to never abandon anyone. Paul emphatically proclaims God cares, for nothing can separate us from God’s love. As you process our suffering, grief, and laments, hold onto God’s promise of resurrection, the promise that all that is lost will be enjoyed again in heaven, the promise that every form of death is a portal to complete everlasting life. As you wrestle, keep our ultimate destination of glory in mind.

Some seasons a storm is raging, the river flooded, and all sorts of debris are harming us; and the river is still on course to destination glory. God is with us and God is awaiting us eager to welcome us home. Peter was a mess, beating himself up for his denials of Jesus, agonizing, why did Jesus need to die to get to resurrection life, distraught by the indifference, fear, hate, and violence that crucified Jesus, confused as to what to do next. The resurrected Jesus greeted Peter. Perhaps as Peter stepped out of the boat he thought he could walk on water. Instead, Peter got soaked, had to strain against the water and a wave violently faced planted Peter on the shore, where Jesus helped Peter up. Together, they enjoyed breakfast. Peter received from Jesus forgiveness, healing, and a purpose to tell others that they will make it through every ordeal to glory.

Carl explains: God cares completely and God’s love is committed to freedom. Freedom comes at a price and that price is accidents. Most of these accidents are random but none of them will stop the main purpose, the ultimate destination of glory. Bad things happen. But here is the good news: pain, heartache and suffering are not the last word. The great river of God’s purpose flows onward to the immortal sea. Like it or not, we are carried along with the river of grace. At times, our progress is slow and languid, a peaceful paddle on a meandering stream. Other times, it has all the excitement and terror of a whitewater rafting expedition. Other times it is flooded suffering filled chaos. Always the river of grace carries us. We cannot predict the rivers route, nor can we declare what obstacles we will encounter along the way. The only certainty is that God will bring us to our glorious destination. When we do finally emerge from the waters, wet or dry, exhausted or exhilarated, bedraggled, bewildered or bemused, we have a promise. The promise is God, all of our joys, all of our loves, glorious beyond our grandest dreams await us. All people will be reunited in vibrant harmony. Love will permeate all. Joy will fill us with laughter. Peace will embrace us. The words of Revelation will ring true.

Revelation 21:3-4 and 22:1-5 Select phrases “See! God has moved into the neighborhood, making God’s home with mortals! We are God’s people. God is our God. God dwells with us. God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be gone for good, tears gone, crying gone, pain gone. See! God is making everything new. Then the angel showed me a river with the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. The river flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. We will see God’s face. There will be no night there, no need for lamps or sun, for God will shine on us. And we will reign forever and ever.” Amen

