

“The GOAT”
Romans 8:28
May 3rd, 2020

When the sole survivor of a shipwreck reached a small, uninhabited island, he prayed for God to rescue him, but time passed...and help didn't come.

Eventually the man built a hut out of driftwood for protection from the elements. One day he returned from scavenging for food and found his hut burning, the smoke rising into the sky. Angrily he cried, "God, how could You do this to me?"

The next morning he was awakened by rescuers. "How did you know I was here?" he asked. They replied, "We saw your smoke signal."

For the past two Sunday evenings, I've watched the first four hour-long segments of a 10 segment documentary airing on ESPN called "The Last Dance." If you're not a basketball fan, you may be unfamiliar. The title refers to the Chicago Bulls National Basketball Association team of the 1990's. The Bulls were a dynasty then – winning 6 NBA championships in 8 seasons. They may have won 8 consecutive championships if Michael Jordan didn't step away from basketball to try his hand at Minor League baseball.

"The Last Dance" was the players' and coaching staff's last season together, 1997-1998.

In the opinion of many basketball analysts, Michael Jordan is the GOAT. GOAT is an acronym for Greatest of All Time. Michael Jordan was an amazing basketball talent with extremely high goals and unbelievable self-control and discipline.

The GOAT is also the name of this message, though it's not about basketball, or even sports. The GOAT, in this message, refers to the Greatest of All Texts – as in Bible texts!

We continue today our Sunday morning sermon series on the New Testament book of Romans, a study I've entitled, *Christianity Explored*. Before us today is the most well known verse in the 8th Chapter of Romans. Further, it's usually one of the top 4 or 5 verses in the entire Bible. *That verse? Romans 8:28. Do you remember it?* "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose." The GOAT!

A couple of years ago, Seminary Professor and author Derek Thomas wrote a book on **Romans Chapter 8** that he titled, *How the Gospel Brings us All the Way Home*. In it he writes:

"No chapter of Scripture reaches the same sustained levels or covers the same ground as Romans 8. It is a description of the Christian life from death to life, from justification to glorification, from trial and suffering to the peace and tranquility of the new heaven and new earth. It contains exhortations to persevere as well as reassurances of God's preservation of His people. And no chapter has been cited

more than this one in expounding the application of redemption in the life of an individual. In short, Romans 8 gives us a picture of salvation in its completeness.”

Of **Romans 8:28** in particular he notes, “Nothing can blow you over when you are inside the walls of **Romans 8:28**. Outside of **Romans 8:28** all is confusion and anxiety and fear and uncertainty”.

Dear ones, we are standing on holy ground – **Romans 8:28** is packed with encouragement for the believer in Jesus Christ. Thank God for this incredible verse!

Romans 8:26-28:

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

²⁷ Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*.

²⁸ And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His purpose*.”

We’ll look at 4 words or phrases as we examine this wonderful 28th verse more closely.

MP1 – “know”

MP2 – “all things work together for good”

MP3 – “those who love God (the called)”

MP4 - “according to His purpose”

Let’s begin with “Know.” Paul says that he and the Church in Rome (the “we”) know. We read verses 26 & 27. Look again at the beginning of verse 26 – “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we...***do not know*** what we should pray for!” In just two verses, Paul goes from mentioning ‘not knowing’ to ‘knowing.’ We do not know the details of what God is doing in our lives; we don’t understand such things. But, we do know God’s great plan itself. We know that God has a plan for us.

This is another of the top 10 verses in the Bible – **Jeremiah 29:11** – *Do you know it?* Some of you have told me this is your favorite verse: “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

God’s plan for His redeemed includes bringing us life to what was previously dead; for giving us a heart of flesh in place of the heart of stone with which we were born. His plan included taking our sin upon Himself and suffering its terrible punishment in our place. And, in place of the life of sin, He gave us His righteous life instead. What an amazing plan!!

We now look at the phrase “all things work together for good.” It should be evident that “mere ‘things’ do not work together (for good or ill).” (Morris, 330)

“All things” includes not only the good, but it also includes the bad (according to our perspective). This would mean that prosperity works for our good, but so also does adversity work for our good. Joy and happiness work for our good, just as do suffering and sadness. In all of these things, their ultimate purpose is a good purpose.

Jacob’s son, Joseph, is perhaps the best biblical illustration of this. Joseph’s brothers were very jealous of him. When they were young, he told them his dreams. Joseph told his brothers that their sheaves bowed down to his sheaf. He also told them that the sun, moon, and 11 stars had bowed down before his star.

The brothers were incensed; they conspired against Joseph. They plotted his death, sold him into the hands of the Midianites, and the Midianites took him to Egypt. There the lusty pursuits of Potiphar’s wife resulted in Joseph being jailed for several years.

Joseph eventually was released from jail, exalted to the position as governor of Egypt in charge of all the land. He was second in command only to Pharaoh. A famine hit the land of Joseph’s family, and they came to Egypt in search of food. By God’s providence, they unknowingly sought relief for the famine from their brother whom they had sold off to raiders years previously.

After revealing himself to them, their father, Jacob, made the trip to see the son he thought he had lost many years previous. What a reunion that was!

Sometime later, after Jacob died, Joseph’s brothers became afraid that Joseph might take revenge on them for the hardships they placed on him early in life. And, another of the great Scripture passages is **Genesis 50:19-21** – “Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God?’ But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about, as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.”

There is no doubt that God is working this current worldwide pandemic into great good for His people. Some of those who have lost their lives possessed saving faith in Jesus Christ – the Bible says that for the Christian, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (**2 Corinthians 5:6**). The outcome couldn’t be any better than that for any of God’s children. Other people have been healed, and they are now largely protected from the virus. The existence of such terrible things as COVID-19 ought to cause the believer in Christ to examine our life, and see where we fall short of God’s Word. It should cause us to make sure our own spiritual house is in order, not just for will and testament purposes, but also for after the pandemic subsides. May we never miss out on the plan God has for us in struggling through our difficult circumstances!

Next, we’ll examine “those who love God (the called).” Romans 8:28 clearly does not apply to everyone. It is specific in its application to those “who love God.” Those who hate God on the other hand cannot claim this verse or the hope/biblical sense it offers. Those who are indifferent toward God cannot claim it, either. Indifference toward another isn’t love; rather indifference is apathy - it’s irrational!

There's a man I have helped on occasion by purchasing things he needs. One time, he asked if I could get him something to eat from a fast food restaurant. When I asked him what he wanted, he replied, "I don't care." I just about went ballistic. *"You don't care? You cared which restaurant you want me to go to for you. Doesn't it also follow you want something in particular? I'm sure you care if you have beets or not! Make a decision, man!"*

No, not everyone can claim **Romans 8:28** applies, regardless of their relationship to Jesus Christ. It is not universal in its scope. It is for the saved in Christ only, not the unsaved. Only those who love God can expect He is working out all things for their good! That means, if you're a Christian, you have an incredibly glorious verse to cling to! If you're not presently a Christian, you probably don't care about this verse. But, you had better care. Your death could take place with little or no notice. It did for Glen this past week; but I'm convinced he was ready to see the Lord.

There are two types of calls the Bible speaks of. One of them is an external call, and the other is an internal call. Theologians call the internal kind of call an 'effectual call.' When God's Spirit calls people to Himself, people come. When God's spirit calls, things happen. *Remember how God brought all things into existence in the first two chapters of Genesis?* He spoke them into existence when there was nothing at all! Good, biblical preaching often calls on unbelievers to come to Jesus. This is an external call! Unbelievers are urged to turn from their sin and to Jesus. But, that is not an effective call unless the person responds to it in faith.

Regarding "the called," "we mean those who have been summoned not only outwardly, but also inwardly by the Spirit, who changes the disposition of their hearts and effects the transformation of their souls – the resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life." (Sproul, 281)

So, here it is friends. If you haven't yet accepted your life has been a tar pit of sin against a holy God, then you must do something about that. If you die in that state of sin, upon your death your next life will be spent in the torments of hell. If you have not yet turned away from your sinful life, forsaken your sins, and sought the forgiveness of God Almighty, then you must do so today. Throw yourself on the mercy of God and plead with Him to include you among the body of people worldwide "who love God and are called according to His purpose."

Finally the verse ends with the phrase "according to His purpose." This refers to God's purpose, which means God's saving purpose. *Why did Jesus come to earth from heaven?* The gospel accounts reveal Him to be God's Messiah – He came to earth to lie, die, and be raised again for our justification. The angel of God speaking to Joseph in **Matthew 1:21** instructed Joseph that he would name his Son, "Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins."

God doesn't call us to Himself and His people for no reason, or even because He loves us. He calls us out of a life of sin and misery to give us the certain hope that this life is not all there is. Jesus came to earth not to merely give you a choice, but to secure for eternity God's choice for you. Let that sink in dear ones, as we make sense of this pandemic, of death and dying, and of the presence of evil in and around us.

As hard as the last couple months have been, you'd have to agree that the American Civil War was the toughest 4 years of our nation's existence. More than 600,000 Americans died during the Civil War – which includes both sides of that war.

Shortly after the outbreak of armed conflict on this very day, May 3rd, 1861, the Southern Congress approved Bill 102 stating, "There shall be appointed by the President chaplains to serve the armies of the Confederate States during the existing war." Of course, there were also chaplains serving among the Federal armies.

But, did you know that between 100,000 and 200,000 Union soldiers and approximately 150,000 Southern troops were converted during the Civil War? It would appear, at least from the observation point of 155 years after the Civil War ended, that God's purpose for that conflict included saving many souls who would perish at the hand of fellow Americans. The Holy Spirit had brought about a revival in both sides of the conflict through the adversity of war between brothers.

Romans 8:28 is irrefutable proof that God does bring great good out of even disastrous devastation. God will not abandon us at any time! He is with us to the very end of the age. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose."