

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Romans 8:26-39

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes[a] with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷ And God,[b] who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit[c] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.[d]

²⁸ We know that all things work together for good[e] for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ 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 within a large family.[f] ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.[g] ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ 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.

Today we find ourselves wandering in the book of Romans, which can be one of the most difficult of Paul's writings to understand. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Rome to introduce himself and to give a sample of his message before he arrived in Rome. He had never been there before, but he heard many things about the church. The church was probably started by Jews who were present on the day of Pentecost and became believers in Christ. They had spread the gospel on their return to Rome, and the church had grown. The church was primarily made up of Jews, but Gentiles were joining and becoming greater in number in the church.

In the opening of his letter, Paul presents to facts of the gospel and declares his commitment to it. He continues by building an airtight case for the lostness of humanity and the necessity for God's intervention. After this introduction he begins to break things down into smaller bites of the truth of the gospel for them to digest, proclaiming up front that the gift of salvation is available to everyone, regardless of a person's identity, sin, or history. He proclaims that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ and his finished work.

With this brief introduction to Romans, let's jump back now to chapter 8. The discussion taking place in his writing moving from Chapter seven to eight is about this inner battle that we deal with—as he did too—between knowing what is right and wanting to follow God's commands and our failure to be able to do so. When we stop and reflect on our relationship with God, we become painfully aware of our sin.

Then we read at the beginning of chapter 8, I'm reading from Eugene Petersen's translation, the Message, "*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.

3-4 God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all.

(5-8) 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 he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.”

By the time we reach verse 26 in chapter 8, Paul has made it clear that we need help with our walk of faithfulness to God, and he made the case that God has provided the help we need.

He gets down to the nitty-gritty, the very thing that gets us into trouble as we try to be faithful, the problems that arise in our lives. Paul tells us that as a believer we are not left to our own resources to cope with our problems. We have help even when we can't find the words or can't find the where-with-all to pray, when issues, difficult circumstances, pain, and when the grim questions of “why?” arise in our lives.

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us and offers our prayers to God. The Spirit prays with us and for us, taking our emotions, our deepest groans, our heartfelt longings, and questions to God. Knowing that we have the Spirit helping us to pray, we then should trust God to answer our prayers. That means releasing our desired outcome and allowing God to work out his plan for good.

As God works out his plan for good, one thing we need to keep in mind is that this doesn't mean we are going to get all our prayers answered the way we want them to be answered. Some people interpret verse 28, which again says: “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,*” ...that if we are believers only good will be happen in our lives.

The scripture states clearly that God works **in all things**—not just isolated incidents—for good. Let's remember also that evil is alive in our world, stepping into our lives and messing with our experiences and thoughts in life. God recognizes this and so he takes this into consideration too, as he works out the bigger picture of his plan for us. What may seem to be God's failure to answer our prayers—meaning we expect him to answer them the way we want them answered—is actually God working to take something bad that happens in our lives and turning that circumstance around for our long-range good.

When she was thirteen, Lauren Blakemore was diagnosed with a rare form of neuroectodermal cancer, in which tumors invade bones and often lead to amputation. She had fourteen rounds of chemotherapy and twenty-five radiation treatments.

Throughout her battle, Lauren was comforted with a multicolored quilt that a neighbor, Mildred, had made for Lauren when she was a baby. Lauren snuggled snuggled with this “Miss

Mildred” blanket through childhood and then through the nausea, fatigue, and sleepless nights that came with battling cancer.

After Lauren’s dad visited a children’s cancer ward in India, he returned home to tell her about the kids. Immediately Lauren began to raise money by speaking at Rotary club meetings and schools. She wanted every child to have a Miss Mildred blanket because “chemotherapy makes you cold all the time,” she said.

Thanks to women in Bosnia working at Peace Crafts, a cottage industry started by Southeast missionaries, whom Lauren asked to make the blankets, each child’s bed in the cancer ward is now warmed by a Miss Mildred blanket.

“When I was first diagnosed with cancer, I knew God had a plan for my life,” Lauren said. “This is part of that plan.”

Not everyone can find the assurances of the promises of God that he works things for good as he did in Lauren’s life. Paul said that this promise is not for everybody. It can be claimed only by those who have accepted the Spirit’s invitation, or call, to love God and to allow Christ to rule in their lives. Those who have not done so, are more focused on themselves than God and God’s help, which if you remember me mentioning, Paul spoke of earlier in Romans. But those who have received Christ have a different and new mind-set, a new perspective on life. They trust in God and not life’s wants and treasures. They look for their security in heaven, not on earth, they learn to accept, not resent, pain and persecution because they know God is with them.

When we get to verse 29, we come to that word, “predestined” which often gets misinterpreted. It has always been God’s goal for all of humanity to become Christ like—that’s the predestined meaning of this text. It doesn’t mean that God has the path for our lives laid out for us before we do or say anything and that we have no choice in the direction our lives would go. No, God’s plan from the start was for us to be more Christlike, and God’s plan includes helping us to become that way. As we become more and more like Christ, we discover our true selves, the persons God created us to be.

For those who have chosen to believe in Christ; and to serve and honor God with their lives, we can rejoice that God has always known us and knows what we face each day. He knows our needs and works things out, by looking at the big picture, and in the end moving us towards good in our lives in this lifetime and the next.

So, as Paul said, “*If God is for us,*” which is the point he just made, then, “*who can be against us?*” If God were willing to suffer the agony of giving his only Son as a sacrifice for our salvation, then why would he ever turn his back on us and our needs to live for him. God doesn’t, but people do turn their backs on him and the good he has in mind for their lives.

The final verses in chapter 8 contain the most comforting promises in all of scripture. “*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am 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 else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” For most assuredly we will face hardships, just as Christians always have, and we may feel abandoned by Christ in the midst of those hardships. But the apostle Paul exclaims that it is impossible to be separated from Christ. His death for us is proof of his unconquerable love. Nothing can stop Christ’s constant presence with us. God tells us how great his love is so that we will feel totally secure in him. If we believe these overwhelming assurances, we will not be afraid of whatever comes our way.

Northwest Airlines flight 225 crashed just after takeoff from Denver on August 16, 1987, killing 155 people. Only one person survived, Cecelia, four years old of Tempe, Arizona.

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When rescuers found Cecilia, they did not believe she had been on the plane. They thought she had been a passenger in one of the cars on the highway onto which the airliner crashed. But when the passenger list was checked, there was Cecilia's name.

Cecilia survived because, as the plane was falling, Cecilia's mother, Paula Chican, unbuckled her seat belt, got on her knees in front of her daughter, wrapped her arms and body around Cecilia, and would not let her go. Nothing could separate that child from her mother's love – neither tragedy, nor fall, not the flames that followed.

Such is the love of our Savior for us. He left heaven, lowered himself to us, and covered us with the sacrifice of his own body to save us.

So, should adversities and sufferings come your way and you feel abandoned, fall back onto these promises that with the Spirit's help God hears you even your deepest groans as prayers, the Spirit has invited you to believe and be one with Christ, that God works all things out for good for the bigger picture, not just the immediate moment, and there is nothing, absolutely NOTHING that can separate you from the love of God. Amen.