

Sermon Text for August 27, 2017

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Judges 16:15-22, Romans 8:28

“What good can come of that?”

What a great morning to come to church. We hear this morning one of the greatest promises in all of Scripture. I know many of you know it by heart and treasure it and pull it out when you need it most. But let's set it in its context. We've heard two promises by Paul related to suffering and specifically how can Christians deal with suffering differently than those who do not love Christ. We heard first of all because we recognize that what we go through now is nothing compared to the glory that is ahead. Last week we heard the promise that even in the midst of our suffering, when we are too tired, too beat up, too disoriented, too out of it and weary to pray, guess what? We have a witness, the Holy Spirit who intervenes and prays on our behalf, what a great promise.

Today we hear the third promise, the third reason why Christians can face suffering in a different perspective, and for me it is the most reassuring promise in all of Scripture. Paul tells us, and we can't hear it too many times, he tells us that all things work together for those who love God. But let's be real, each one of us has been through times, we are going through them now when we have looked at this verse and said, what good can come of that. There is a certain tension with this amazing promise which must give us pause and caution to use it too freely or glibly. Because for some of us it is a blessing, while if we use it in the wrong context, for other, it can be a curse. Let's look at our Scripture for today.

READ SCRIPTURE

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purposes. What a great, great promise of Scripture. This great promise of Scripture contains within it the greatest commandment in all of Scripture. Remember when Jesus was asked by those trying to test him what is the greatest commandment and he states, love the Lord your God, also love your neighbor? But do you see what Paul has done here? If you obey the greatest commandment, you receive the greatest promise. All things work together for good, for whom? For those who love the Lord. This is absolutely crucial to understanding this text because it is not a universal

claim, but speaks to how we as Christians are able to specifically deal with our suffering differently from those who do not love the Lord.

There are two things that I want you to notice about this text. First is the stark honesty of Paul. This is not some Pollyanna unwillingness to admit evil even when it slaps us in the face. Paul does not say everything is good, no matter what happens, it is good to those who love God. Or, only good things happen to those who are Christians. Those of us who have a few grey hairs know it better than others. Those of us who have no hair perhaps know it better than any of us, but some of us who are little younger have already discovered that is a truth of life. Whether you are a Christian or not, life can be tough. We have all learned that life is fair, sooner or later it breaks everyone's heart. Not everything is good that happens to those who love God.

I will never forget the funeral that I went to for a little 3 year old girl who had drowned in her neighbors pool while playing. I didn't perform the funeral, I just knew some of the family. The speaker got up to deliver the eulogy said something along the lines – don't worry about this because we know that this accident was God's will. I got to tell you, I don't know what he was trying to do, I'm sure he thought he was trying to bring comfort, but that did not bring comfort to that moment. When you have a sanctuary full of young families and young adults who are mourning the death of a friend's child and they hear that God intended that to happen, that was part of His great plan for that kid, find me another God. That's not a great encouragement. That's not trying to build up young families. Horrible things happen, we are in a sinful world and in a sinful world horrible things happen.

A grandchild born with so many birth defects that you are unsure of it will survive another day, is that what God wants? You've just discovered that your wife is having an affair with another man, is that part of God's plan for you? Your child is caught in a web of drug-addiction and there is apparently no way out, is that God's good plan for you? Only a fiend would see these things as good, they are not. Rather you are left with the question, what good can come of that? They are bad, they are horribly bad in some cases, but that is not what this text says, it does not say only good things are going to happen to those who love God. No it says that all things will work together for good for those who love God.

The wonderful promise is that God can and does take very single experience of your life, the good ones and the horrible ones too and weaves them together. Today with the marriage of Jack and Amy is a perfect example of that. Ask them about their witness and how being baptized has changed their lives and how God has used this church and their life experiences to bring us to where we are today. He weaves these pieces together in to a whole which God then can pronounce good, that is the second thing about this text that I want you to keep in mind after honesty.

When God says something is good, that's a big deal to God. That's not a word that God tosses around lightly. Think back to Genesis and the creation accounts, when God created the earth and the waters, the dry lands, and the sun and the moon and the stars, when God created the vegetation and the animals and when God created us, man and woman what was the word that he used to describe the creation? He said it is good, and for some he even said it is very good, in fact I did some really good work, I did alright today, I think I'm going to take a break after that one.

God doesn't just cause all things to work out okay. God doesn't just smooth things out God causes all things to work together for good, for those who love him and are called according to his purposes. Again, what a great promise. The Bible has so many Scriptures that are an example of this Scripture. What is the greatest example in the Old Testament where God is able to take a tragic, horrible situation and weave it together to make it come out for the good.

We spent some time on this in Genesis a couple of years ago, that's right Joseph. Remember Joseph, that 17 year old dreamer who was one of the youngest of the family and his father loved him so much that he even had a long-sleeve coat that his dad gave him. He had a dream that his brothers and even his father and mother would bow down to him and then he can't figure out why his brothers hated him. Well, they sold him into slavery, that was bad, very bad. But he was bought by Potiphar who was the master of Pharaoh's guard and he was trusted and given responsibility. That is good. But one day while Potiphar is out on his hobby cat in the Nile his highly hormoned wife takes a liking to Joseph and she catches him and he runs away naked. He is caught thrown into prison for the rest of his life. That is bad. But he is so reliable he is made the one who runs the prison that is good and he meets a butler and a baker who have him interpret their dreams on the grounds that if they make it back up they will remember him to Pharaoh. One

makes it another doesn't but the one who makes it forget him. That is bad, but then finally he remembers him and after time Joseph is given the keys to the kingdom that not only saves his life but the life of his family and the life of the people of Israel and the covenant with God goes on.

Isn't that just amazing how God is able to assure us that all things work together for good for those who trust in him, even in the situation of Joseph. If you were to take those individual chapters, as we did, you would think what in the world, what good can come of that, but when you take them as a whole you have a moment of clarity, of understanding of what Paul is saying in these verses.

How about in the New Testament, do we have a story of how God uses our difficult situation? How about Jesus? There has never been a situation more evil and cruel than the beating, the whipping, the mocking, the torture, the crucifixion of our savior Jesus Christ. You can see the scene of the disciples and the women at the foot of the cross, and there is his very mother, Mary, watching the whole scene, can you imagine what Mary would have felt if John, the beloved disciple who was just given charge of her were to come up to her and say, don't worry, this is all going to work out for the good, you wait and see, God's in control. There would not have been much solace there. And yet God took the most evil moment in history and recreated it into the greatest art of redemptive love that the world has ever known.

All things work together for good for those who love the Lord. Let me give you a word of caution about this Scripture and this promise. If you plan on using it to help others in the midst of their suffering, this is not a promise that should be shared too recklessly or glibly. The young Christian couple who have lost their baby, if you whip out Romans 8:28, don't worry all things are going to work out for the good because hey, you love God, you are not going to be a blessing to them at that moment, in fact that verse will be a cursing. To the grandparents of that baby they will probably not love you for sharing that with them, in fact they may hate you for doing it. It takes a sensitivity to God's spirit and discretion and wisdom to know how to share this time with someone who is grieving. The promise of the text needs to be discovered gently and quietly and personally. If you beat a suffering soul over the head with this text, it may not be very helpful, it will be a curse. Sharing it gently and tenderly, sensitively maybe after the family has already started to put their lives back together again, months, years later, when

the Holy Spirit tells you, that is the way that you can use this promise in the lives of those who are hurting.

There is one more way that's even more powerful and that is for you to use it for yourself in your own life. This promise is one that every Christian ought to store up in their heart since they are a kid for the time of crisis in their life. So that they are ready to pull it out at a moment's notice. It is the sort of truth that you ought to have in your spiritual arsenal so that when you find yourself in crisis or suffering you'll remember it then. It won't have to be brought to you by someone who may end up being a cursing to you because you are not ready to receive it.

But if you have steeped your soul in the truth of this passage then when you face a crisis of life, you're are going to face it a different way. We know right now that God causes all things to work together for those who love him and are called according to his purposes, put it in your heart right now, and if it had been there and if it had been marinating in your heart how do you think you would have dealt with the job that you lost, or with the marriage that is disintegrating around you. God is working for good, he is not done with you yet, or with the situation. How would it affect the way that you would respond to a biopsy that was not what you expected it to be.

If I love God more than everything in my life, the good choices and the bad, the holy moments and my moments of deepest sin, the most joyous moments of my life and the moments of darkest tragedy, every single thing in my life, God is working to use to weave together in my life a work of exquisite beauty upon which he will pronounce the word, that is good, that is good.

It is one of the greatest promises you will ever draw from Scripture and if you don't have anything else in Romans memorized I would encourage you to take this one home, steep your soul in it. It will change your life. We know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who live him and are called according to his purposes. Amen.