

**Text: Romans 8:28-32**

**Theme: PROMISED... PREDESTINED... and PARDONED**

**Date: July 20, 2008 (Pentecost 10)**

Dear Friends in Christ,

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven" – I've always liked the opening phrase of the hymn we just sang. These three memorable and catchy words describe what we are: "Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven". These three memorable and catchy words convey the essence of the Gospel message.

In Our text for today we hear once again one of the better known, frequently quoted and most comforting passages in the Bible. Our text for today also suggests another triad of words that beautifully and accurately describe us as Christian people. Today let us rejoice in the fact that, as the people of God, we are: **PROMISED... PREDESTINED... and PARDONED.**

### **1. Promised People of God**

In the first verse of our text God assures us that we are a promised people. **AND WE KNOW THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.** Simply put this is God's promise: Everything that he allows or sends into our lives is somehow, some way for our highest good. This is a marvelous and comforting statement that God makes to us here, and we can only imagine how many Christians throughout the centuries have clung tightly to this glorious truth in the midst of their personal pain and adversity.

But it is a truth – if we are honest – that is at times hard to believe. For instance, for the Christian standing at the freshly dug grave of a loved one who, in the eyes of the world "died before their time," it may be hard to process how this is for their highest good....For the Christian who has just been informed that he or she has cancer or an inoperable terminal disease, and who may be leaving a family behind – it may be hard to process how this is for their highest good.... For those whose lives have suddenly been shattered by a tragedy or the loss of a job or a serious financial setback that they don't know can ever be reversed – it may be hard to process how this is for their highest good....For the parent about to send their child into surgery or someone standing outside the ashes of their burned-down home – it may be hard to process how this is for the highest good. We could cite any number of other examples, but I think you get the picture.

Nevertheless and regardless of how we might perceive the things that come into our lives, of this truth we are assured: **IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.** This is God's promise to us. A promise, to be sure, that we sometimes have difficulty in apprehending and understanding in light of our present reality, but a promise of God nonetheless. And when God gives us his Word, we know it is ironclad and rock-solid in its reliability.

The reason we can and do believe this promise of God is because of who and what God has made to be. Listen again to the rest of the passage: **IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.** We have been called by God according to his purpose for us; (meaning: God in His grace has called us to believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior). And why has God called us? What is God's ultimate purpose for us? It is this: that we might live with him forever in heaven. With that being the case, we know there are no "accidents" in our history, and that, again, no matter how we may momentarily perceive things, God is orchestrating things in our lives according to the big picture of having us in heaven with Him. The Psalmist also writes, *"All the days ordained for me were written in your Book before one of them came to be."*

Perhaps we can expand on this Biblical truth with an illustration. It might be helpful for us to remember the difference between God and us and how we view time. Because God is eternal, he sees things from the perspective of eternity. Like a map, everything about our lives (start, finish, and everything in between) is laid out before him. On the other hand, we see our lives from the perspective of time unfolding. In other words, we see our lives like a book with each day or year or experience being another chapter, and we never know for sure what the next chapter will bring. Not only has God already read the entire book, he wrote it.

In our text for today, God assures us of what the last chapter of our lives will be. It will be eternity with him. And therefore he tells us we can be confident that all the other chapters of our lives which lead up to that – be they periods of triumph or tragedy, highs or lows – somehow contribute to forming the ultimate plot he has for each of us: heaven. And so, the difficulties that we would not choose may have been chosen for us to keep us close to him. The tragedies that we hoped we could always avoid may come into our lives to keep us focused on the eternal rather than the temporal. The sadness we may have to experience on earth reminds us by contrast of the joy that will be ours in heaven. And the accomplishments and achievements God allows us on earth serve only to accentuate an amazing grace to us that will reach its full fruition in eternity.

We are a promised people and this is the promise: **IN ALL THINGS GOD WORKS FOR THE GOOD OF THOSE WHO LOVE HIM, WHO HAVE BEEN CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.** As we continue to read in our text, God teaches us that we are a promised people because we are a predestined people. God says, **FOR THOSE GOD FOREKNEW HE ALSO PREDESTINED TO BE CONFORMED TO THE LIKENESS OF HIS SON, THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BROTHERS.**

## 2. Predestined People of God

This passage takes us right into the heart of one of the deeper teachings of the Bible – the doctrine of "election" or "predestination." But even though it may be one of the more difficult teachings of the Bible for our human reason to understand, I would agree with Martin Luther who said we often make it a lot harder than it is.

Both the idea that God foreknew us as well as the idea that God predestined us essentially means the same thing. Both words tell us that from eternity – well before we as individuals ever came into being as people who live in time and space – God chose us to be his own. Not only did he choose us to be his own, he chose us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son. What does that mean? It means he has chosen us to be like His Son – meaning, the perfect righteousness, holiness and sinlessness of Jesus Christ as seen in perfect His life, death and resurrection is transferred over and applied to each of us (imperfect sinners though we be) who trust in Him as our Savior. We have this spiritual likeness now, but in heaven we will also be conformed to his physical likeness as we take on our glorified, resurrection bodies.

So... looking over the verse, this is what we are told: From eternity God chose to bring us in the true faith and preserve us in that true faith up until it reaches its conclusion in everlasting life where we will be with Jesus and like Jesus. And so, while we think of our coming to faith as taking place in time – at our baptism as infants or our conversion as adults – in reality our coming to faith took place from eternity... Simply put, this is the doctrine of predestination: we have been chosen by God to be His own. And that is indeed a comforting thought.

And it will remain a comforting piece of spiritual information as long as we don't press it any farther. But unfortunately, throughout the history of the church there have been those who want to do so. And so they ask, "*If God has chosen some to be saved, does that mean He's also chosen some to be damned?*" Or, "*If God is the one who calls and elects, why does He choose some and not others? Are some less sinful or more deserving than others?*" Or, "*How does the doctrine of predestination square with the Bible passage that says God wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth?*" And in the process of asking these questions the teaching of election no longer becomes a comfort, but a puzzle to be solved, and worse yet, can actually plant the seed of doubt as to whether a person is really saved or not. It prompts the question, "*Can I be sure I am one of the elect?*" Those are merely man's musings but the fact of the matter is that whenever God speaks to his people about their election, it is always in the context of comfort and assurance, and never to cast doubt.

And so in this verse we are reminded and comforted by the fact that we are a predestined people. Practically speaking, this means we are not here on this earth at this place and this time as the product of random chance; we are here by design; God's design. We are here to live our lives to God's glory and honor with the blessed assurance that after this brief life is over we shall be with him forever, all according to his plan.

## 3. Pardoned People of God

As a summary statement, then, our text concludes by telling us that we have one more reason to rejoice. We are a pardoned people. AND THOSE HE PREDESTINED, HE ALSO CALLED; THOSE HE CALLED, HE ALSO JUSTIFIED; THOSE HE JUSTIFIED, HE ALSO GLORIFIED. God has chosen us from eternity and called us to be his own. He has led us to faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, and we stand justified – that is declared not guilty – because we trust that Jesus died and rose to take away our sins. Heaven is ours. There we shall appear before God "glorified." And in fact, by virtue of the past tense of that word used here by the Apostle Paul, in the eyes of God we are already glorified. He sees our salvation as an accomplished fact. We are a pardoned people.

And that is what this text is all about. It is pure Gospel given to assure God's people that their eternal destination has been planned, so we can go forward through life knowing that everything that happens to us somehow falls within the framework of the eternity that will be ours.

In the words of the hymn, we are indeed "redeemed, restored, forgiven." Our text adds to this good news: We are a promised, predestined and pardoned people of God. It's no wonder that a little later on in his book the Apostle Paul breaks into these words of praise and thanksgiving, with which we'll bring our thoughts for today to a close: Romans 11:33-36.

**Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.  
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out.  
Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?  
Who has ever given to God that God should repay him?  
For from him and through him and to him are all things.  
To him be the glory forever! Amen.**