

9/15/24  
NWCC

***According to His Purpose***  
Romans 8:28-29

**Introduction:**

We are three messages and three chapters into our look into the life of Job. Although we are not looking at Job's life this morning, this message directly bears on our understanding of Job's suffering.

Back in the days before cell phones, computers, area codes, even zip codes, I was reading through the New Testament and read our text for this morning in the Apostle Paul's letter to the Roman believers. I don't remember exactly why, but it was at that particular moment I decided Romans 8:28 would be my "life verse."

The Lord's promise in those verses, as well as other Scripture, has brought comfort and encouragement throughout my life. So today, with this opportunity I have, I want to share a few insights and personal thoughts from this portion of God's Word.

**[Romans 8:28-29] 28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

[Pray]

"According to His purpose" informs us that God has a purpose for you and me. Beyond just the overarching purpose for all believers that we glorify our Father in Heaven, I believe God created you and me with a purpose in mind.

Rather than just deal with Adam's sin by starting all over again, "... **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.**" (John 3:16)

God provided a way through His Son, Jesus Christ and Jesus' death, burial & resurrection, so God's purpose could be worked out in the lives of those who receive the free gift of eternal life.

Earlier in this chapter, Paul assured the Roman believers that:

***. . . the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8:18***

Paul reminds these believers their salvation is ultimately focused on eternity and a promised glory which shall be theirs.

When Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth to dispel their doubts about the reality of the resurrection, he assured them that not only was the resurrection historical as well as foundational to their salvation but that the dynamic of the resurrection was such that they would have glorious resurrection bodies in Heaven.

This future glory in eternity is interwoven as a key hope for believers in contrast to the brokenness and sufferings we experience during our lives here and now.

And such glory is not an ambiguous, vague notion. Paul connects that glory to God's purpose for believers with the person of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

God's purpose for you is stated in verse 29, "***. . . to be conformed to the image of His Son . . .***"

Now, there is something about this that you should not miss. This verse is not a command to believers. God is not saying, "You be conformed to the image of Jesus!"

Rather, this is an assurance, a guarantee. If you have put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are being conformed to the image of Jesus because God is the One Who doing it!

The word “conformed” Paul uses in verse 29 means to render like, to bring to the same form. It is a word used only twice in the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> Both times it speaks of being made glorious – just like Jesus!

The word “image” Paul uses means “likeness, representing the essence, character, & personhood.”

Taken together, these words speak of a representation which reflects the original.

Think of a marble sculptor. He has an image in his mind he wants to conform a block of marble to. So he chips away and works with the marble until that happens. He uses just the right tools to accomplish his task.

Most of us have not seen a sculptor of marble at work, but perhaps you have seen the creation of an ice sculpture.

A number of years ago my wife, Chris, and I traveled to Alaska and cruised the Inside Passage. Each day at the entrances of the ship’s dining areas, beautiful, intricate ice sculptures greeted us.

Near the conclusion of the cruise, we were invited to watch a demonstration of just how those ice sculptures were created.

Along with other passengers we were amazed as the ice sculptors took huge blocks of ice and with huge chippers at first, then smaller ones later, they chopped and chipped away at those ice blocks until, after some time had passed, discernible shapes began to emerge.

Although we were encouraged to guess what was being sculpted. in reality only the sculptors knew for sure, for only they knew in advance what it was they wanted to accomplish with this chunk of frozen water.

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<sup>1</sup> See Philippians 3:20-21 for the other reference.

Now you are NOT a chunk of ice. You are precious to God. But your heavenly Father does work to chip away at you and work with you to conform you to the image of His Son.

Well, just what is that?

Is it just to be conformed to His glorious resurrected body which is yet future for us? Or, are there “right here and now” aspects about being conformed to the image of Jesus as well?

Paul is addressing these believers’ concerns about present suffering, and he speaks of “all things” in verse 28, that indeed, there is something about the image of Jesus which our loving Father is conforming us to even now.

And what that something is relates to the character of Christ.

So, how did Christ characterize Himself while He ministered on this earth? Our Lord spoke of His purpose and character one time while interacting with His disciples as recorded in Mark’s Gospel:

***For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. Mark 10:45***

What was Christ’s purpose? To minister, to serve, to give. Wrap it all up in one word – Servanthood!

It is so easy to get caught up in life and forget about others, to think only of our own stuff and to care about only our own needs.

But God, cutting cross grain to our culture, is conforming us to be like His Son – a servant.

Consider this, too, the only time Jesus described His own temperament, He referred to Himself as ***“gentle and lowly in heart.”*** (Matthew 11:29) That word “gentle,” has the sense of “thoughtful & considerate” while “lowly in heart” is another way of saying “humble.”

That’s the description of a servant!

When Paul exhorted believers in Philippi to have the same mind as Christ, he used these words to describe Jesus:

*. . . He made Himself of no reputation . . .  
 . . . He took on the form of a bondservant,  
 . . . He humbled Himself . . .  
 . . . He became obedient. (Philippians 2:5-8)*

I said earlier that conforming believers to the image of Jesus, that this was God's work in and through us. He will complete it and we will be glorious in eternity.

Yet there is a sense, that as God does His work in us here and now, we are to respond to His work. And our response to His work determines other aspects of our eternal experience.

One way to measure just how well you are responding is through honest and transparent accountability with other believers. Would your brother or sister in Christ, describe you as a person with a servant's heart or say that you are humble and kind?

This is why, here at Northwest, you are encouraged to enter into genuine, "masks-off" community with other believers through deepening friendships, care groups, ABF's and other means of fellowship.

Perhaps you wonder though about what the earthly benefits are if you do respond to God's work in your life. You wonder, "If I really surrender myself to be a servant as Jesus was a servant, if I allow God to do as He wants in my life, will everything work out here and now?"

There is this incredible, true story of a Australian bricklayer who volunteered to rebuild a church's brick steeple which had been blown down during a hurricane. Here's what the bricklayer wrote to his employer describing what happened to him.

*When I arrived at the building, I discovered the hurricane had blown a number of bricks from around the top of the steeple.*

*So I rigged up a beam with a pulley at the top of the building and hoisted up a couple barrels of bricks.*

*When I had fixed the damaged area, there were still a lot of bricks left over which I was able to load into one barrel. I went to the bottom, releasing the line that held the barrel full of unused bricks.*

*However, that barrel of bricks weighed more than me and before I knew what was happening, the barrel was coming down fast, jerking me up. I decided to hang on since I was too far off the ground to jump and half way up I met the barrel of bricks coming down! I received a hard blow to my right shoulder.*

*I then continued to the top, banging my head on the beam and pinching my fingers in the pulley.*

*Then the barrel of bricks hit the ground hard and when it did, the barrel broke open allowing the bricks to fall out.*

*I was now heavier than the barrel, so I started to go down to the ground at high speed. Half way down, what was left of the barrel was coming up fast and collided with my shins causing severe injury.*

*When hit the ground, I landed on the pile of spilled bricks causing several painful cuts and deep bruises.*

*At this point, I must have lost my presence of mind because I let go of the line allowing the barrel to fall back down fast, giving me another blow on my head causing a concussion which ended up with me in the local hospital.*

*I respectfully request sick leave.*

This man had a servant's heart, but from an earthly perspective, it backfired! "Will everything work out if I have a servant's heart," you ask? Not necessarily in the way the world perceives what that means.

But from God's perspective and His purpose for you, choosing to respond, by faith, to your heavenly Father's work of conforming you to the image of His Son will yield spiritual fruit and blessing in this life as well as heavenly blessing in eternity.

But by the measure of eternity, you can be sure having a servant's heart is worth it because,

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

Last Sunday, Pastor Dave in his message on Job's lament, said that when you suffer, you would love to know the "why."...God may often withhold the "why" so that we will learn the grace of trust-in-the-dark. And trust-in-the-dark is the sort of trust that, in the long run, brings us closest to Him. Makes us most like Jesus.

And, after all, isn't that what God has promised He is doing with His children – conforming you to the image of His Son?

Let me share with you a few of my "trust-in-the-dark" moments...wondering "why" yet "trusting my heavenly Father" when my father, with whom we were rebuilding a fractured relationship, suddenly died; or when our son had a horrific, almost life-ending, motorcycle accident; or inexplicably allowing cancer to invade my body.

Now my suffering is nothing compared to some of what you have suffered or are suffering even now. Yet in my current situation with cancer, God is using one of you who has his own "trust-in-the-dark" moment to encourage me. His servant's heart reflects the kindness and love of Jesus in caring for others in the midst of his own health crisis.

But we still wonder, "How can any of these things be considered good?" Well, Paul does NOT refer to the "things" as in "all things" as being good.

What Paul acknowledges is that the believer who loves God and walks by faith, that believer can know that his or her heavenly Father will and does take "all things" and will use them to conform us to His Son's image which is what Paul describes as good!

Here's a paraphrase of what one commentator wrote about this passage of Scripture:

*"(God) is ever at work to reproduce the . . . image of Christ in (believers). All that now comes into our lives He uses for our good to further that glorious goal. His aim for us now is **not** to make us happy, materially prosperous, or famous, but to make us Christlike. He now uses 'all things,' the sad as well as the glad, the painful as well as the pleasant, the things that perplex and disappoint as well as the things we eagerly strive and pray for, to further His eternal purpose for us. In His infinite wisdom He knows what is needed to bring about that transformation."<sup>2</sup>*

### **Conclusion:**

That's God purpose for you and me. He takes all things in your life to mold you and form the image of Christ in you so with your natural abilities, your personality and your spiritual gifts you display Jesus through your life...serving others, caring for others, loving others. And through that, your heavenly Father is glorified.

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<sup>2</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, "Romans 8:28-29 and the Assurance of the Believer," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148:590 (April-June 1991):182.