

Before You Were Born Romans 8:28-31, Psalm 139, Ephesians 1:3-11

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made
My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.

I love these words from David's Psalm 139, they tell me that my life is not, nor has it ever been, random. They tell me that both my body and also my days were lovingly crafted and carefully planned out for me long ago, by God, even before I was twinkle in my parent's eyes.

And that is exactly what the Apostle Paul was trying to tell each of us in our Romans portion for today: that God has always had a plan for my life: *IF God is for us, who can stand against us* (8:31).

In a Readers Digest article, Mark Smith wrote that, like many high school seniors, my son was filling out college-scholarship applications. One form asked for extracurricular activities. He answered: "wrestling." The next question requested positions held. He entered: "pinned, mostly." (Readers Digest Jun00 (<http://www.irsweb.com/>))

How many of you have felt liked you are continually being "pinned" to the mat and are just waiting to get counted out.

Or perhaps you feel more like Chippie the parakeet, who was simply minding his own business and singing his songs one day when his female owner decided to do a quick cleaning of the cage with the vacuum cleaner. But just then the phone rang and as the lady turned away to answer it, the wandering business end of the vacuum cleaner sucked up the bird and sent him to the dust bag.

Realizing what had happened and fearing the worst the woman tore open the vacuum and ripped apart the bag to find Chippie, thankfully, not dead but stunned, and covered with dust.

Thinking that Chippie needed to be revived, she ran him to the bathroom sink, turned on the water and stuck Chippie under the flow. Now Chippie is cold

and wet from the sudden bath. So she dried him off, not with a towel but with her hair dryer. Through no fault of his own, suddenly, Chippie had been sucked in, hosed down, and blown out in the trials of life.

A few weeks later, a friend asked how Chippie was doing, the woman replied: "Chippie seems okay, but he doesn't sing much anymore, he just sits and stares."

Yes life can do that to you, and as we learned last week, unless you have God's Spirit living within – your person on the inside – working to guide you through such of life's troubles, you might just end up like Chippie the parakeet; sitting there and wondering what happened. But cheer up Chippie, God wants to assure you that even in the vacuum events of your life, He long ago has already worked out a plan to bring good out even this.

For the last few weeks we have been studying in Chapter 8 of Romans. Here, the Apostle Paul has been listing out the benefits we receive from having God's Spirit – our person on the inside - living in us to guide and protect us. It is a rather impressive list:

With the Spirit living inside us (chapter 8)

1. We are no longer condemned (vs.1)
2. We are set free from slavery to our earthly desires (vs.9)
3. We are led by the Spirit to live as children of God (vs.11)
4. The Spirit directs our thoughts towards God (vs. 16)
5. The Spirit gives us hope in suffering (vs. 23-24)
6. The Spirit prays for us according to God's will (vs. 26-27)
7. God's Spirit works to bring good out of all situations (vs. 28)
8. God has already predestined our future to be like His son (29-30)

But right in the middle of listing out all these Spiritual benefits, Paul for some reason switches to the topic of our having to suffer in this life; which he briefly comments could never compare with the glory awaiting us in the next life. Then he goes on to list out three types of suffering we must patiently endure until "*the day of our adoption, the redemption of our Bodies*" (Which is Pauline speak for our dying and going to Heaven).

There is the cursed and suffering planet in which we live, which in turn can cause both physical and spiritual suffering in our lives. Paul's solution to all this suffering, that which should give us HOPE even in the midst of suffering is to make the 3 most amazing and also controversial statements about how God is working in our lives.

God Gives us hope in the midst of suffering because...

6. We have the **indwelling Holy Spirit** both praying for us and guiding us through life according to God's will for us (8:26-27)

7. We have **God working to bring good** out of all the present circumstances of our life (8:28)

This is what we learned last week (copies of that sermon are still available)
And now this week:

God Gives us hope in the midst of suffering because...

8. long ago **God laid down a plan** for our future
 - to conform us to the image of His son
 - and to bring us to share in His glory. (8:29-30)

Paul assures us, that God is completely involved in **the present issues of our life** both with His indwelling Holy Spirit praying for and guiding us according to God's will for our life, and also with the Father working to bring good out of all the circumstances of our life. **All this being possible because long ago God had already planned out our future.** Before we were even born, God knew us and loved us, knew what would happen in our life, and laid out a plan for our life. As verse 29-30 assure us ...

Those whom God **foreknew** he also **predestined**

To be conformed to the image of His son.
And those whom he predestined he also **called**;
and those whom he called he also **justified**;
and those whom he justified he also **glorified.**

(Romans 8:29-30)

Think about this for a moment, this is a very radical idea: **Your life is not the product of random**

forces acting upon random events to create random circumstances. Your life is the result of a very intentional God who is working out His divine plan in and through your

life. Too often, though, we don't allow ourselves to see God's purpose in our lives because we have not bothered to view our life from God's perspective.

How do you interpret the path your life has taken?

Do you look at your life with the understanding that God is the author of the story of your whole life?

Or do you still think that you are somehow floating through this life by chance and with no purpose?

According to our Bible, if you love God, have been reborn into His family, and are trying to follow His will for your life, then Romans 8:29-30 applies to you; having known you long before you were ever born, God predetermined (predestined) that you should be conformed to the image of His son. And having predetermined that God put his plan into motion: calling you by His Spirit, justifying you through his Son, so that one day he might glorify you in His presence... see? Both your salvation and life in Christ has always been a team effort.

But let's stop here for a moment to acknowledge the theological storm that has grown around this very controversial passage.

The theological controversy which verse 29 raises is:

- If God predestined us then are we not just slaves to destiny, having no free will of our own? We are what we are because that is what God determined we would be?
- Others say that God's predestination is just a matter of His foreknowledge. God being the ultimate "inside trader," fashions our life according to what He knows we will decide to do. But just because God knows what I will do tomorrow does not negate the fact that I still have choices to make which will affect tomorrow's outcome.

If you are not concerned with such theological controversies; God bless you! You are probably wiser and certainly happier to avoid it. Because I doubt that Paul wanted us to waste so much time and ink trying to figure out the workings of God's "foreknowledge." Rather **Paul's intention is to assure and comfort us** – in times of distress – with the knowledge that our lives have always had a God ordained purpose that our heavenly Father continues to bring to pass in our life.

Not only is God involved in our present, but He has also secured our future. In his letter to the Philippian Church, this is how Paul expressed his thought about God's provision for our future.

I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ – Paul. (Philippians 1:6)

So let's take another look at what God does intends for your future:

Those whom God **foreknew** he also **predestined**
To be conformed to the image of His son.
And those whom he predestined he also **called**;
and those whom he called he also **justified**;
and those whom he justified he also **glorified**.
(Romans 8:29-30)

*Those whom God **foreknew** he also **predestined to be conformed to the image of His son.** The powerful truth of the gospel is that God loves you just as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way. He wants you to one day be just like Jesus.*

God wants Jesus to be not be his "only son" but instead to be a part of a very large family of brothers and sisters (you and me) all calling God "Father." I don't know about you but that thought makes me feel very warm and loved; it tells me a lot about the loving character of God my father.

So, when we turn our lives over to Him, when we say, "God, you are my Lord, take my life and the mess that I have made of it and do something with it." He does!

Using the experiences that we go through, both good and bad, He starts shaping us through His Spirit, through His Word, through our interaction with other Christian people, teachers and advisors.

And it's not some arbitrary process. God knows exactly what He's molding us into. He has a very well defined plan. He is making us into "the likeness of His Son." It's a process that is never complete in this lifetime. But it will be finished one day. Listen to what the Apostle John said in his letter to believers "*Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" (1 John 3:2).

So that is God's will for all His Children, that we will be conformed to the image of His Son Jesus Christ. And one day we will all be; on that day when our adoption is fully ratified and we are standing before him in Heaven. But that is a process He begins working to bring about just as soon as you join the family.

So having predestined us to be conformed to the image of His son, God then calls us, justifies us, and begins working to fully glorify us (this process is known as "**sanctification**" making us as actually holy as He has already declared us to be). And when God is finished with us, the only Way to describe it is "Glory." (v. 30)

In Chicago there is a father/son athletic team who regularly compete together in the Iron Man Triathlon. It is a grueling event involving swimming two miles on open water, biking 100 miles, and then running a 26 mile marathon. It takes incredible conditioning just to compete in this event. And Ricky Hoyt – the son - has finished the competition several times even though he is totally, physically disabled. That's right, Ricky can't run, he can't swim, and he could never think about pedaling a bike. But he finishes the course because his father, Jack Hoyt carries him through the course. Jack swims the 2 miles pulling a boat. He then bikes 100 miles and runs the 26 miles pulling Ricky in a specially made cart.

You know, on our own we are all a whole lot like Ricky Hoyt. There's no way we could make it through the grueling rigors of life anywhere near where we should be on our own. But Paul says you don't have to be afraid of that. You are not alone. The Holy Spirit is regularly lifting your prayers before the Father, and interceding on your behalf so that your prayers remain in accordance with God's Will. And the Father joins the Spirit in working out your present life according to His foreordained plans for you; all of which will end one day in you being glorified.

Thus, the main thing you should take home today is this. God is working on a process by which he is accomplishing "glory" in your life. It is His work to change you from a sinful human being into something that is glorious, that looks a whole lot like Jesus. That is a great end to the journey we are on in this life.

And although there may be in times of suffering, that fear rears its ugly head in my life, the words of Paul in Romans 8 give me courage to overcome all my fears. Remember,

- we are not on our own.
- the one who is with us loves us unconditionally.
- And He is not figuring things out as He goes, but He is purposefully working in our lives to transform us into the image of His Son.
- And when He is done, it's going to be glorious
- because the promise of God's Word is that when He's done we will all be like Jesus.

And that's something to really smile about. So as we now prepare our hearts for communion, the reminder of the price Christ paid so that we might be justified and one

day glorified. let's return once again to the end of David's Psalm and join him as he prays...

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.

For those reading this sermon, If you wish to wrestle with this so far humanly unresolved issue of God's foreknowledge and predestination in relationship to our free-will, note that in one sense Scripture does seem to indicate that God's "foreknowledge" is not just His knowing in advance but His choosing in advance. In Ephesians 1:3-11 Paul writes: that in love, **God chose us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before Him... after which He destined us for adoption ...** Roman's, chapter 9 also tries to somewhat resolve these conflicting ideas of God's predestining and our free-will (but I doubt you will like Paul's answer). See also these verses:

Mark 13:20 "If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive. **But for the sake of the elect, whom he has chosen**, he has shortened them.

John 15:16, 19 **You did not choose me, but I chose you** and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit; If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which **you were called** when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

1 Peter 2:9 But **you are a chosen people**, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Good luck, and let me know if you come up with any solutions worth sharing – John.