

Sunday Morning Message

November 25, 2018

God is Working for Good at All Times and In All Things

Text for Today's Message – Romans 8:26 - 30

Congregational Reading – Romans 8:26 - 30

Introduction

Lately, I have been considering the subject of thanksgiving through the lens of the sovereignty of God. On Wednesday evening, we developed this idea from two verses:

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

*"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for **all things** unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;" (Ephesians 5:17-20)*

In those two verses, the ability to give thanks is connected to the will of God. In other words, we concluded, that we can be thankful for all things and in all things, because God is able to use all things, even our mistakes to advance His kingdom and also to help mature us.

This morning's passage also teaches and confirms this idea:

"Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

The Holy Spirit makes intercession for us and prays for us, even when we don't know what to say and are not praying correctly. Also, the Lord Jesus then intercedes for us on to the Father as our great High Priest:

"But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Hebrews 7:24-25)

So, even when we are prayers are not right or are insufficient, God is still working on our behalf.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified." (Romans 8:26-30)

The next part of our text really teaches two things:

1. God is working "all things", even bad things; even our mistakes; even our sins that we commit; even the sins that are committed by others against us; together for His good. In other words, God can and does take all things – good and bad – and uses them to advance His work.
2. God uses "all things" – good and bad – to grow us and mature us, and ultimately conform us to the image of His son.

This does not mean that God is pleased with our sin, or that we will be rewarded for sinning, even if God somehow uses that sin to bring about something good. The purpose of this message is not intended to salve your conscience regarding your sin, or to cause you to give up trying to live a life that is yielded to the will and Word of God and surrendered to the indwelling Holy Spirit. This message is intended to get you to see and appreciate the awesome ability of God to transform even bad things into tools that will bring glory to Him and advance His Kingdom. ***God is working for good at all times and in all things.***

Transition

This morning, I want to illustrate this concept through the life of the Apostle Paul. God certainly used Paul when he was a preacher, but you might be surprised to learn that God also used when bad things happened to Him, when he was a prisoner. You might be even more shocked to discover that God also used Paul in a great way before he was even saved, when he was the enemy of Christ and a persecutor of the church.

I Paul the Persecutor

Read Acts 7:57 – 8:4

The fact that Paul persecuted the church, and authorized the execution of Stephen was not a good thing. It was clearly sin, but God used this rebellion of Paul in several ways:

1. Paul's persecution of the church served to scatter the Christians throughout the Roman Empire as they escaped the persecution in Jerusalem. When they left Jerusalem, they took the gospel with them.
2. Stephen's testimony had a profound impact on Paul. I believe even Paul's Damascus Road experience with Christ, God was softening up Paul's heart. Why would an intelligent man like Stephen, a man who obviously knew the Old Testament Scriptures as much as Paul did, be willing to die for this Jesus. Even through Paul's rebellion

against God and resistance to the Holy Ghost, God was moving Paul to the place where he would be saved.

3. His passionate desire to persecute Christians brought him to the place where he was confronted by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read Acts 9:1 - 18

4. Throughout Paul's later ministry, he never lost his concern for the welfare of the poor saints at Jerusalem. He was always collecting offerings for them in order to ease their hardship. Paul continued to have a great burden for the Jews at Jerusalem for the remainder of his life.

II Paul the Preacher

After Paul's salvation, God immediately began to use him in another way:

"And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." (Acts 9:19-20)

Eventually, he was called by God to become a missionary and church planter:

"As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2-3)

There are three missionary journeys recorded in the Book of Acts. The first was to an area of Asia Minor known as Galatia. The second brought him all the way to Greece. The third was focused mainly on western Asia Minor, but also allowed him to travel all the way to western Greece, just opposite Italy:

"Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ." (Romans 15:19)

Paul mightily preached Christ throughout much of the known world as a preacher. However, I would like to point out that while Paul was preaching, doing exactly what God wanted him to do, he endured a lot of hardship:

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23 – 30

Paul gloried – he rejoiced in the bad things that happened to him. Why? Because he knew that God used all of them to advance the cause of Christ and to get people saved.

*"And we know that **all things** work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)*

III Paul the Prisoner

Paul was imprisoned a few times in his ministry. He and Silas spent a very short but painful night in a jail in Philippi. But Paul didn't complain there either:

"And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them." (Acts 16:23-25)

As we follow the Apostle Paul through the Book of Acts, we know that he eventually is arrested again in Jerusalem and, after appealing his case to Caesar, spends a couple years under house arrest in Rome. And, even though I believe Paul was out of the will of God for going back to Jerusalem in the first place, God still used the outcome to advance His cause:

"And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome." (Acts 23:11)

Paul ultimately would be thrown in jail again at the end of his ministry. This time, he would be placed in the Mamertine Prison in Rome, which was a horrible, cold, and filthy place. But, even there you don't find him complaining. It was there awaiting his execution that he wrote his second letter to Timothy, and very possibly the Letter to the Hebrews.

In 2 Timothy, we get a glimpse of Paul's attitude regarding his suffering. He understood that God was using it to glorify Christ and to advance the gospel.

"Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day." (2 Timothy 1:11-12)

"Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." (2 Timothy 2:9-10)

"But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (2 Timothy 3:10-12)

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me

only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

Conclusion

So we see that God truly did work all things together for good in the life of Paul. And, he will do the same for you and me. In the Lord's service, we are going to have some good days when it seems that everything is working well. God will use those days. But, we will also have some bad days, either when we blow it and mess things up ourself; or, when some "seemingly bad thing" happens to us, perhaps through no fault of our own. God is in those things also, and He will use those things to advance the gospel, to glorify Himself, and to help conform us to the image of His Son.

So – we can rejoice, and truly be thankful "in everything" or "for all things:"

*"And we know that **all things** work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)*