

The Sovereignty of Salvation, Part 1

Sunday Sermons

By Dr. Steven J. Lawson

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Romans 8:28-29
Preached on: Sunday, January 5, 2020

OnePassion Ministries
5622 Dyer St, Suite 200
Dallas, TX 75206

Website: www.onepassionministries.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/onepassion

Well, Michael, you just sang my sermon so there's no need for me to preach this morning. You just sang the message so this message will be a postlude to Michael's sermon that he just sang to us. That was absolutely perfect, beautiful, and I don't know that I've ever been more wonderfully set up to preach the word than what we just heard.

Well, it's a joy to be back with you here at Grace Church and I just love being in your midst and I have so many lifelong friends in this congregation; my life is enriched untold numbers of times and ways because of your fellowship, your encouragement and your ministry into my life, and I could never repay the debt of love that I owe to this church. If you would take your Bible and turn with me to the book of Romans 8, I want to read verses 28 to 30 this morning. We'll be looking at verse 28 specifically.

Many years ago, James Montgomery Boice, who was a great expositor in Philadelphia, said, "If the Bible is a ring, the diamond on that ring is the book of Romans, and the apex cut on that diamond is Romans 8." And I would have to say verses 28 to 30 is the very tip of the apex cut of that diamond on the ring, so we are looking at what is, in reality, the heart of the file, the very mountain peak of glorious truth that God has for us.

The title of this message is "The Sovereignty of Salvation." This morning we'll look at just verse 28 and tonight, I'm certain you'll be here, we will look at verses 29 and 30. No one laughed so I guess you will be here. Okay, good. Wonderful. So I want to begin by reading the passage and setting it before you. Romans 8:28, if there's a verse in the Bible other than John 3:16 that you would know, it would have to be this verse.

28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30 and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

Standing behind these verses is the first article of our Christian creed which is the sovereignty of God. We fundamentally believe that God is and that the God who is, is the God who reigns. The sovereignty of God is the foundational truth of all Christian theology. It is the bedrock doctrine of all doctrines. This is the immovable mountain that towers over the landscape of theology. This is the Mount Everest of theology. This is the undisputed throne rights of Jehovah to govern all that he has created. The sovereignty of God means, quite simply, that God is God not merely in name only but in the full reality of all that it means for God to be God. That is to say, God always does as he pleases, when he pleases, where he pleases, how he pleases, with whom he pleases. God never asks for permission, God gives permission.

The Lord reigns. The Lord reigns over nature and nations. The Lord reigns over history and salvation. The Lord reigns over temporal circumstances and eternal destinies. This is the main truth that the Apostle Paul is driving home to us in Romans 8. We see the sovereignty of God over the entire universe and as R. C. Sproul has said, there are not maverick molecules in the entire universe. We see the sovereignty of God here in verse 28, which we will look at this morning, in what is known as the doctrine of providence, that God governs over all the circumstances and affairs and events of our lives. And then later tonight in verses 29 and 30, we will focus our attention upon the sovereignty of God in salvation from eternity past with foreknowledge and predestination all the way into eternity future with glorification. But this morning, our focus is on verse 28 and the doctrine of providence, the sweet doctrine of providence.

Just to give you a definition of providence written in 1646 is the Westminster Confession. It has stood the test of time as those Westminster divines gathered at Westminster Abbey in the Jerusalem Room in London, and the greatest Puritan minds of the age crafted this definition of providence and it is just as true today as it was when it was first stated. "God the great Creator of all things doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy." What we see in verse 28 is the most succinct statement that we can find in the Bible on this glorious doctrine of providence. Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "This is the pillow upon which we rest our head at night as the storms of life are howling all around us. This is the peace for our heart and the comfort for our soul to know that God is causing all things to work together for good."

So as we look at verse 28 today, I have five headings to set before you. It will be easy to follow in the note-taking and we just want to divide this verse out as the Apostle Paul has written it. The first thing that I want you to notice is the conviction, the conviction which is found in the first three words as Paul begins with a strong affirmation of a believer's convictions. He says, "And we know." The word "we" here refers to believers, it refers to all believers, not just to believers in Rome but as this is in the Canon of Scripture, to all believers down through the centuries upon every continent.

He says, "And we know." He doesn't say, "And we feel that all things are working together for good." Not everything feels good. The death of a spouse does not feel good. The loss of a job does not feel good. Bankruptcy does not feel good. Divorce does not feel good. A rebellious child does not feel good. But this does not say, "And we feel," neither does this say, "And we understand," because we do not always understand what the invisible hand of God is doing in the affairs of providence. But it does say, "And we know." If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, this is what you know otherwise you are living in unbelief.

The mere fact that Paul says, "And we know" implies how well-taught the early church was in matters of sound doctrine because, in reality, this is Christianity 101. This is kindergarten stuff. This is entry level truth that if you're a Christian and you're breathing, you know this. If you do not know this, it would be cause for question whether or not you truly know the Lord. All Christians know this and so it must be true for us as well. This is something upon which you must be able to hang your hat, to drop your anchor. This must be a cornerstone for your faith. This is something that you know that you know that you know that you know.

This is the conviction. I trust that you have this conviction for all that we see. You need to understand that there is no such thing as good luck or bad luck, there is no such thing as an accident, there is no such thing as good karma, bad karma. Those are just pagan superstitions that have no basis in reality whatsoever, but for us as believers, we discard the emptiness of what the world wants to bank on, and instead we can say with the Apostle Paul, "And we know."

Second, I want you to note the controller, "And we know that God causes." Let's just stop right here. God is the master controller. This tells us that God is vitally active in the affairs of providence. This tells us that God is not a mere passive spectator of everything that is taking place here upon the earth. This is not the view of God as presented by the deists that God is the proverbial watchmaker and he has built the watch, he has wound it up, he has set it down, he has walked away, and now all creation is just unfolding according to its own pattern and that God is outside the box and God is not involved in the affairs of what is taking place upon the earth. Nothing could be further from the truth. The God who is seated upon his throne in heaven has his hand upon this earth and he has his hand upon the circumstances and events that are surrounding your life.

This is God the Father who is often the forgotten member of the Trinity. God the Son is mentioned in the next verse, in verse 29, and God the Holy Spirit is mentioned in the two previous verses in verses 26 and 27. The God of verse 28 is God the Father who is the master architect of everything, who is the one who has sent his Son and with the Son sent the Spirit into this world, but it is God the Father who is the mastermind behind all of the events and circumstances of life.

God is so dominant even in this text. If you just allow your eye to scan this text, God is mentioned twice in verse 27, "He" and "the will of God." He's mentioned three times here in verse 28, "those who love God, God causes" and "His purpose." He's mentioned three

times in verse 29, "He foreknew, He predestined," and "His Son." He's mentioned six times in verse 30, "He predestined, He called, He called, He justified, He justified, He glorified." That's all God the Father. And in verse 31, "If God is for us." And in verse 32 twice, "He did not spare," and "His own Son." Verse 33, twice, "God's elect, God is the one who justifies." Verse 34, "the right hand of God." I think we've got the point. Twenty times in these eight verses God the Father is the dominant figure. God the Father is the active driving force behind the universe. And not only is God dominant in this text, God is dominant in your life and God is dominant in the affairs and circumstances of your life. Whether you realize it or not, this is a true statement.

This leads now to number 3: the comprehensiveness. As we continue to just walk our way through this text, we would ask this question: to what extent is God actively involved in our lives? To what extent? And you'll note the next two words, "all things. And we know that God causes all things to work together for good." Now as theologians, we need to make careful distinctions. God causes some things, God allows other things, but God controls all things. God causes some things, he allows other things, but he controls all things.

All things. Nothing lies outside of this all-inclusive statement. This includes both bad things and good things. In this immediate context, "all things" includes, and I want you to note this in your own Bible, it includes everything mentioned in verse 35, God causes all things to work together for good, even tribulation and distress – Tom, this is why I had you read this passage – and persecution and famine and nakedness and peril and the sword, speaking of martyrdom. God is bringing good out of even these bad things. Then in verse 36, "For your sake we are being put to death," that is a martyr's death, and at the end of verse 36, "as sheep to be slaughtered." Even in all of this, the worst thing that could happen to our lives, God has a master blueprint and a master plan from all eternity past how he will take both good and evil and bring it all together and work it for good. This is how stunningly brilliant and all-wise God is.

If you would note also in verse 17 of Romans 8, it includes all that we suffer. In verse 18, it refers to all of our sufferings of this present time. In verse 23, it includes also all that we groan within ourselves as a result of this suffering, all of the heartache, all of the brokenheartedness, all of the emptiness that we suffer under the blows of life. God puts his arms around all of this and is working it all together for good.

This leads to number 4: the coordination. Please note the coordination, "all things," here it is in the next three words, "to work together." To work together. Now this is not saying, number 1, that all things are good because evil is not good and sin is not good, and this is also not saying, number 2, that God causes all things because God is not the author of evil and God does not create sin in human hearts. But what this is saying is that God takes everything in our lives, as believers he is working it all together for a far-greater good. Even the worst thing that has ever happened in your life, God can take that and use it for your own spiritual good. That's what this text says and if it were not in the Bible it might be hard to really grasp, but here it is staring us right in the eyes in each of our own Bibles.

"To work together" is one word in the original language. It's a compound word and the idea is to weave together. The idea is to knit something together. Like a beautiful tapestry with all different colored threads, some bright colors and radiant colors, but also others that are dark colors and muted colors, and God is so stunningly brilliant in the genius of his wisdom that God is able to take all of these different colors of threads and weave it together to make a perfect picture. That's what this text is saying.

Now I want to drill down just a little bit for a moment with you on "to work together." I want to parse this verb because it's worth noting and, number 1, it's in the present tense. This is to say that God is always working everything together for good. Every moment of every day God is actively working in your life, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. You go to sleep, God stays awake and God is causing all things to work together for good constantly in your life. This very moment, even as I am preaching this truth to you, God is working in your life.

Second, it's in the active voice which is to say God is not just passively observing from the throne with his arms folded and squinting with his eyes beholding what is taking place here. This is in the active voice which means God is proactive, and that God is taking action to be constantly working.

Third, it's in the indicative mood which simply means this is a statement of fact. There's no conditions that are necessary for this in your life. This is just a statement of reality for your life, that God is causing all things to work together for good.

And fourth, it's third person singular which just simply means God and God alone is bringing this about. God and God alone is the driving force controlling bringing together all of these threads into a perfect tapestry in your life.

Now note the next two words, "for good." God is causing all things, all things, all things to work together for good. God is always working for your good. God is not working for your bad. God is always working for your good. He's never not working for your good.

This word "good, agathos" means "excellent; that which is honorable; that which is beneficial and beautiful." So here is the million dollar question to put before you this morning: so what is this good? What is this good towards which God is causing all things in your life both good and bad to be worked together for your good? So what is this good? Is it financial prosperity? Is it physical health? Is it earthly comfort? Is it personal success? Is it social popularity? With some Christians they know some of these things. Some Christians are more financially well-off than others. God is not a socialist. Hey, I'm just trying to be contemporary and current with everything that's going on in the word. [laughter] But other Christians are not financially well-off. Some Christians are healthy, some Christians are not healthy. Some Christians are comfortable, others are not comfortable.

So what is this good? Let me make this personal for your life. Look at the next verse, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined," here it is, here is your greatest good, "to become conformed to the image of His Son." Can you think of any greater good that could ever come to your life than for you to begin to look like Jesus and act like Jesus and walk and talk like Jesus, and to become increasingly conformed to the image of your Savior? No, there could be no greater good that could ever come to your life. It is Christ-likeness. It is Christ-like character. It is to walk as he walked. Now there is no greater good for our lives and what this is saying is God takes everything that is taking place in our lives, days of prosperity and days of adversity, days on the mountaintop and days in the valley, days of success and days of defeat, sunny days when the sun is shining and dark days when it is hidden by a cloud, God takes all of this, nothing is left on the table, God just gathers it all up, the good, the bad and the ugly, and he weaves it all together in the mastermind of his genius to conform us into the image of Jesus Christ.

And the truth be known, we grow more through adversity than we do through prosperity. We grow more through trials than we do through triumphs. I would not even be here today standing before you and preaching in this hallowed pulpit if it had not been for dark and difficult days in my life and in my ministry to prepare me and to make me more like Jesus and to preach more like Jesus. How I thank God for the most difficult days of my life and now that I look back upon it, that God used to catapult me in my sanctification to conform me more and more into the image of Christ, and God is using all these difficulties to prune and to cut off and to remove things that do not look like Jesus, and to water and fertilize and stimulate other things that do look more like Jesus.

The great artist Michelangelo who could take a block of marble from the hills there in Italy and shape the most beautiful objects, he carved the statue of Moses that was so lifelike, it's there in Rome, that when he finished it, he looked at Moses, the statue, and tapped it on the knee and said, "Speak." It was so lifelike. And someone once asked him on the statue of David, "How did you create this statue of David with all the muscles and the blood vessels and the neck, the hair." And he said, "Oh, it's just very easy. You just remove everything that doesn't look like David and you're left with David."

That's what's God's doing in our lives as believers. God is just pruning and cutting and trimming back everything that does not look like Jesus and many times those scissors are the dark days in our life that humble us, that throw us to our knees, that cause us to look up to God, that strip us of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, that weans us off of this world and causes us to long for another world to come. It is only God who so brilliantly is able to be at work in our lives like this that is causing all things to work together for good to conform us into the image of Christ.

If you were to take an Oriental rug, you look at the bottom side, you roll back one corner and it's just all disentangled threads and muted colors and frayed threads and it looks almost chaotic, that there's no pattern, there's no design, and then you lay it back down and you look at it from the topside and it's stunningly spectacular and beautiful. Every thread is in exactly the right place. As we live our Christian lives, what we normally see is the bottom side of the Oriental rug, we just see the difficulties, the hurts, the groans.

We see what's in verse 35 and verse 36, we see what's in verse 17 and 18 and 23, but we even see what's in verse 38, death and angels and principalities, including demonic spirits, and everything in verse 38 and 39, that's all we see. But from God's perspective, what God is up to, God sees the forest, we just see the trees. God sees the big picture, we just see the micro. God is looking at the macro and the macro behind it all is that God is causing all things to work together for our good.

This is what God is up to and let me just give you some examples. There's Joseph, the example of Joseph in the Old Testament and we're very familiar with Joseph, but just to remind you how he was favored by his father but hated by his brothers and they conspired against him and threw him down in a pit, and then sold him to some Midianite traders who were traveling through, and they actually with great hatred and jealousy and envy in their heart sold their own brother to some foreigner trader who would take him away, that they would never see him again, who in turn sold him in Egypt to a man named Potiphar and he's now a slave in the house of Potiphar who was in the military. And Potiphar's wife made advancements at Joseph and Joseph resisted and she falsely accused him of rape and immorality and adultery, and so Joseph is thrown into prison because of her evil. And there in prison he interprets a dream which is made known to the higher ups, and Joseph now interprets a dream for this leader until he is now elevated to be second in command in all of the Egyptian dynasty under Pharaoh. And at the end in Genesis 50:20 as he looks back on his life, the evil of his brothers, the evil of Potiphar's wife, the evil that was going on in Egypt, the difficulty, the despair, we don't see Joseph whining and complaining, we don't see Joseph dissolved into a puddle of, "Why me?" We see him vibrant and robust and triumphant in his faith because he understands the doctrine of providence however that was made known to him, and it says in Genesis 50:20, "What you meant for evil God meant it for good."

That is a true statement. Look at your life. Look at the circumstances and the difficulties and the tragedies whether it's in your family, whether it's at work, wherever that is, and it may have been the darkest day in your life, I want you to know that God is upon his throne and God is actively at work to cause even that to come together for your greatest good to conform you into the image of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. God is a very purposeful God and he is so immense that he is at work in every one of our lives on a personal individual basis. Down to the very number of hairs that are upon your head, down to the very smallest detail in your life, down to where you are sitting in your pew this moment, God is actively at work causing all things to work together for your good.

Let me give you another example: the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the darkest day in human history. It was the first degree premeditated murder of the second person of the Trinity. It was the ultimate cosmic treason that has ever been perpetrated in the history of the world as evil men rose up against the only perfect man who ever lived, Jesus of Nazareth, who is the Son of God, the Son of Man. And they actually asked for Barabbas to be released who was the chief terrorist of the day, and they called out concerning Jesus, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" As the evil was just dripping from their lips, as there was hatred and unbelief in their heart, and the Son of God, the Prince of life was nailed to a cross, the most horrific death that anyone could possibly suffer. It was

invented by the Carthaginians and perfected by the Romans where you were dying but you couldn't die to escape the trauma of the suffering. And yet it was the greatest day in your life because Jesus was put to death according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God the Father, he was the Lamb of God who was slain from before the ages. And the greatest evil act that has ever been committed on planet earth by this disgusting human race was the means that God used to bring about the greatest good in your life as his blood made the only atonement for your sins, for without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.

If we had time, I could trace this through the early church, the persecution that rose up against the early church. That was God's means for them to fulfill the Great Commission. They were run out of town and it was the greatest thing to ever happen for the spread of the gospel. The greater the flames of persecution, the greater the spread of the gospel. We see with such limited vision and Romans 8:28 opens the lens and allows us to see the big picture of the invisible hand of our sovereign God who has his hands on the controls and he is causing everything that is going on in your life, in one way or another, to contribute to the greater good of your becoming conformed to the image of God's Son.

Do you see what God is up to in your life? As you've come to church today, no doubt many many many of you have left behind at home or at your apartment difficulties, maybe even a dying spouse, maybe a stack of bills, maybe a child who will not come to church with you. Whatever this is in your life, you need to be assured today from the authority of Scripture that God can even take this which is so painful in your life and bring about the greater good of making you like Christ, and no loss in your life will ever outweigh the greater gain of Christ-likeness.

Now this leads us to the final heading, the fifth: the call. As we come to the end of the verse, we need to ask this question: for whom is God causing all things to work together for good? Is this for everyone? And Paul says, "to those who love God." It's very emphatic, to those and those only; to those and no one else. To those alone who love God. This is synonymous for saving faith. We have deep affection for God, we have strong devotion for God with a fixed commitment. We once were not that way. In Romans 3:11-18, we read there's none who seeks after God, no, not one, that's verse 11. We read all have turned away from God, that's verse 12 in Romans 3. There is no fear of God, verse 18. That's where we once were and where we once lived. And Romans 1:30 says we were God-haters. So how did we go from being God-haters to God-lovers? And there's only one way and that is by the miracle of the new birth where God removes your heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh with a love for him. It is a miracle that God must produce inside of us. And I'm so glad that Paul wrote saving faith this way, "for those who love God," because it reminds us that saving faith involves far more than just acknowledging the existence of God. It means far more than just acknowledging the gifts and the provisions of God. It is far more than just doctrinal orthodoxy and correctness of theology. True saving faith is to love God, to have a heart for God. 1 Corinthians 2:9 speaks of those who love God. 1 Corinthians 8:3, if anyone loves God. Ephesians 6:24, those who love our Lord Jesus Christ. And 1 John 4:21 identifies the one who is born of God as the one who loves God. It couldn't be any more clear.

Now let me be very careful here. Let me tell you what this is not saying and then I'm going to specify what it is saying. This is not saying if we love God enough. It is not saying if we love God perfectly. It is not saying if we love God at the highest level. None of us would qualify. The Apostle Paul would not qualify. This is a categorical statement. There are only two categories of people in the world: those who love God and those who hate God. This is speaking of this category of people who love God. It's not speaking of the degree of the love, it is speaking of the fact of the love. All believers are those who love God.

If you're a believer in Jesus Christ today, I can tell you this about yourself: you love God. So why do some love God and why do others not love God? Is it because some are smarter than others? Is it because some can connect the dots better? Is it because some are just better people? Is it because they just naturally are more loving? Why do some love God and why do others remain resistant to God? And the answer is what follows in verse 28. It's what we call parallelism. A line, those who love God; B line, it's a synonymous statement. Those who are called. This call here refers not to the external call of the gospel, it refers to the internal call of God. It refers to the effectual, or what has been referred to as the irresistible call. It is effectual because it always produces the intended effect which is to love God. In fact, this call, it's a silent call but it is a powerful call, it is a sovereign call. It always apprehends the one who is called and brings that one to faith in Jesus Christ. The reason that you love God is because God called you out of darkness and out of the world and drew you with cords of grace into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and the fact is your part was to run away from God as fast as you could, his part was to call you, turn you around and bring you to himself.

So why are some called and others are not called? Because if God called everyone in the world, everyone would love God and everyone would believe in God. So why do some answer this call? Why are some called and why does God not call others? Well, it's found at the end of this same verse, it's the last four words, "according to His purpose." This is God's eternal purpose which we could call his eternal plan which theologians refer to as his eternal decree, which is his own sovereign will designed before time began for everything that comes to pass. And in the mystery within himself known only by himself, God chose some and left others in their sin.

This purpose, this eternal purpose includes three things in this text. 1. It includes the sovereign choice of God's elect. We will look at this tonight, verse 29, those whom he foreknew, those whom he predestined. Verse 30, these are the ones he called. No more. No less. So this eternal purpose includes the salvation of his elect as God made a distinguishing choice. Ephesians 1:4, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us according to the kind intention of His will."

So that's the first thing that's included in this purpose, second is the sanctification of all of the elect. They will be very distinguishable in this world because these will be the ones who will be being conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. They will stand out like

bright stars on a dark night. They will stand out like sparkling diamonds on a black velvet backdrop. They will stand out in this world because God will be at work in their life bringing about their greatest good which is to make them like his Son. And it's going to happen and God has all different means in his quiver to use whether it's the Scripture or prayer or whether it's even church discipline or death. God will work about the conformity of his chosen ones into the image of his Son. None who are chosen will ever fail to be like Jesus in this life.

And in the third part of this eternal purpose that we see here is the affairs of providence in verse 28 in which God uses all his various means to bring about this sanctification, and as God uses all of these means even to bring the elect into saving faith with Jesus Christ. Can you in your mind remember where you were when you stepped through the narrow gate and entered into the kingdom of heaven, whether you were in a bedroom, whether you were at a camp, whether you were in this church, whether you were listening on radio, whether you were reading a Christian book, whether someone was witnessing to you? Can you remember where you were when you were born again and birthed into the kingdom of heaven? God orchestrated all of those events and all of those affairs. It was God who had you listen to Grace to You. It was God who put that radio into your car. It was God who had that person come by your house and tell you the good news of Jesus Christ. It was God who gave you parents who told you about Jesus and that you need to give your life to Christ. It was God who did whatever it was that superintended all of the affairs and the circumstances of your life to bring the gospel to you, and it was God who worked in your dead heart to raise you from the dead. There's a sense in which you had nothing to do with it. It was all God overseeing the affairs or providence to bring about his eternal purpose and plan in your life, and if I didn't believe that, I would close this book and never preach again because everything would just be up for grabs.

So as I bring this message to a conclusion, let me ask you these questions. 1. Do you love God? Do you love God more than anyone or anything in this world? Do you love God more than you love yourself? Do you love God more than your spouse, your children, your grandchildren? Is God number 1, the number 1 affection in your life? Are you more devoted to him than anything else? This is the mark of a true believer. It's not just that you know a lot of facts, it is that there is fervency for God in your soul and a devotion to him that all the waters of this world could not quench. Do you love God? Could it be that you're like those in the church of Ephesus, that you've left your first love? That you've drifted? That you've cooled off? It is not that you don't love God anymore, it's just that you love God less than what you once did. That you once were on fire for God. That you once were ignited for God within your soul, you wanted to be in those prayer circles, you wanted to be in Bible study. Is it possible that you're just going through the mechanical motions of the empty routine of the Christian life and that this message is a call back to you to love God with all of your heart, and all of your soul, and all of your mind, and all of your strength? That is the greatest commandment of the entire Bible and no matter what you do and how much you do, if you don't love God you've failed at the highest level. If you don't touch first base it doesn't matter if you run around the diamond. You're out. First base is to love God with all your heart. Do you love God?

Second, do you trust God in the midst of the storms of life? When the doctor gives the difficult report? When the banker issues his call? Do you trust God that God is at work in the midst of this difficulty and that God will bring about a greater good in my life as a result of this?

And finally, do you praise God for his wisdom, that he knows how to bring this all about in your life? Do you praise God that he is ever at work every moment of every day to cause all things to work together for this greater good? And even when you're not thinking about it, God is thinking about it and God is more than thinking, God is working all things together for your good, that God is so industrious, that God is so resilient, that God is so persevering and enduring in your life and in my life. How we should give praise to God this day for bringing about his good in our life.

The last thing that I would say and I just have to say this: if you don't love God, I cannot tell you that everything is working together for good in your life, and if you die without Christ, God will cause everything to work together for bad in your life which is eternal hell. The key is do you love God and do you believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ because this text is only for the family, this text is only for those who love God, and if you are one who is in love with this world, in love with yourself, and maybe even in love with your sin, you need to repent this moment and confess it as sin to Almighty God who deserves the affections of your heart and of your soul. Repent this very moment and turn away from the world and turn away from your pursuit of sin and turn to God through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. And God will receive you if you will come on his terms which is to deny yourself and take up a cross and follow after the Lord Jesus Christ, and then I can tell you, you will step out of this realm in which things are not working together for good and you will step into this realm in which everything will be working together for your good, and one day when you die, which you may feel at this moment is to be the very worst thing that could ever happen to you, it will be the greatest thing to ever happen to you when you die, you will graduate to glory, you will leave this world and you will go immediately into the presence of Almighty God in heaven and be robed in the righteousness of Christ and be received by him. The worst day of your life will be the best day of your life for when you die, you will never be any more alive than when you awaken half a second later in the very presence of God.

Do you know this? "And we know," that would be all of us, "that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." And I cannot wait for tonight to open up verses 29 and 30, and I want to take you back to eternity past and I'm going to take us back into the inner council hall of God before there were angels, before there was a world, into the very eternality of God when God set everything into motion.

Well, I can hear you gathering your stuff. [laughter] It was free to get in, it's going to cost you to get out so let's pray and as we're praying if this message has been a mercy of God to your heart and soul and if you would like to talk to a counselor about your relationship with God, maybe you need to be saved, maybe you need to be converted, maybe you need to have some questions answered, maybe you would like for someone just to pray

with you, the elders' prayer room is to my right, to your left, and I would encourage you as soon as this prayer is over to make a beeline for that counsel room and there will be some men who love God and who love you and who would love to answer your questions and even pray with you.

Father in heaven, thank You for this text of Scripture. It is a diamond to us and I pray that its truth would put its arms around us and lift us up, strengthen us and encourage us. In Jesus' name. Amen.