

### ACCORDING TO PLAN!

***"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. 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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."***

Let's say you went to the Minneapolis Symphony. One violinist from the third violin section begins to play. It probably would not sound much like music because he is playing a harmony section. It would be a bunch of notes that don't mean anything all by themselves. But then all the violins start playing, and then the woodwinds, then the percussion and finally the brass section, and when you put it all together, it is beautiful music with each part harmonizing with the rest.

That, in a sense, is what the Lord is doing for you. Everything in your life is like an instrument in the symphony. By itself, it may not seem like much, but you put it all together, it is a symphony. Everything in your life is being orchestrated into something beautiful by the Lord. He certainly did not plan disaster and trouble; these are things that happen because of sin, but he promises he uses everything for our good. And what is that good? He chose us to be glorified with him in heaven. Let's see how it all is going according to plan.

#### *I. God works everything out for our good.*

***"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."*** The apostle Paul sounds so sure, doesn't he. ***"We know,"*** he states in our text. How many times in our life can we say with absolute certainty, "I know?" Listen to your self speak during the day. How many times do we say, "I think," or "I believe" or "It seems to me?" But Paul says here, ***"We know."*** And what do we know with 100% certainty? ***"We know that God works everything out for our good."*** Paul doesn't say "some things." Everything in your life is worked and managed and sculpted by God to end up for your good.

Looking back, it is easy to see the good things. You can see how God used your experiences and education to give you a job that you like, provided for you needs, gave you a spouse you love and children that give you pleasure. We can look on all of this and say, "Yes, life is good," and agree God is doing a good job.

But what about the things that don't seem good like those bad, evil, painful times in life? I mean, it is hard to understand how God is working the cancer diagnosis out for someone's good, or that divorce, or unemployment. But remember, faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. We may not see it right away. We may not see it this side of heaven, but faith knows what the eyes cannot see, that God will also work the terrible things in life out for good.

Probably the greatest example of this is Joseph in the Old Testament. Hated by his brothers, Joseph was sold into slavery, accused wrongfully of rape, and imprisoned for life in the dungeons of Pharaoh. From there Joseph ended up as the second in command of all of Egypt. When he met his brothers, Joseph was able to say, ***"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good."*** God took nasty things like hatred, slavery, imprisonment, and used them to put Joseph in the position to save his brothers and family and thousands of others. Another example comes from Paul. He knew he would end up going to Rome. But he never imagined how he would get there. Instead of buying a ticket on a passenger liner, God got him there by a different way. It started with a riot in Jerusalem, a severe beating, two years held without trial, a shipwreck, and a bite by a poisonous snake.

God can even turn sinful actions into good. Look at Jacob who had two wives and two mistresses, a sin against God's will for marriage. Yet out of that came Joseph whom God used to save God's people, and Judah who would be an ancestor of Jesus. God twists bad things for good.

The Bible is full of examples of that. He used the devil to strengthen Job's faith. Then there is Samson, Abraham, Jacob, and many others. And your life is full of examples, too. Often we don't realize it at the moment. I like it how Luther once put it. He said that God's ways are like reading Hebrew. You see, Hebrew reads from right to left and for us who normally read left to right, Hebrew is "backwards." It is hard to see God's plans forwards like reading left to right. It is hard to see how he can make good out of that. But if we wait patiently until his plans have been accomplished, then, beginning with the end, like reading right to left like Hebrew, we can look back and see how everything unfolded for our good.

But what is this good?

#### *II. He works everything out for our salvation.*

***"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. 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"*** Often we interpret this passage to mean only temporal good. A man loses his job and gets another, better job. Obviously God worked it out for good. But think bigger than that. God is working everything out so we

may spend eternity with him in heaven. To do that, God must make it possible for us to be in heaven and the only way is to make us conform us to Jesus Christ.

I am sure you have stayed in a hotel or two. To get into your hotel room, you need one of those credit card keys. It looks like a credit card with a magnetic strip on the back. But it isn't. You could try to swipe your VISA or MasterCard in the slot to open the door, but it will not work. You could swipe your gas card, ATM card, any card, and it will not work. Only the card from the hotel will open the door.

What can we swipe to get into heaven? Everything we have will not work even though it looks like it would. No matter what we swipe, a life of decent good works, being better than others, and so on, it will not work. We don't match heaven or God. So God gives us a key to heaven, Jesus Christ. It works because the information on the magnetic strip on that key matches the code in the door. The holy life God demands for heaven is there because Jesus lived that holy life for us. The sins we commit are not recorded there because Jesus paid for them on the cross. He is the key. Going through the door to heaven would be as if you and I are Jesus Christ and not ourselves! That is what it means to be conformed to Christ. This is God's plan to save us, and he worked out all of history to make it happen when Christ came to live and die for us. ***"When the time had fully come, God sent his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem us under law."***

So in Christ we have access to God and heaven. But now he needs to get us there. ***"For those God foreknew he predestined."*** This is where many people get into trouble. When it says here that God foreknew, it isn't in human terms. Take baseball, for example. Professional baseball teams have scouts. They will hear about some good pitcher and go and watch him play. If they think he has potential, they would make offers to him and try to get him into their minor league teams.

It is an error to think that God looked ahead into the future, saw that you would be a pretty good person and thus he decided to save you. In speaking to the Israelites, Moses said, ***"It is not because of your righteousness or your integrity that you are going to take possession of the land."*** God did not chose the Israelites to be his people because they were better than others. In fact, they proved time and again that they were worse than everyone else. So why did he chose them? It wasn't because we are better or would believe. It is because of his love. This word, "foreknow," is a special kind of knowledge. It not only knows the future, it causes the future. Looking ahead God saw you and me. He wants us to be heaven. That is why he sent Jesus. Now he makes sure that we know and believe in Jesus. He literally choses us and then makes sure certain things happen to us.

***"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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified."*** God works things out so you may believe and be saved. It is no accident that you were born when you were born, met the people you have met, had the parents you had. And it is no accident that he used some if not all of those people to introduce you to God's Word. Through that Word called you to faith through the Holy Spirit. It may have been at your baptism. It may have been when you were older. And when he called you to faith, he justified you. Now justify is a word we Lutherans must know by heart. If I call you up at 2:00 AM and ask you what "justify" means, you should be able to answer, "To declare not guilty of sin." When God brought you to faith, you were declared not guilty of your sin. Are you beginning to see how he is working things out to save us?

And he continues to work things out to strengthen that faith or call us back when we sin. Look at Peter when he denied Christ in the courtyard. He was throwing away Christ and his salvation. Yet, what happened each time he denied Christ? The rooster crowed. That crowing rooster and the look of Jesus led Peter to weep bitterly and repent. If God could use a rooster in Peter's life, what has he used in your life to nudge if not drag you back to him? Sometimes all it takes is a little tap on the shoulder, other times a great big whack in the rear-end, but God uses all things for the good of our salvation even if it hurts.

Each instrument in a symphony has its place and joined together with all the other instruments, will make beautiful music. Listen to the song God is writing. Each part of your life, taken all by itself, may seem confusing, even bad. But put it all together, it has one purpose: so you may be glorified with him in heaven. Trust the Lord. We not understand how, but it is all going according to HIS plan. INJ Amen.