

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Really, All Things?

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Scripture:

Romans 8:28-30

²⁸ 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. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

Transcript:

If you don't know me, my name is Anthony Ballard. I serve on our Go and Grow team. Thanks for being here on Memorial Day weekend and on all ages Sunday, those of you joining online. If you're here in person and online on a weekend like this, you actually get a special blessing for God, because it's a weekend. Long weekend. Just kidding. That's not true.

Today's scripture is from Romans chapter 8 of chapter eight, verse 28 through 30. 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 image of his son, that he might be the first born among many brothers and sisters. Those who predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified. If you're new to Christianity or to church culture in general, this scripture has become something, what I would call a fortune cookie verse.

A fortune cookie verse, these are verses that we throw at people to help them feel better about themselves. We begin to quote them so casually that they kind of begin to lose their meaning and their power. I don't know about you, but for me, fortune cookies are pretty much worthless. I got a fortune cookie once that said, "Laughter is coming your way." For me, I kind of laugh almost every day. This verse, all things work for good, tends to be quoted like that. It's made synonymous with this phrase, everything happens for a reason.

You can say everything happens for a reason when facing an inconvenience here or there, like a canceled flight, or a canceled concert or something like that. As a country, we've been through way too much, the past two weeks for me to stand here and offer you fortune cookie Bible verses. We've seen mass shootings take place at a church, a grocery store, and a school. These are places that we visit on a weekly basis. I know many of you in your personal lives are experiencing all kinds of sufferings and tragedies.

Romans 8:28 isn't for when your car breaks down, or when your vacation plans get canceled. Romans 8:28 is for those who are suffering, those who are persecuted, and facing trials. It tells us, it promises us, that God reworks everything for a new plan. This is not wishful thinking, but it's Christian hope. I love how the amplified version puts this verse. It says, "And we know with great confidence that God who is deeply concerned about us, causes all things to work together as a plan for good, for those who love God, to those who are called according to his plan and purpose."

This is why we shouldn't equate the universe with the God of the Bible. The universe is indifferent, but the God of the Bible is active. He's engaging us, and he's not passive. He rallies for those that he loves. Some Bible translations actually leave out the name God as working all things for good. In the original Greek, God's name is always there. The focus of this verse, isn't the all things, but the subject of the verse is God himself, who's working, who's planning, and who's moving always.

All things themselves are not good. Some of the things we've seen happen in our country the past two weeks are purely evil. We know from scripture that God doesn't make evil happen, but there's no evil that can come upon God's people that he won't rework for our growth and for his glory. When we're faced with all kinds of trials and tragedies, the question is, what is your focus? Is it the all things, or is it the God who is deeply concerned about us?

Depending on your situation, this might be hard to believe. Remember that God works things for our good, but not to our liking. We're called according to his plan and his purpose, not our own. When we pray, God make things right. It's often how he sees fit. If you're a person who likes being in control, I'm sure there's at least one person in here, this probably sounds awful, but that's okay, because God is good.

There is a song from VBA in 2019 called I'm Trusting You. It was a theme song for the week. Maybe some of you have heard it. After hearing the kids in one week singing this song maybe 30 times, I thought my head was going to explode. I'm not kidding. After a while, I found myself singing this song, and I was like, these lyrics are kind of deep. The song goes like this: wherever you lead me, I'm going to follow. I'm trusting you, God. You are good. Life will be crazy, wild and amazing. I'm trusting you, God. You are good.

All right, Ezekiel, can I join the worship team now? Just kidding now. That's not going to happen. That's why they have me preaching. God's plans are not our own, but we can trust his plans, because he's good. What has God predestined for us? That all believers become replications of Jesus. For verse 29 says, "For those God for knew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son, that he might be the first born among many brothers and sisters." There's no false target here where it's like, oh, that's just Jesus. We can't actually be like that.

There is actually an expectation and a predetermined plan that we will actually be like him. The goal of discipleship is that we become like Jesus, and we help others be like him until he has many brothers and sisters. In fact, the word Christian was kind of used as a derogatory term when it first comes up in the Bible. That word meant little Christ. It was essentially like calling someone a copycat of Jesus. That's our goal as a church, to be making each other, all of us, making each other into copycats of Jesus.

That's because disciples are copycats. If you've never had a copycat phase before in your life, now is the time to start. When I was six years old, there were two people that I thought were the coolest people on the planet. It was my brother, Adam, my oldest brother, and my cousin, Robert. They had all the cool stuff. They had the cool clothes. They had the cool music and video games. I would try to wear their clothes, but I could never truly look like them, because they were 18 and 14 and I was six. This changed one Christmas when my family bought us all matching pairs of Air Jordans together.

It was Christmas 1996. If you had the Air Jordan twelves, black and white in 1996, you were absolutely certifiably cool. Some of you don't know what I'm talking about, but just

trust me. What really made this special wasn't that I was just matching them, but I had a piece of their image on me. That's what God is doing with us. He's taking the image of Christ, and he's placing on us until we all look like him. Disciples are full on copycats of Jesus.

If Jesus forgives his enemies, I'm going to do that too. If Jesus arranges the schedule to meet with outcasts, I'm going to do that too. Jesus fasted and prayed, I'm going to do that too. Is that last one really hard for some of you? Maybe, but that's what a copycat does. Jesus said in Matthew 10:25, "It is good for a student to be like the teacher, and for the servant to be like the master." Imagine a world where day by day, everyone is becoming more and more like Jesus.

That is what we're called to be. In Romans verse 30, it says in Romans eight, verse 30, it says, "And those he predestined he also called, and those he called, he also justified. Those he justified, he also glorified." Predestined, called, justified, glorified. There is a lot of Bible theology words there, and I was going to try to skip them, but they're there. We have to go with this. Hang with me for a second.

What Paul is doing is he's breezing through this process of salvation. Think of all these words as links in a chain. Each one connects to the other, and you don't get one without the other. Salvation doesn't just happen, but it's God's past, present, and future plan for all people to come to the knowledge of his son. Predestined is God's plan set in motion in the past, and it's happening now in the present, and for the future to come.

We're called to the lifelong process of becoming like Jesus, which is otherwise referred to as sanctification. Then we're justified, which means to be declared righteous, and declared free from the guilt of sin, based on what Jesus did for us on the cross. Predestined, called, justified, glorified. Being glorified is the final piece of the process. This is the big Kahuna. It is the grand finale. Okay?

Simply put, this is our life after death. When Jesus returns, all believers will experience the absolute removal of the presence and power of sin. The Christians who are dead will be resurrected to new, immortal, and perfect actual bodies. Those who are alive will be transformed the same way. On the day of Jesus' return, we will be resurrected to new life like him, and we won't get sick, we won't die, and we especially will not sin anymore. We will be, in no exaggeration, perfect human beings. We will reign with him in the kingdom of God. Doesn't that sound like a good day?

I don't think we hear this often enough though, because on a day to day basis, we hear more about our souls going to heaven than our bodily resurrection. The people who wrote the New Testament actually expected a bodily resurrection, because of Old Testament prophecy and because of who Jesus was. Martha, and the story of Lazarus, Martha's the sister of Lazarus, and Lazarus has died. Jesus is having this conversation with Martha.

He says to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha answered, "I know he will rise again, in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus says to her, "I am the resurrection in the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die." Martha had it right. The resurrection she was waiting for had already come through Jesus. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he was still mortal. Next time, Lazarus would be immortal like all of us. When we speak about life after death, we've been formed to say when our souls go to heaven, it'll all be better.

That's true, but that's not the Bible's focus. If you want to sound like a New Testament person, you'll say, "At the return of Christ, when I'm resurrected, all will be made right." That's how the New Testament talks. That's how Martha, the apostle, Paul, and John and all those guys, that's how they talked. Pixar made this fantastic movie, if you've seen it, it's called Soul. It's a movie about what happens when you die, and what does it truly mean to live?

If you haven't seen it, it's brilliant. You should watch it. There's a part of the movie where they make character, Joe, dies. He turns into a soul, and he's headed for this place called the great beyond. It's a place that's like heaven, but it's not. We don't really know what it is. From a Christian perspective, though, there's one thing that I think the creators missed. It's that ultimate end of what happens after we die.

Our ultimate hope isn't that we won't ever die, or that we'll stay disembodied souls in heaven. Our hope is that even if we die, our actual bodies will 100% for sure, be resurrected by Jesus when he returns. That's our hope. The ultimate hope Paul's talking about isn't just the soul, but it's the body again, but way better than it has been. Body, soul, body.

When you think glorification, think about the resurrected body, like Jesus at Easter, but for yourself and everyone in here. Jesus is the resurrection. Because we've been justified, our glorification is absolutely guaranteed. Predestined, called, justified, glorified. If you notice,

the apostle Paul, he writes about these words in past tense. He writes about them as if they've already happened. That's because in Paul's mind, all this is already done. God has already made up his mind about what he's going to do with us. It cannot be stopped.

Pastor Scott mentioned last week that we are in this in between time of the already and not yet. It's the time between Jesus' victory at his resurrection, and his future return to come. Everything in the New Testament is best understood with an already and not yet framework, because God has already fully initiated his unstoppable plan of salvation, but has not yet been fully completed until the return of Jesus.

Already, we're what we're going to be, but we're not yet fully what we're going to be. Already, Jesus has rescued us from sin and from death, but we just have not yet experienced this full removal and power and influence from our lives. Already, not yet. God is so trustworthy that we can talk about what he will do as if it's already happened. I'm going to say that again, because I didn't hear one amen.

In the chat too, I can see it. Just kidding. God is so trustworthy that we can talk about what he will do as though it's already happened. Amen. Amen. Already, not yet. First John says it. "Dear friends, now we are children of God. What we will be has not yet been made known, but we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." It's already been locked in. The life to come is absolutely guaranteed.

This is why scripture so often tells us to rejoice in our sufferings, to rejoice when facing trials, and to rejoice in the Lord always. In a sense, Christians are futurists. We look to the future for our present sufferings and our present circumstances, because our values aren't based on this age, but they're based on the age to come, which is the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.

We live the future today as if it's already happened. That is going to make us look like crazy people very often. Psalm 27 says it, "That I will remain confident of this. I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." If you want to see this goodness now, and today, it is determined by us, the church. It's determined by how relentless we are at becoming disciples of Jesus in, every area of our lives. Now, Pastor Scott tells us that we are a church that doesn't agree on anything.

Already, God is conforming us to the image of his son. We will have absolute unity. Imagine a totally unified [Belprez 00:17:23] on all the issues in our community, all the issues in the

world. Then we just get launched out as little copycats of Jesus to handle all those problems and to preach the news of Jesus. Imagine that. The thing is we are going to be that church, and we will fail often, and we will have success sometimes.

Every time you find yourself overcome with your own sin and your own hopelessness, say this: "Already, I'm what I'm going to be. I'm just not yet what I'm going to be." We can speak this about our church, and for your family when you're driving to church, and you're having an argument in the car. Nobody? Already, we're what we're going to be. We're just not yet what we're going to be. In God's mind, we're already predestined, already called, justified, and glorified. It's written in past tense, and it's already done.

The question still remains. Does God truly work all things for the good of those who love him? One of my favorite preachers is a woman named Terry McFadden Solomon. She's one of my favorite preachers because she's also my maternal grandmother. I'm not bragging when I say this, trust me, but there have been many churches that I've been to the size of Belprez in LA, where the pastors are coming to me, and they found out that I'm related to her and they're like, "Terry's your grandmother? I can't believe it."

They're just in awe. I've had people cornering me, and they're in tears and streaming about some of her ministries for women who are in abusive relationships, and people who are struggling with drug abuse, and the list goes on. For most of my life, I've witnessed with my own eyes, her minister to groups of thousands, at places like the Great Western Forum. I've also seen the holy spirit work through her in rooms of just three people.

Before she knew Jesus, and before all the preaching, all the book writing, and the world tours and ministries, and the miracles, she was married to my grandfather, Adam McFadden. He was a very successful businessman in 1960s Los Angeles. His full story is one for another time. At the age of 49, he died of lung cancer. He had died before he was able to complete all of his affairs and handle business to secure her and my family. He ended up leaving behind my grandmother with all kinds of legal battles between her and his family.

On top of that, my grandmother had to raise two daughters that she had to care for, one being my mom, and the other being my aunt Teresa, who was born with several birth defects, and had to go under several surgeries all before the age of two. Single mom going through all of that. On top of that, my grandmother suffered with depression and anxiety, and was rapidly losing all the comforts and success that she and my grandfather had built.

Fast forward to a few weeks ago, we were on the phone talking, because we've recently experienced a tragic death in our family. I was talking with my grandmother, telling her about the irony that I would be writing a sermon about how God seemingly works all things for good, even when facing tragedy. She told me, she said, "I will tell you about God working all things for good." She started to preach a little. She said, "I don't think I would've become the Christian I am today, had your grandfather, Adam, not died. With all the suffering his death brought, his life was business."

All she wanted to do was help him achieve his goals. Had he lived, they would've been financially successful, but spiritually, they would've been failures. My grandfather's physical death ended up being the beginning of new life for her. God healed her. God called her to his purpose, and he placed other disciples in her life. He called her to this ministry that has led thousands of people to Jesus. She spent much of her time praying that her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren would all know Jesus and live for him.

For years, she would say to me, "Anthony, you need to be a preacher." She would literally pray during dinner or any other time that, Lord, make Anthony a preacher. I'm like, "Just because you're a preacher doesn't mean I want to be." That was literally what I would say. James 5:16 says, "The prayers of a righteous person are powerful and effective." Here I am. This was God's plan, that he started way back in 1970, with some serious suffering experience by my grandmother, that he worked for her good.

As she said, she wouldn't be the Christian she is today, had none of that happened, which also means that I wouldn't be standing in front of you here today had none of that happened. Over 50 years ago, God was reworking bad for good. Belprez, Many of your family stories are similar. You got to take time and see how the threads all connect. Many of you here minister to me, and you help me become a better copycat of Jesus. We're all going to help each other be better copycats of Jesus, until Bellevue is covered with people who are healing sickness, who are forgiving enemies, and loving our enemies. There's nothing that we can do to stop God's plan.

Already where we're going to be. We're just not yet fully there. Does God work all things for the good of those who love him, and who are called according to his purpose? My family's testimony absolutely says yes. It's not even the end yet. I think you can say the same thing. It might take two weeks, and it might take 50 years. I know that's hard. If you trust God, you will find that he is good. Before I close, I want to take time to pray for us.

Some of us here have this hope, and maybe some of us are a little unsure if we have this hope in Jesus or not. I want to pray with you. In John 11, Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die. Whoever lives by believing in me will never die." If you believe this, or if you want to believe this, will you pray this prayer with me?

Jesus, I hear your call. Help me to become like you more and more each day. Help me to love you. Help me to love your plans, and to be part of your mission in this world. Lord, resurrect my body to new life when you return. Amen. If you prayed that prayer for the first time, you're a Christian. If you prayed it for the 10th time, you're still a Christian.

No matter how many times you've prayed it or something like it, here's what I want you to do. Please, come after the service and find a prayer minister, and just pray. This will be the beginning of your lifelong journey of becoming a copycat of Jesus. Let me tell you, from experience and from my family's experience, it's the best decision that you can make. It's not an easy one, but it's the best one. Amen. All right.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Icebreaker Question: Have you ever been mistaken for someone famous?

Opening Question: Looking back...Last week we talked about the assurance we receive as a child of God. How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions - *Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:*

a. In your life, have you seen God work all things for your good? Or are you still waiting?

b. In what area of your life are you working on being a "copycat" of Jesus right now? How's that going?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.