



**Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford**

November 18/19 2017 - Greg Harris

**Hope in Suffering: Part 2 - Glory is Certain (Romans 8:28-30)**

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

This past Sunday, last week on Sunday, marked the ninth year anniversary from when my mom's mom, my nana, passed away. She was by far one of the most significant people in my walk of following Jesus. She would often tell me things like, "Greg, before you make a decision, make sure you pray." And I'm like, "Right, prayer. Prayer's good. Okay, thanks, Nana, I appreciate it." When we had the opportunity, my sister sent around the video that she made for the memorial service of some pictures and highlights, and that kind of stuff from my nana's life. Watching it again a few times this past week, I was reminded of, even though nine years had passed and I kind of had gotten used to walking with that particular limp from the sorrow, still, the moments of grief still come up. And this past week I was thinking how much – it was awful that she wasn't able to be there for my wedding, she wasn't able to meet my son, she wasn't able to meet a lot of her great grandchildren. And even though, in some ways, it's an old sorrow, it was a reminder, this past week, that sorrow is a normal part of the life of every human. More a part of a Christian life, even. Last week if you were here, that's what we talked about, that suffering is normal. And Romans 8 talks a lot about suffering, actually. Last week, we talked about, though, that for the Christian person, even though suffering and sorrow is a normal experience, it's not as though we suffer without hope. We looked at how Paul was talking about the future glory that awaits those who have their faith in Christ, that our bodies will be resurrected, that our creation will be resurrected, that we will dwell with God in a cosmos that will never decay. See, even though we have suffering now, we talked last week about how we can have hope in suffering because glory is coming. And this week we're going to keep going through Romans 8, we're going to be looking at verses 28 through 30, and here's how Paul, after talking about the glory that is coming, says, this is what he says in Romans 8:28:

**"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."**

See, we can have hope in suffering not just because glory is coming, but because glory is certain. And the certainty of the glory that's yet to come is addressed in Romans 8:29-30, where Paul says,

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

See, Romans 8:28-30 is talking about how we can have hope in the midst of our suffering and sorrows because glory, for the Christian, resurrection life, is certain. So as we study this passage, we're going to see two things. We're going to see the controversy of this passage, and we're going to see the



comfort from this passage. So we'll look at the controversy of this passage, and also the comfort that comes from understanding this passage.

### [The Controversy]

So, first of all, let's look at the controversy that comes from Romans 8:29-30 in particular. Here's the verses:

“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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

This passage is all about God's activity in the salvation of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. So there's other passages that talk about our activity in salvation, but this passage in particular is talking about God's activity in those who love him and are called according to his purpose. So, I'm going to present two views of how to understand those five words. Those five words are sometimes known as “the chain of salvation,” or viewing each of those words as a link that's linked to the next part of the chain. And those five words have a little bit of controversy around them. So, I'm going to give two views, the two most common views, about how to understand these words in terms of God's activity in our salvation. So first of all, I need to say that this is probably going to feel more like theology class than sermon for the first bit, but hopefully we'll all be able to keep tracking and it will be okay. Also, I need to make this really clear, that this is an issue where good Christians disagree. There are people on our staff and people on our elder board who would have different viewpoints on this issue. So, it is an area where good Christians disagree, and yet, I think that, as a pastor and a preacher, I'm compelled, and actually commanded, to teach what I believe the Scriptures are teaching. So I'm going to present both views, but I'm going to try to persuade you of my view. Okay? So, unashamedly, I want to try to win your mind over by the end of our time together. But if I don't, that's okay, we can still all love Jesus, I promise. Okay?

So here's Option A, for understanding God's activity in our salvation, or in the salvation of those who love him and are called according to his purposes. So, we're going to have the five words on the screen, we're going to look at them word by word and how to understand them. So, “foreknew”. That's the first thing God does is he *foreknows* those who are called according to his purpose. And this language of “foreknowledge,” according to this first view, is that it should be understood as God's *foresight*. Or, God *foresaw*, down the corridors of history, what people would do. So, imagine that I'm throwing a party for my son. And I want to invite all of you to my son's party, because I want all the gifts for him, okay? So, what I'm going to do, because I paid Google, and they gave me access to your calendar, and now I can see every single one of your calendars, and I can see who's available and who's not available on the day that I'm going to throw my son a birthday party. I have the ability, because of Google, to foresee who will come to the party and who will not. See, this first idea of God's foreknowledge is this idea that he foresees who will make a decision to put their faith in Jesus. When he presents them the opportunity to believe the gospel, he looks down the corridors of history, and he can see who will choose him, when given the opportunity. And it's on the basis of him being able to see their calendar, to see the decision that they're going to make, that he decides to predestine, call, justify, and glorify them. So, foreknowledge, in this view, is foresight.

Second word: predestination. God foresaw, he foreknew, he *predestined*. This imagery, or this language, this word is understood in this first viewpoint, as God *intending* something to be. So, the language here of God predestining, has to do in particular with God conforming those who love him,



who are called according to his purpose, he's *conforming* them to the image of his Son. So, he's *intending* to have them look a certain way. So, let's say that you have a daughter, and you know your daughter really, really well. And you know that given the right circumstances around your daughter's life, she will excel in university. And so, your work right now, as her parents, is you're going to save all the money you can, to give her the best education you can. It's your intention. You know her well, but it's your intention that she will take that money and spend it on going to university. She may not actually go to university, but you know her well, and it's your intent, you've orchestrated things so that it would be true of her that she will go to university. It's not that it's a determined thing, it's an intended thing.

So, those who God foreknew he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, and he called. So the way that this language of "called" is understood in this first view, is that he's invited; he's made the option available, he's made the gospel invitation open. So, go back to my birthday party imagery. So not only can I see your calendar, but I know that I still need to make the invitation – I still have to send the invitations out. I know who's going to respond, but that doesn't stop me from needing to actually send the invitation out to people. Here's the added part of what this word "called" means for this first view, which doesn't fit as much into my illustration of the birthday party, okay, so I'm not going to try to make it fit. So, this second part of this idea of God calling is this idea that he's really good at bringing circumstances around your life to help you make that decision. So, part of this work is he needs to get you outside of your sinful thinking. Because every single one of us is born into sin, and our minds don't think the way that they should. So even if we were given the opportunity, in our sinful state we aren't going to accept the gospel. So God, in his act of prevenient grace, lifts us out of our bad, sinful thinking, to give us the free choice to either choose to accept the gospel or not. See, he knows who's going to choose him still. But he still makes that invitation open. He calls them. So, through the gospel, God calls all people to himself, the invitation is made to all, even though he knows who's going to respond. Those who he has called, and who accept his call, are those who are justified, they are declared righteous. A different status is given to them. So, as sinners, we are all – by nature, our status is one of a rebel against a holy God. But because of our faith in Christ, we can be given the status of perfect. So, I don't know if you follow the royal family at all, some of you might. Kate Middleton is the name of this girl, who was just a normal girl. She was from a kind of middle-upper class family, but just normal, simple Kate. But then, she married a prince and her status changed. She was *declared* royalty. She was *declared* the princess, the Duchess of Cambridge. She didn't change, but the declaration of her changed, she was no longer simple Kate, she was the Duchess of Cambridge. This is an image for justification. That we are *declared* something because we are now in a new relationship with Jesus, that because we've confessed of our sins, we trust in Jesus for the salvation of our sins, we trust in his perfect life as our perfect record before a holy God. We are in Christ, and we are declared righteous. It's a new thing that's been declared over us.

And those who are justified are glorified. And glorification is what we talked about last weekend. In short, glorification is the resurrected body that we will have as believers, and the resurrected, new creation that we will dwell in forever. And God will be our God and we will be his people. Our bodies will look like the body that Jesus had when he resurrected from the grave, where you could touch him, and you could speak to him, and he could eat with you. It was a physical thing, it was just perfect. Never going to decay. The glorified state is the resurrected state. So that's the first viewpoint. That God foreknew, so he foresaw, on the basis of his foreseeing he predestined, he intends people to be conformed to the image of his Son, he invites all, even though he knows only some will respond, and those who respond are declared righteous and they will be a part of resurrected life.



Here's the second viewpoint. This is the one I'm going to try to convince you of, so I have more Bible verses, okay? [Laughter] Just full disclosure. Here's Option B for understanding God's activity in salvation for those who are called. So, same five words, different understandings on some of them, okay? First word, God *foreknew*. I think the best way to understand that language of "foreknow," is for it to be understood in a relational way, for it to be understood in a "loved" kind of way. So, imagine that you have an uncle, and he has \$5 million that he wants to give you as an inheritance. And so he has decided that he wants you to receive the inheritance; not because he can see what decision you'll make about accepting the inheritance, but he simply chose you to receive the inheritance because he's related to you. I think when the language of knowledge and foreknowledge is used in the Scriptures and it has to do with people, it's always to do with relationship. When the language of knowledge and foreknowledge has to do with events or plans, yes, God does know the outcome of what's going to happen in the future. So in Acts 2, it says that the crucifixion of Jesus was according to the plan and foreknowledge of God. God *knew* that the event called the crucifixion of Jesus was going to take place. That's a foreknowing thing that he had. And yet when the language of "knowledge" is used in the Bible to talk about God knowing people, it's not that he knows true things about them, it's that he knows them relationally. Exodus 33:17:

**"And the LORD said to Moses, 'I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.'"**

**John 17:3:**

**"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."**

**Matthew 7:21-23:**

**"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' [which is good theology] will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"**

So, did Jesus not *know* what would happen in those people's lives? No, Jesus didn't know them relationally. We use the word "know" this way too, right? We say, "You need to go out on dates with someone before you marry them so you can get to know them." I'll say, "I've known Pastor Jonathan (who leads worship in here in the Worship Centre), I've known Jonathan for over 20 years. I'm getting to know Pastor Dwight." And I like him better. [Laughter] Right, we use the word "know" in this way, in a relational way. 1 Corinthians 8:3, Paul says,

**"But whoever loves God is known by God."**

So look, when it comes to foreknowledge in Romans 8:29, this isn't about events that will take place, it's about people. Namely those who love God and are called according to his purpose. So therefore, upon the basis of his relationship, his fore-love of these people, he will predestine, call, justify, and glorify.

So, those he foreknew, he predestined. Here's how I think we should understand the word "predestined." I think it makes better sense to understand it as something like "decided" or "determined." So, when you're a parent and you have little kids, and I see some little kids, you pick for



your kids what clothes they're going to wear. You determine the clothing that they're going to be wearing. And usually one parent is better at clothing the kids than the other one, right? They look really good in one outfit because you knew the mom put them in the clothes, and the next day they're in stripes and polka-dots and you're like, "Woah, Dad, smelled them - they were clean when you put them in them." Right? We as parents determine what our kids will look like on the basis of what they're wearing. Paul is saying that God's activity in our salvation is to predestine us to be conformed to the image of Jesus. He's determined that we are going to look like Jesus. Now, if you've been a Christian for a while, you know that Paul in other places tells us things like, "Work out your own salvation in fear and trembling." Because he's saying, "Live your life in such a way that you make decisions the way Jesus would." Right? You wear the wristband, "What Would Jesus Do?" Live your life asking that question. Make decisions, act in certain ways, love the way Jesus loved, so that you grow in your Christ-likeness. That is a command that's to given us, but in this passage, Paul's talking about God's work in our salvation. And from God's perspective, his activity towards those who love him who are called according to his purpose, is he has predestined them to conform to the image of his Son. That language of "being conformed to the image of his Son" ultimately refers to the resurrected body that we will one day have, but it also includes the growing in our Christ-likeness. This is something that God has determined to put you in. He's going to put you in clothes so that you look like Jesus. He's determined to do so.

And those he predestined, he called. I think the language of "called" here, makes the most sense to talk about God converting and transforming. That when God calls, things happen. John 11, Jesus is going to visit some friends, and on his way to visit these friends, he hears that one of his friends who's named Lazarus, he dies. And in John 11 we have the shortest verse in the Bible where it says,

"Jesus wept."

He's sorrowful over the loss of his dear friend Lazarus. And when he gets to the place where they buried Lazarus, he tells the people nearby, "Look, I need you to remove the stone away from the tomb." And they say, "But Jesus, like, he's been dead for awhile, it's going to really stink." He's like, "No, no, remove the stone." So they do. Jesus looks right into that tomb and he says, "Lazarus, come out!" And out comes Lazarus. See, when God calls, the dead are transformed to life. This is what it looks like for God to call, it looks like a transforming work. Now, listen though, Lazarus still had to come out of the tomb, right? He still had to make the decision to come out of the tomb. He was dead, he was given new life, he came out of the tomb. Paul talks about how we need to make a decision, even when God calls us. Romans 10:

"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved."

Yes, you do need to make that decision. Paul isn't speaking out of two sides of his mouth here. There is a need for a response. But the fact that we respond doesn't negate God's transforming work. God's transforming work *enables* us to respond. Christianity is not the story of good people becoming better; it's the story of dead people becoming alive. And when God calls, people walk out of tombs. John 6:44 makes this point also, it says,

"No one can come to me [Jesus says] unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day."



**Acts 16:14:**

**“One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”**

**Yeah, of course, from our perspective we need to make the decision to believe the gospel. But from God’s perspective, when he calls, dead people live. It’s a transforming work. And those whom he called, he justified. This is the being declared righteous. This is the simple Kate becoming the Duchess of Cambridge. This is the rebels towards God becoming sons and daughters of God. From being hell-bound to being heirs and co-heirs with Christ. He will declare us righteous. Because as 2 Corinthians 5:21 says,**

**“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”**

**God will declare you righteous upon your faith. And those who are justified will be glorified. You will receive the resurrected body, you will dwell in the resurrected, new creation. This is going to be your future as a believer, for those who love God and are called according to his purposes. The hope of the Christian life is resurrection life. And look, those whom he foreknew, he predestined, he called, he justified, he glorified. There is no one who falls through the cracks of these five truths. Those whom he foreknew, he *will* glorify. There is a certainty for the glory that is coming in the life of the believer.**

**So look, I need to make a quick aside here. Because the question is, how do you know if you’re a part of this group? How do I know if I’m *in* this group or not? Well, verse 28 told us. You’re a part of this group if you love God. For those who love God, this is true of them. So the question is, do you love God? Well, that seems like a vague question, what do you mean, do I love God? Well I mean, do you know you’re a sinner and that you need saving? And do you want to follow Jesus as your Lord because he’s also your Savior? See, if you believe that Jesus is both your Savior and your Lord, you love God. And the reason you love God is because he has done a work in your life so you can love him. See, there’s no such thing as a person who wishes they could be saved but is not a part of this group. It’s not a category that exists. Everyone who wants to be saved, everyone who loves God, who needs saving from sin and wants to follow Jesus as Lord, it’s evidenced in the fact that they know that, that they believe that, it’s evidence that God came to the tomb of their heart and said, “Come out!” Everyone who wants to believe is going to be a part of this group called “the called.”**

**So look, here’s the overview of these two viewpoints for us. These words all describe God’s activity in our salvation, and I’ve done my best to describe both views fairly. You might hold to the top view and say, “Yeah but when it comes to the language of predestination, I want to use the language of ‘determined,’ or when it comes to called I want to use the language of ‘transformed,’” yeah that’s okay, we can quibble over some of those words. Here’s the categorical difference between the two though. What does “foreknowledge” mean? Does foreknowledge mean that God looked down the history of time and chose who would be saved on the basis of their decision to choose him, or does God choose who will be saved because of his love and relationship with them? No conditions other than his love for them? I’m trying to persuade you that the bottom view is what the Scriptures teach. And I know that if we hold that viewpoint, that God chose us, not based on any conditions of what we brought to the table, I know that raises questions, like “how can this be fair?” How is this fair that God chooses some and not others? How do we make sense of a God that’s like that? Well, Romans 9 answers that question for us - which we’ll talk about next fall. [Laughter] So, stay tuned. [Laughter] No, it’s a hard question. But the Bible does have answers for it. So we’re going to study that passage,**



we're going to do things like study sessions to try to help us unpack how to understand this, but before Paul goes to Romans 9 to answer the challenging questions, he stays in Romans 8 for a bit. And the reason he stays in Romans 8 is because this truth that God has set his affections on those who will be saved isn't meant to be an intellectual challenge, it's meant to be a deep seated hope for the glory that's yet to come. It's to give us a certainty that those who love God will have all things work together for their good. This is intended to give you great assurance. It's supposed to be a comfort.

### [The Comfort]

So let's think about the comfort. Verse 28:

**“And we know that in all things [in our sorrows and in our joys] God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. [He's the kind of God who foreknew and predestined and called and justified and glorified.] What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

My experience in pastoral ministry hasn't been very long, but here's what I've observed so far. Is that when you ask people if they're a Christian, what they put their hope in, you get different responses. Here's a common response. If you ask someone, “Are you a Christian?” They'll say something like, “Well, I'm trying. I'm working really hard.” I think a good way to call this is “tightrope Christianity.” Their assurance of their salvation goes so far as that next step lands squarely on the tightrope. But they know that storms of life come, and winds of mindset changes, and so anything can blow them off that tightrope. The other viewpoint that people have about the assurance of their salvation, though, is that people know that their two feet are standing solid on the floor that is the character of God. They have hope in their salvation, not because of their abilities, but because of God's character. See, the image for the Christian life is not one of running out of a burning building and trying to make it out to the other side alive. The image for the Christian life and Christian salvation is that you have a heavenly Father who is stronger than you can imagine, who is carrying you out of that burning building, and will deliver you to safety. You're not trusting in your ability; you're trusting on the character of God. So do you trust God's character?

My family, right now, we're a one vehicle family, and so I have to ask people for rides, like, all the time. It's like, probably the thing that comes out of my mouth and that I text the most is, “Can you drive me somewhere?” I will only ask the people that I trust their character to actually deliver me where I'm hoping to go. So I don't ask Jonathan, right? [Laughter] We trust people to do what they say they'll do on the basis of their character. God says he'll save you. Do you trust him? Just think about the character of God. He's love. He's just. He's all powerful, he's all knowing. He is kind, he's patient. Are you willing to trust this God for your salvation? Because this God says, “Look, if you love me, it's because I've foreknown you, predestined you, called you, I've justified you, I've glorified you. It's a done deal. Trust me,” God says. And there's great assurance for salvation for those who have been called according to his purposes. And look, your lives are going to include all kinds of ups and downs. I don't have to tell you this. You're going to face mental and physical illnesses, you're going to face the loss of loved ones, you're going to face financial struggles, you're going to face all kinds of sorrows. You're also going to have moments of joy and blessing and of laughing so hard your ribs hurt. Here's what this passage is telling us, is that we have God, who is in control, who is a master weaver. He is taking every sorrow of your life, and using that thread to draw a little piece in the tapestry. He's using the joys of your life, the laughs of your life, and he's using the thread to build the tapestry, and from your perspective it's just a mess. But God's going to turn that tapestry around when Jesus returns. And you will see that all things work together for your good, because you love God and are called



according to his purposes. Not because you're really good at walking on a tightrope, but because God is trustworthy.

Look, the reason why I want to persuade you about this viewpoint that God's foreknowledge has to do with his relational commitment to us - not his ability to see how we would respond - is because I think it gives you a great hope. A God who looks down the history of time and chooses those who will choose him is a reciprocal God. He's a reactive God. But a God who sets his affections on you, just because he loves you, that's a proactive God. That's a pursuing God. See, a God who reciprocates love and who responds to us, he's a kind God who gives us something we don't deserve. But a God who pursues us and is proactive in his love for us, that's a scandalously gracious God. And it's scandalous grace that provides an anchor strong enough to hold you in the storms of your life. It's a God who's decided, "I'm going to save you because you belong to me," that's going to withstand all the joys and all the sorrows of this life. You can have hope in the midst of your suffering because your glory as a Christian is certain. Not because of your abilities, but because of the character of God.

See, this idea of God's love for us has hit new heights for me since I had my son. Listen, my love for my son is not based on if he is going to reciprocate love to me. My love for my son is not on the basis of how he's going to react to me, that's not how I love my son. How I love my son is, I look at him and I say, "You belong to me. And so I love you. Not because of what you do for me, but because you are mine." Look, if you are a Christian, it is because God has looked at you and said, "It's not because of what you could do for me, it's because you are my child. I don't care how you respond, you belong to me. And because you belong to me, I will predestine you, I will call you, I will justify you, I will glorify you. Trust my character, I am a trustworthy God." And when you believe that kind of thing, you say something like, "What shall we say in response to these things?" Because if this God is for us, who can be against us?

Let me pray for us. Father, I'm thankful for your love. I ask right now, Father, for those who are here who haven't yet decided to follow Jesus as their Lord and Savior, that you would do that work in them and they would respond in faith. Father, we believe that whosoever calls on your name will be saved. Father, I pray that that would happen this morning. And for those of us who have called on your name before, as our loving heavenly Father, through the ministry of your Son, Jesus, by the power of your Spirit, Lord would you give us hope. Would you help us trust your character, you are a trustworthy God. We don't deserve you, but we are so thankful that we have you. We're thankful that we belong to you. Lord, help us have hope. We pray this for your fame and in Jesus's name. Amen.