

Addresses Pastor's Conference

(Pastor's Conference speeches not in booklet were not available at press time.)

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"Who Paid For the Roof?"

by Bill Weber

The text for this message is Mark, Chapter 2. There is something about silence that makes people uncomfortable, have you noticed that? Mark 2:1-12 reads:

"And when He had come back to Capernaum several days afterward, it was heard that He was at home. And many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room, even near the door; and He was speaking the word to them. And they came, bringing to Him a paralytic, carried by four men. And being unable to get to Him on account of the crowd, they removed the roof above Him; and when they had dug an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic was lying. And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, 'My son, your sins are forgiven.' But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?' And immediately Jesus, perceiving in His spirit that they were reasoning that way within themselves, said to them, 'Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven'; or to say, 'Arise, and take up your pallet and walk?' 'But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, rise, take up your pallet and go home.'" And he rose and immediately took up the pallet and went out in the sight of all; so that they were all amazed and were glorifying God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this.'" (New American Standard)

This story is about an interrupted service. It is so easy to think of a worship service in terms of 'the usual'. Have you ever heard the question, "What happened at your church last Sunday?" And the reply is, "the usual." What do we mean by "the usual"?

Obviously, we feel that nothing spectacular happened. We all sang the songs in the exact order of the service. We read all the announcements. Everything was status quo. Nothing was unusual or extraordinary. As you know, there are churches that take great pride in having uniform, ritualistic services; but, there is something very special about a church where the spontaneous and unpredictable are allowed—and the unusual takes place. The story that Mark relates in Chapter 2 of his gospel is about a service in which an unusual event happens. I believe that the outstanding lesson here is that our services should never become so predictable and formatted that we do not have a spirit of anticipation and expectancy as we worship. Our faith should be vibrant and alive—always ready for God's Spirit to break into our worship and do what only He alone can do! This means we must be willing to let go of our enjoyment of a set format—and a service built around predictable, unchangeable events.

We might title this passage of scripture, "Who paid for the roof?" The story opens revealing a man with a problem, a group of concerned friends with a deep faith and a waiting Saviour who is anxious to meet the needs of people. Jesus conducted much of his ministry in the homes of the people. He often went to areas where there was not a synagogue,

or a designated place of worship. Therefore, He often taught in a home. Often, people would gather inside, filling space within the walls—as well as stand in crowded fashion in the outer yard. To see God in the flesh, and to hear Him speak was an opportunity of a lifetime, and so it was not unusual that on this particular occasion in the City of Capernaum, on the Northern coast of the Sea of Galilee across from Tiberius, Jesus was in a home teaching. Crowds had gathered to the extent that the little home was packed with people. In fact, the Bible tells us there was no room left at all. The doorways were crowded, the windows were crowded, the rooms were crowded, the hallways were crowded—there was no place for another person to join the group.

It is interesting to recognize the mood of the people as they gathered in the house. First of all, they had come to hear him because they had hungry hearts. People gather in our services today with hungry hearts—eager to receive the spiritual food our Lord can provide. It is easy to forget that *everyone* around us has a spiritual hunger in their lives. Often, because a group of people look healthy and successful, we overlook the fact that the inner man searches daily for a spiritual feeding.

Secondly, not only was there a spiritual hunger that brought them there, but there was a desperate need for help as well. There was a hoping and a wondering in their hearts—, "Can Jesus help me? Is my problem one that he can solve?"

In every service a pastor conducts, there are numerous people in the listening audience who have a specific need in their life. There are periods in all of our lives when we stand in special need of the Lord and His ministry to us. The crowd of people in this home in Capernaum were in need of help.

There were some, undoubtedly who came just out of curiosity. They wondered, "What about this Man? Is He for real? What does He look like?" There will always be the curious observers in our audiences, but it is important to realize that they stand in need of spiritual feeding just like all others.

As Jesus began to preach, he had an uncanny way of holding their attention. His interest in them and care for them was extremely evident as he spoke. He never saw them as masses, but he saw them as individuals. He never saw them as the crowd, but he saw each one as unique. He was interested in who they were and what their needs were. He saw them with the potential of being saved and the potential of being used in service. He never saw anyone beyond hope or beyond saving. Jesus never would say, "They have gone too far. Their habit patterns have been set. They cannot turn back." Sometimes, we find ourselves, even as Christians in service for the Lord, tempted to feel that some folks cannot be reached. As our prospect file grows, we, occasionally, may feel the desire to remove names from our lists—names of people who are unresponsive. There may be a temptation to even take names off the Sunday School roll, rationalizing that, "They'll never come." That attitude on our part indicates a 'giving up'—a quitting. But Jesus, the Master Teacher, never gave up on anyone. He was *always* interested in individuals, and they knew it.

The following story illustrates the message here. As a little boy walked to Dr. Moody's church, past several other churches on the way, he was asked, "Son, why do you walk so far to Dr. Moody's church?" With a wide grin, he replied, "I like to walk to Dr. Moody's church, even though it is a long way because they love me over there." As Jesus conducted His ministry, the people around Him sensed His love for them—His concern for them—His interest in them.

Jesus was able to hold their attention for another reason. When Jesus spoke to the people, he addressed their basic human spiritual needs. He talked to them about the need for which they had come to Him. When you or I go to the doctor, we visit with him about our physical hurt—our need for him. We do not waste his or our time by discussing sports or the weather. We have come to the doctor because we have a physical problem, or concern, and we want his advice. We do not want to waste time. Our primary desire is to talk about our needs. It may be inconvenient or uncomfortable, but we want someone to tell us the truth.

Preaching to people's needs is merely following the example of our

Model Teacher. When Jesus preached, he told the truth. In the crowds, there was some squirming. There was some nudging. There were some feelings of guilt. There were some feelings of shame. But Jesus aimed His messages at individuals' needs—their weaknesses. We do not see Him only bragging on their good points. He was sensitive to their needs and sought to bring them relief as he preached.

How does this relate to the church today?—or to our ministry? Of all the characteristics of a vibrant church, the most outstanding one is it must be a place where love abounds. As we relate this love to our total ministry, it follows that helping people is our general behavior. People come to us with needs, with crises in their lives, with urgencies and hurts. Day in and day out, urgent needs are brought before the church. Occasionally, it is a matter of life or death. Sometimes, it is a matter of being able to save a marriage—or locating a meal—or enabling a teenager to go back to Mother and Dad—or to encourage one to return to a job where there has been difficulty. So, it is my God-given responsibility to encourage you—and myself, as well, to prepare and address for real, real needs. The church is not open for the business of lighting candles. Its purpose is not to become fixed on some beautiful stained-glass window—as wonderful as that is. As ministers, we are here to talk about and assist in meeting real needs in the lives of the people. When we sing, we ought to be singing to meet needs; when we pray, we ought to pray about needs; and when we preach, we ought to be preaching about needs.

Jesus never wasted time. When he got up to speak he had a way of unfolding the lives of people and laying them bare. He exposed their hearts, but more than that, He met their needs and showed them a solution, an answer, to every problem they faced. As we preach and minister today, we know the abiding solution to all problems in Jesus Christ. The wonderful song "Victory in Jesus" is a testimonial to our assurance that no matter what problem we are encountering, there is victory in Christ. Jesus spoke to the people in a way they could understand. His messages were vivid and plain. Our example, from the Lord, is to speak in clear language, not vague generalities. And so this story that we read about in Mark 2 reminds us that crowds came because Jesus spoke in a direct way. And crowds will continue to come if we preach to their needs directly.

This story tells us something else, as well. It is a picture of the unique and unusual ways that people can be saved. We do not have to sing "Just As I Am" for people to be saved. We do not have to be standing in a certain place. In addition, we see in this story that people can be saved from any walk of life. A recent illustration further depicts this lesson. There was a boy who went to camp who was not a Christian.

One day while he was playing, he ripped the side of his blue jeans. He went to the counselor for the counselor to mend his pants. While the counselor was mending his jeans, he talked to the boy about what it meant to become a Christian; and as a result of that insignificant encounter, the little boy invited Christ into his life. This is an example of "way-side opportunities", of a person coming to Christ.

The man in the story in Mark 2 had a physical condition. He was in need. He was a paralytic with palsy. He was helpless. He was friendless. He was lonely. He was miserable. Beyond that, his greatest malady was that he had a spiritual problem. He did not know what it meant to be forgiven. He did not know what it meant to be made whole, to receive hope, cleansing, and spiritual restoration for his life. On this particular day, four men saw him and came under conviction. They had a sense of conviction because they were aware that there is a hell to shun and there is a heaven to receive. As they looked at this man in need, they were reminded that he was without hope unless Christ came into his life. They were further convicted because they knew there was more to life than this man had been experiencing. He deserved to know about abundant and full living, and he ought to receive forgiveness and cleansing in his life. As a result of their deep conviction, the four men were overwhelmed with a spirit of compassion. Their compassion developed as a result of genuine concern for the man—concern for his spiritual needs. They saw the man as Jesus saw him.

As the story unfolds, the men decided to take action. They did not say, "Well, let's appoint a committee to study the problem—perhaps, a 'door committee', or a 'window committee', or an 'overcrowded house' committee." They did not say, "Well, the problem is too big, it's too great, there's no way to get him in, let's give up." They could have said, "It must not be the Lord's will that this man be saved and be healed. If it was the Lord's will, there would be room in the house for him." They could have said that but they did not. They could have said, "Let someone else who is more experienced in handling paralytics do the job. We don't know what to do, and we may do the wrong thing." They could have said, "Let's just leave him outside here to wait and Jesus will probably find him and heal him." Have we ever thought of how this story

might have ended if any one of these attitudes would have been acted upon?

Our positive attitude is so vital as we minister today to those around us. Standing in the midst of a world with serious spiritual needs it is easy to think, "Someone else will do it if I do not get to it. It's someone else's job, they're more capable, they have more training. After all, I have other responsibilities." We are tempted to justify our spiritual apathy or our indifference. We try to rationalize our lack of concern that people be saved. As a model to us, these four men in Mark, Chapter 2, revealed a spirit of conviction and compassion, and God used them. They were enthusiastic about bringing men to Christ. People, including ourselves, often hear the truth but do not do anything about it. Even when we know the message applies to us, we do not do anything about it. I believe, frankly, that one day we are going to have to give an account of that indifferent attitude. Just procrastinating rather than being enthusiastic about doing the Lord's work is not pleasing to God. It is important to ask, "Are we excited about doing the work of God and the will of God? Or have we won a blue medal in thinking up reasons why we should not get involved?" In the ministry, God's work—by its nature—means that we *must* become a part of it.

We further recognize that God used the four men not only because they were enthusiastic, but they were also energetic physically. You know there are some who just get worn out doing anything for the Lord. Some just stay tired all the time. I, personally, get the tireddest when I am doing *nothing!* There is something about the Lord's work that God gives us strength for big tasks. That does not mean we ought to be foolish and abuse our health. However, we ought to want to take a big job and do our best with God's help. These four men looked at the ailing man and recognized that if he was going to be helped by Jesus, they were going to have to physically get involved in the task. They realized they might get tired lifting him up on the roof, but they decided they would do it anyway. They were willing to become energetically involved.

In addition, they were successful because there was a sense of urgency in the work at hand. They looked at this man in need and said, "He needs help now, and we're going to provide that help!" Satan's tactic has long ago been devised and been put to effect in the lives of many. It deals with procrastination. "That's a good idea, you ought to do it—but not *now!* Sure you ought to teach a Sunday School class, but don't do it *now!* Everybody ought to go to visitation some time, but not *now!* I mean you ought to yield and you ought to serve, but don't do it *now!*" Procrastinate. It is like removing a stream or force of energy from us when Satan can remove the spirit of urgency for the task that we are about to do. We are in a life and death business that has to do with the eternal destination of the souls of people. That's a big task. We cannot while away the time. There are people who, if we do not reach them, will not be reached. These men were enthusiastic, and there was a compelling urgency to their attitude. Consequently, God used them.

There is one last observation in this lesson. God used these men because they were creative in their approach. I like to be around creative people who figure out different ways of doing the Lord's work.

— It is a real temptation in the ministry to get in a rut—to think you can only do something *one way*—and if you change it, you may be violating spiritual principles. Here are some ideas to ponder. Sometimes we ought to give an invitation at the first of a service. Maybe we ought to preach right after everybody enters the Worship Center. Why not?

The four men looked at the ailing man and reasoned, "He needs to get inside that house. There's no possible way to get in the door: we can't get in the window; but there *is* a roof. There's a *roof!* Yes, we can tear up the roof! Somebody will have to pay for the roof—but so what! If we get the man into Jesus and he can be saved, he can enjoy an abundant spiritual and physical life." So, they pooled their energies and began to help move the man. The mental picture is significant at this point. Here are these four men, each of them picking up a corner of the bed, moving toward Jesus with united effort. When they decided to unite their efforts and move in the same direction, God honored their work. And that is the reason God blesses a church family that locks arms and lives in a unified way in order to be more effective in reaching a community for Christ.

The Bible says that as they let him down through the roof, Jesus looked up. Now what impressed Jesus about those four men whose heads were peeking down from above? Jesus was impressed by their faith. Jesus is impressed by the same quality in you and me today. Frankly, He does not get too impressed just because we are behind the pulpit on Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night. That does not impress him, in terms of just the mere activity, the physical being here. But when Jesus looks at our lives and sees a spirit of faith and trust in His will for our lives, that excites the Lord. I believe that we are, at times, not used most effectively because we have not been men of faith. The Bible says

that without faith, it is impossible to please God. If we could get all the faith out of our hearts and put it here in front of us and weigh it, how big would it be? God wants it to be enormous.

In addition to the amount of faith we possess, we must also recognize that the *object* of our faith is important. How much, really, does Christ mean to us? Does He mean enough to us that we are excited about inviting others to meet Him and encouraging others to serve Him? I want to challenge us tonight, as Pastors, to get serious about our responsibility in reaching people. I am grateful for what God does so effectively through His servants. But my heart breaks as I think of the thousands of people who live in our communities who do not know Christ. The world is your responsibility and mine, and the world begins right next door where we live.

In summary, we must remember that the people to whom we are called to minister need spiritual feeding from God's Word *and* practical solutions to real needs in their lives. This story in Mark is a model of energetic and creative thinking by concerned, compassionate servants of the Lord. In obedience and faithfulness to our calling, we are to use our God-given abilities to reach others, and this always means being innovative and expedient in all that we attempt to do. Jesus Christ is the spiritual food that heals broken hearts and broken lives. May we all be encouraged to bring others to Him—at whatever cost or inconvenience it may be to us. Our primary concern is not "Who will pay for the roof?"—but rather, "How do I get this ailing one to Jesus?"

For release after 10:35 a.m., Monday, June 10, 1985

Thomas David Elliff, 41, native of Paris, Texas, is pastor of Applewood Baptist Church, Wheat Ridge, Colorado. His education includes the B.A. degree from Ouachita Baptist University, Arkadelphia, AR; the M.Div. degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, TX and post-graduate work and teaching fellowship at Ouachita. Southwest Baptist University honored him with the Doctor of Sacred Theology degree this year. Previously he served churches in Arkansas (El Dorado, Warren, and Little Rock), Texas (Vickery in Dallas and First Baptist, Mansfield), and Eastwood Baptist Church, Tulsa, OK. In 1981-83 he served as missionary with the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe as church planter/area evangelist. His family includes his wife, Jeannie Thomas of Little Rock, AR, and four children—Beth, Amy, Sarah, and Jon.

"Settled in Heaven" (Psalm 119:89)

by Thomas D. Elliff

"Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." Psalm 119:89

For fifty years E. F. "Preacher" Hallock was pastor of the First Baptist Church, Norman, Oklahoma. After nineteen years of good works (including Sunday School teaching, leading prayer meetings, completing a seminary degree, and becoming Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Pittsburg, Kansas) "Preacher" Hallock became convicted that he had religion but not a right standing with God. During an evangelistic meeting in the church where he was pastor he stood before his congregation and confessed his sinful state and professed faith in Christ as his Savior.

Until his death at the age of ninety-one, God used "Preacher" Hallock to impact the lives of thousands with the simple truth that direction for every area of life could be found in the Bible as God revealed His will by His Spirit through His Word. I am one of those whose life readily identified with and eagerly grasped this message which was the theme of "Preacher's" life.

I first heard "Preacher" Hallock as a teenager when he came to our church for a Bible Conference. "Read the Bible through!" he would say "and if you had to make a choice between reading the Bible and praying—choose reading. It is more important for you to hear what God has to say than for God to hear what you have to say." Of course, such a choice is not necessary but this teenaged boy got the message. Later I heard "Preacher" speak at a youth camp on "Life Direction Through Bible Promises." And within days I found myself kneeling in a small bedroom in El Dorado, Arkansas, my Bible opened to Isaiah 6:8, saying "yes" with the prophet of God to His call to the Gospel ministry. God had spoken by His Spirit through His Word.

There were three things of which "Preacher" Hallock was thoroughly convinced: (1) That the Word of God was absolutely true; (2) that the

absolutely true Word of God was sufficient to settle every issue of life, and; (3) that every true believer should immerse himself in the Word of God. "Try to master the Bible" he would say "and you will discover that it will master you!"

Apparently the Psalmist had those same convictions when he penned the 119th Psalm—those one hundred and seventy-six verses which stand as a tribute to the Word of God and the God of the Word. I am choosing just one of the verses, the eighty-ninth, as my promise. "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." Notice that the Psalmist emphasizes first

The Settled Nature Of God's Word

"Thy word is settled . . ." In the original language the word translated "settled" means established, fixed, or stationed. When people move from one town to another we ask them "Are you settled yet?" We say to our energetic children "Settle down!" We close a business deal with a "settlement." We end a discussion with "That's settled." God's word is settled, established, fixed, stationed, unmoveable, indisputable.

God's Word is settled in regard to source. It is God's Word. Would He lie? Would He mislead? Would He make a mistake? It is inconceivable that a Sovereign God would ever have to say "Oops! Sorry!" It is His Word and He has jealously protected it through the ages so that we might have as sure a word from Him as did Abraham or Daniel, Peter or Paul.

God's Word is settled in regard to time. We close agreements with a notation concerning time—"thirty year notes," "one hundred year treaties." At the end of the time stated either the deal is off or there is a re-negotiation, on different terms.

Time is a frame of reference for us. We are bound by its beginnings and endings. But God created "time" just as He created the universe. (We measure time by His creation: the earth's revolutions, the tick of a quartz crystal). He is beyond time. It is abnormal to Him. Nonetheless, just so we will know the degree to which we can trust Him, He says His Word is settled "forever" (literally: "beyond the vanishing point").

God's Word is settled in regard to realm. My U. S. driver's license is not always valid in other countries of the world. When I travel to a distant nation I pay an airport tax. The tax I paid in the U. S. apparently is not sufficient. But God's Word, His promises, are negotiable throughout His realm. It is settled in heaven. Think of it! Every true believer here has the real MasterCharge—not American Express but Heavenly Express.

I believe it was W. A. Criswell who said "God said it! I believe it! That settles it!" With all deference to him, if God said it that settles it whether we believe it or not. It is God's Word, settled forever, in heaven. Jesus said in fact that even if heaven and earth *should* pass away His word would not (Matthew 4:35).

Now, since God's Word is, by its nature, settled let's note the

Settling Nature Of God's Word

When a ship is being tossed about in an ocean storm you will not find yourself much steadied by grabbing a dinner plate or a deck chair. Our nature is to cling to something more permanent, like a rail. So it is in the storms of your life. If you are convinced that God's Word is settled, then cling to it and it will settle you.

When God speaks and you agree with it, He will settle you with a supernatural peace. Look at Paul in Acts twenty-seven. He is a good example for us all as we ride through our tempestuous Euroclydon. Look at it! There is mutiny on the main deck! There is panic in the pilothouse! (This all sounds too familiar!) But over the babble of fearful voices and the howling wind comes the calm voice of the shriveled up apostle who tried to hide a slight smile and the "I told you so" sound in his voice. "Cheer up!" he says.

"Cheer up?" "How can this man be so calm when the ship is headed for the rocks and we are going to be killed!" "Why" says Paul "there stood by me this night an angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, saying, 'Fear not Paul' . . . and I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me." That's the settling nature of God's Word.

"Daniel! Your behavior seems so strange! Yet you seem so determined in your praying and fasting. What has brought about this strange behavior?" "O," says Daniel, "In the first year of Darius, the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans; In the first year of his reign I, Daniel, understood by books the number of the years concerning which the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem." (Daniel 9:1-2) In other words, Daniel is saying "When I read what God said, I knew what I needed to do." The settling nature of God's Word!

"Nehemiah! Do you really believe that the walls of Jerusalem will be rebuilt and Israel will return?" Listen to his prayer. "Remember I beseech thee, the word that you commanded your servant Moses, saying, If you transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the peoples; But if you turn to me, and keep my commandments, and do them, though you were cast out unto the uttermost part of the heaven, yet will I bring them unto the place that I have chosen to get my name." (Nehemiah 1:8-9) The settling nature of God's Word!

"Jesus! Are you really sure you can trust this ragged bunch of disciples to get the job done?" Listen to His prayer. "For I have given unto them the words which you (Father) gave me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from you, and they have believed that you did send me." (John 7:8)

"Peter! Before you make an idiot of yourself in front of this crowd, can you be certain this is the right moment?" "Listen," he says, "This is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel!" The settling nature of God's Word!

"Listen cloud of witnesses! Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua! Listen Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David and Samuel! Listen you prophets! Listen you people who subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in fight and turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Listen you women who received their dead raised to life again and you who were tortured. Listen you who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings and bonds and imprisonment! Listen you who were stoned, sown asunder, tested, slain with the sword; you who wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented, wandering in deserts, mountains, dens and caves of the earth!"

"Listen! Why did you do it?" "GOD SAID IT AND THAT SETTLED IT!" The settling nature of God's Word.

Now, because of the settled nature of God's Word and the settling nature of God's Word, I want to encourage you to

Settle Down In God's Word

"Preacher" Hallock had the formula! Read it through; write it down; pray it in; and live it out. Get into the Word of God not to argue with but to agree with it.

Over the years I have been privileged to read the biographies of literally dozens of the great stalwarts of the Faith—men and women who were singularly used of God and significantly altered the course of Christian history. I have yet to read of one so used who did not immerse his life in the Word of God. In every case there were storms, times of testing, but God brought them through as they held true to His Word.

Permit me this one example. No one will question the impact of the life and ministry of Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the great pastor of London's Metropolitan Tabernacle. Over a century ago he preached to turn-away crowds. Perhaps no ministry has ever become so singularly the conscience of a community; a force with which men of high and low estate had to deal. He was one of our faith's most prolific authors; founder of colleges and orphanages; supporter of missions.

In the latter years of his ministry he was deeply saddened by England's "down-grade" controversy, a term used to describe what he considered a subtle attack on the integrity of God's Word. In the second volume of his autobiography (*The Banner of Truth Trust*, Edinburgh, 1976, p. 468) there is reprinted a portion of a message preached by Spurgeon in 1878. Listen to him.

"I am a disciple of the old-fashioned doctrine as much when it is covered with obloquy and rebuke as when it shall again display its power, as it surely shall. Sceptics may seem to take the truth, and bind it, and scourge it, and crucify it, and say that it is dead; and they may endeavor to bury it in scorn, but the Lord has many a Joseph and a Nicodemus who will see that all due honour is done even to the body of truth, and will wrap the despised creed in sweet spices and hide it away in their hearts. They may, perhaps, be half afraid that it is really dead, as the wise men assert; yet it is precious to their souls, and they will come forth right gladly to espouse its cause, and to confess that they are its disciples. We will sit down in sorrow, but not in despair; and watch until the stone is rolled away, and Christ in His truth shall live again, and be openly triumphant."

Now we all can rise to Spurgeon's acclamation of the word of God. We can identify with it!

But do you know that, over the years that great London church has dwindled with, at times, only a handful of people meeting there? I am speaking here of settling down in God's Word because I want to sound a warning. You see we must have more than an intellectual commitment to

the Word of God. We must have more than the capacity to either defend or deliver it. We must have a commitment to settle down in God's Word that we meet the God whose Word it is.

It is not this convention arena which will determine the integrity of God's Word. It is the arena of life.

Somewhere just now there is a hungry man looking down at a meagre bowl of soup. While we eat our pie, pick our teeth, and discuss the latest word from the battlefield, this man bows his head and claims God's promise that the "righteous will not be forsaken." And, while we taxi from convention center to hotel to shopping mall, he will walk on the strength of God's promise, to share the Gospel with others like himself.

Somewhere there is a missionary tossing in fitful sleep. "Why am I here? How can I go on? Is it worth it?" Fumbling for a lamp, he opens his battle-scarred Bible, reads again the promises of God's call and drops off to sleep a few more hours before dawn comes in a strange land.

Somewhere in this city a mother decides to keep on, a father decides to try harder, a teenager decides to be honest, a preacher decides to keep visiting, all because, *this morning*, God said, "Lo, I am with you!"

Why do these people do it? What keeps them going? Long ago they decided on the settled nature of God's Word. They have experienced the settling nature of God's Word. They are the ones whose voted count because *today they settled down in God's Word*. Do it!

For release after 3:10 p.m., Monday, June 10, 1985

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"The Promise of Faithfulness" (Genesis 9:12-17, 6:5-8, 12)

by John A. Wood

God set the rainbow in the sky as a sign of his covenant with Noah and mankind that he would never again destroy the world by flood. Every rainbow is a reminder of God's promise of faithfulness. This is one of God's precious promises. Our appropriate response is to follow the example of Noah and to make of our lives rainbows that reflect our faithfulness to God. Consider the faithfulness of Noah as an example for our ministry.

I. NOAH WAS FAITHFUL IN HIS DAILY LIFE.

Genesis 6:9 states that Noah walked with God amidst evil surroundings. Noah lived in a day when there were no beautiful churches as we have today. Noah lived in a day when there were no great preachers to call men to repentance. Men cared nothing for their character and women cared little for their purity. Every other man in Noah's day was living without regard for God. The whole world was going away from God, but Noah was a just man and Noah walked with God.

If Noah could walk with God in the evil day in which he lived, surely we can be faithful to our God in "Christian" America. The great need of our day is for minister and layman alike to be just and perfect in our generation and to walk with God.

II. NOAH WAS FAITHFUL IN HIS SERVICE TO GOD.

Genesis 7:5 tells us that, "Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him." Noah was obedient when assigned a difficult task.

Can you imagine the enormity of the task God assigned to Noah? There had never been another ark. There were no other ark builders for Noah to consult. There had never been a flood. In fact, Noah had never even seen rain. According to Genesis 2:5, God had watered the earth by the dew of the morning. Imagine how much dew would be required to float an ark. In this context, God called Noah to build an ark.

You and I are prone to think that God has called us to a difficult task. We look at our church and our situation and complain about the difficult place in which God has called us to serve. On Monday mornings we often find ourselves under the juniper tree whining and complaining. God has not called us to be "successful" in the world's terminology, but He has called us to be faithful. The prayer of every preacher's heart should be:

Master, where shall I work today?
And my love flowed warm and free.
He pointed out a tiny plot
And said tend that for me.
But I answered Him quickly
Oh, no! Not there.
Not that little place for me.
For not one could see
No matter how well my work was done.
Not that little place for me.
When he spoke, his voice, it was not stern,
But He answered me tenderly.
Disciple, search that heart of thine.
Are you working for them or for me?
Nazareth was just a little spot
And so was Galilee.

There hung over the mantle in the heart of Noah a rainbow that promised God that he would be faithful regardless of the difficult obstacles he might encounter. What would you do if God called on you to build an ark in your backyard? In spite of the technological advancements of our day, many of us would respond to God's call like the man who said,

The Lord had a job for me,
But I had so much to do,
I said, you get somebody else,
Or wait till I get through.

I don't know how the Lord came out
But He seemed to get along.
But I felt kinda sneaking like.
I knowed I'd done God wrong.

Then one day I needed the Lord.
I needed Him right away.
He never answered me at all,
But I could hear Him say.

Down in my accusin' heart
Mister, I got too much to do.
You get somebody else
Or wait till I get through.

Now when the Lord has a job for me
I never tries to shirk.
I put what I has on hand aside
And does the good Lord's work.

And my affairs can run along
Or wait till I get through.
For nobody else can do the work
That God's marked out for *you*.

I know what Noah did. He went out behind the house and began to cut down those gopher trees for lumber and began the difficult task to which God had called him. I don't know exactly how it happened in Noah's day, but I actually believe that if it were to happen today, it would be something like this. The morning paper would carry this unusual story:

LOCAL RESIDENT SEEKS BUILDING PERMIT

City Council members broke into wild laughter at their regular weekly meeting last night. Noah, well known in this area for his carpentry skills, applied for a 120 year building permit for something he called an ark. When the laughter died down, Noah outlined his plans to build a large, covered boat with animal stalls. The 480 year old family leader could not say when the boat would be finished. He did say, however, that only those on the ark would survive something called rain. The council could not restore order after Noah predicted that his God would cover the world with water from the sky and the meeting broke up. The council president said that a private meeting would be held next week to discuss the unusual request for a permit.

Imagine the events that follow. Noah cuts the trees and skins the bark and begins to gather materials for the ark. Living on one side of Noah is a Mrs. Jones. On the other side lives a Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Jones goes out back one morning to carry out the garbage. Noah leaves the stack of lumber and walks toward the house to get a drink. Mrs. Jones walks to the fence and asks Noah the purpose of all that lumber. "Are you starting a lumber yard?" "No," Noah answers. "I know, you are going to build the world's first Holiday Inn." "No, Mrs. Jones, I'm actually going to build an ark. You see, God is going to destroy the world by a flood and He has called upon me to build an ark large enough for you and your family and everyone who will repent of their sins and turn to God before the flood." "I see," says Mrs. Jones. "Well, I must be going, but you shouldn't work too long out here in the sun. You might get a sun stroke." She walks back into the house and forgets about Noah. Not on your life. It is a universal law, a woman never forgets what she hears over the backyard fence. She immediately gets on the phone and rings up Mrs. Smith who lives on the other side of Noah and says, "Have you heard . . . ?"

Mrs. Noah goes down to the supermarket to buy groceries. She puts the smallest child up in the grocery cart and goes up and down the aisles picking out all of Noah's favorite foods, including preacher's steak. That's center-cut bologna. When she gets to the check out counter, a lady in the next line whispers to her friend, "That's Mrs. Noah. It's her husband who is building that big boat. My husband says that the men at work think he is a little crazy in the head. She's such a nice lady, I don't know why she doesn't divorce him." Now, Mrs. Noah hears their conversation but says nothing. She gathers the groceries and the kids and heads for home.

That evening, Noah comes in for dinner. They sit at the table holding hands and Noah offers a prayer to God thanking Him for the opportunity to build the ark and asking God for strength to do His work. He is famished and immediately begins to satisfy his appetite. He looks up and sees that Mrs. Noah is not eating. "Honey, what's wrong?" "Nothing." "Do you feel alright?" "Yes." "Then why are you not eating?" Finally, she really comes uncorked. "O.K. If you want to know what's wrong, I'll tell you. You have been so busy out there building that stupid boat that you don't even know what's going on under your own roof. Do you know how long it has been since one of the neighborhood kids have been to our house to play with our kids? I walk down main street and meet someone I've known for a hundred years and they cross the street and walk down the other side to keep from speaking to me. How long has it been since you and I have been invited to the country club? You know why? Because the people in this town think you're crazy! Today in the grocery store, I overheard two ladies talking and they wondered why I didn't divorce you. I have wondered it too."

Noah puts his head in his hands and his elbows on the table and says, "Honey, I'm sorry. I have been so busy trying to do what God has called me to do that I have left undone my basic responsibility as a husband and a father. I know that God called me to be a family man before He called me to be an ark builder. I'm sorry."

Every pastor needs to realize that God has given him the responsibility to be a Christian, a husband and a father before He ever gave him the responsibility to preach the Gospel and pastor the church. That is true for every deacon and layperson and every denominational worker and every WMU leader. We are so often prone to let the good become the destroyer of the best.

Imagine how it was for Mrs. Noah and the children to endure the criticism and ridicule to which an unbelieving and mocking world subjected them. Children would walk through Noah's yard on the way home from school and throw rocks at the crazy old man. Noah would shout to them about the Judgment of God. Noah's children were ostracized at school because their father was simply trying to do what God had called him to do. Mrs. Noah experienced deep depression from all the criticism and gossip.

"GOSSIP TOWN"

Have your ever heard of Gossip Town,
On the shores of Falsehood Bay,
Where old Dame Rumor, with rustling gown,
Is going the livelong day?

It isn't far to Gossip Town
For people who want to go;
The Idleness Train will take you down
In just an hour or so.

The Thoughtless Road is a popular route,
And most folks start that way,

But it's steep down grade; if you don't watch out
You will land in Falsehood Bay.

You glide through the Valley of Vicious Talk,
And into the tunnel of Hate,
Then crossing the Add-to-Bridge you walk
Right into the city gate.

The Principal street is called "They Say,"
And "I've Heard" is the public well,
And the breezes that blow from Falsehood Bay
Are laden with "Don't you tell."

In the midst of the Town is "Tell Tale Park";
You're never quite safe while there.
For its owner is Madame "Suspicious Remark,"
Who lives on the street "Don't Care."

Just back of the Park is Slander Row;
'Twas there that Good Name died,
Pierced by a dart from Jealousy's bow,
In the hands of Envious Pride.

From Gossip Town peace long since fled,
But envy and strife and woe,
And sorrow and care you'll find instead
If there ever you chance to go.

It always makes it hard when people criticize and gossip.

Our problem is just the opposite from Noah's. Too often, the community wouldn't even notice if the church were to close its doors and go completely out of business. We have avoided criticism, because the world has never noticed us.

III. NOAH WAS FAITHFUL IN HIS WITNESS.

II Peter 2:5 tells us that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. He warned his neighbors of the impending judgment. Noah worked on that ark for 120 years, but he was never too busy to give witness to the coming judgment of God. Every time Noah drove a peg into that gopher wood, it sounded the judgment of God. Every time he drew his saw through a piece of gopher wood in sang the song of the judgment of God. For 120 years he witnessed and warned his neighbors of the impending judgment.

In 120 years of faithful preaching and working, not one person, outside of Noah's own family, believed his message.

IV. GOD WAS FAITHFUL TO HIS PROMISE.

Genesis 8:1 states that, "God remembered Noah and delivered him from death."

I wish I could have been there the day that ark was completed. Think how it would be if it happened today. The headline of The Noahville Daily News would read, "Ark of the Foolish Carpenter Completed." A front page picture shows Noah standing proudly in front of the ark. He has on fresh overalls, a starched white shirt with a black string tie. Several lead articles deal with different aspects of the ark. One story describes how Noah plans to load a pair of every species of animal life. It points out that Noah's God had instructed him to put one door in the ark.

Everyone gathers in Noah's backyard. A ramp has been placed from the ground to the one door into the ark. The children especially enjoy watching Noah load the animals. It was better than a trip to the zoo. One lady asks her friend, "I wonder how long Mr. and Mrs. Noah are going to be able to stay inside with all those animals?"

Remember that old logging road on the hill behind Noah's house where he cut down the gopher trees? Isn't it amazing how young people can find an unmarked road like that when they can't even find the public library? The high school hot rodder has the latest sports car with four in the floor and a tape deck with the top ten blaring out the beat of the day. He has his sweetheart with him and they are enjoying a day off from school. His last thought is that crazy preacher, that big boat and all those animals.

The strangest thing appears on the windshield. It is round and then lengthens as it runs down the windshield. The instruction book from the glove compartment describes the windshield wipers. He had never needed them before. He closes the convertible top, but the tape deck is silent as his girlfriend asks, "Honey, remember when you would carry my books and we walked through Noah's backyard? You and the other boys would throw rocks at that crazy ole preacher and then run. Honey, do you think what Noah said about the rain and the flood and the judgment of

God is true?" "I don't know, honey, I don't know."

Meanwhile, back at the ark, Noah has loaded all the animals. He stands in the open door of the ark and extends one final invitation, "Repent of your sin. Trust God to save you. Enter through the one door into the ark of safety." The people respond like statues, hearing with deaf ears and peering through sightless eyes.

Noah tends to the animals. Every eye is riveted on that one door that enters into the ark and the Bible says that "God shut the door"! Not Noah . . . God shut the door! Then, the heavens open up and the rains come. The people are silent. The water begins to rise. The people stand with their hair wet upon their faces and their eyes fixed upon that door that moments before had been open. Moments ago they could have walked that ramp and entered the ark. But God has shut the door.

As the water rises, one man pushes through the crowd and calls for Noah. He beats his fists on the side of the ark and screams, "Noah, let me in! Let me in! Noah, I repent of my sins. Let me in. Let me in! I'm ready to turn to God." Noah listens from inside the ark. He recognizes that man's voice. He runs a little shop just down the street. In 120 years, Noah had been in his shop a thousand times to pick up supplies. Every time, he went in he tried to talk to that man about his life and about repenting of his sins and turning to God. The man was always too busy trying to make another dollar. Now, his business is closed and that old brass cash register is under water and that man's soul is on its way to Hell!

The waters continue to rise. The people cling to the sides of the ark or swim to the highest point for safety. Finally, that great ark begins to shift its load in the waves as it starts to float. Noah is on his knees inside with a broken heart as he hears the last cries of the damned suffering the judgment of God. He would have opened the door, but it had been sealed by the hand of almighty God.

Noah did all he could to win those who perished in the flood. Someday we will hear the screams of those we could have won to faith in Jesus Christ.

God gives everyone a chance. No one in that distant day could say, "I didn't know." There was a time when the door was open and the invitation extended. God has given His word. Every page is a burning warning against postponement; *today* is the day of salvation; *now* is the accepted time; *boast not* thyself of tomorrow; choose you *this day*. Every promise of salvation in the Bible is *NOW*.

Notice, finally, that all believed when it was too late. The Bible teaches that someday every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. The damned will cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them. They will pray, but their prayers will be too late.

The judgment is over for Noah's day, but the Bible teaches us that someday God will roll up this world like yesterday's newspaper and throw it in the fire. Just as God provided an ark of safety through Noah, he has provided an ark of salvation through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, for the judgment to come. There was only one door into the ark. Jesus said, "I am the door." "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Every person in Noah's day was either inside the ark or on the outside. Today, every person is either in Christ or outside the ark of salvation.

May each of us trace the rainbow of God's precious promises and be challenged to faithfulness in the task to which God has called us as individuals and as a Convention. The faithfulness of our God to His promises should be the motivation for our faithfulness in His service that, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign forever and ever." Amen.

For release after 8 p.m., Monday, June 10, 1985

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The Family Secret (Romans 8:28)

by R. T. Kendall

Paul's most extreme statement is Romans 8:28: 'And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.' Paul was in fact given to many extreme statements. Take his statement in Romans 3:28: 'We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.' Or Romans 4:5: 'But to him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.' The very nature of his doctrine of justification by faith is radical. It never ceases to amaze me when I discover this again and again.

But I am prepared to say that when Paul uttered Romans 8:28, it was his most extreme statement; because he went out on a limb, actually promising that *all things work together for good*.

I want you to think about this for a moment. I look at that verse and I stand back and I ask, 'Can I believe that? Did Paul know what he was saying?' *All things work together for good*. Had he said, 'some' things; or had he said, 'many' things; or had he said, 'most' things, we then could have said, 'Well, Paul was speaking guardedly.' Because there are some situations that are so desperate there is apparently no way they could be redeemed.

Was this then a slip? Was this an unguarded comment, when Paul said: '*All things work together for good*?' You see, a pastor must be careful what he says in the pulpit. I have been preaching for over twenty years. And after I had been preaching for but a few years, it began to dawn on me that people were actually believing what I was saying! They were taking me seriously; they would quote back things I had said in the pulpit and I would have to say, 'Did I say that?' 'Ah, yes, you said it'. And, you see, Paul surely knew what was involved when he could go out on a limb and say: '*All things work together for good*.'

Can you imagine the possible fall-out from such a statement in pastoral situations when *everything* is included in this phrase, 'all things'? There is no way to water it down. It either means that, or it does not. I've checked the Greek thoroughly. There have been one or two attempts by some modern scholars to twist the meaning and make 'together' mean that the 'good' depends on our working 'together with God'. The Greek neither says this nor remotely implies it. The fact is, this statement is so radical and bold that modern scholars have been overwhelmed that such thinking could emerge from an intelligent man like Paul. They therefore have made every attempt to superimpose their humanistic thinking on Paul.

You see what is at stake here. It is a very contemporary theological issue—the question of a theodicy, the governing ways of God in the world. You have in theology today two polarities. On the one hand there is the belief in theodicy, that there is *purpose* in the world. The other is existentialism, that there is no fixed purpose. One view is the Christian view, that God rules the world, that this is my Father's world and that there is a purpose in history. This is the Christian view. But now we have on the other hand the existentialist position which purports that there is no explanation for things that happen; some even say that everything is 'absurd'. 'We cannot understand why things happen the way they do; and we will never understand.' So says existentialism. Thus when you come forward in the twentieth century with the view that there *is* a purpose in history, you are meeting head-on this prevailing view in contemporary Christian theology that says you cannot understand, or you never will understand, why things happen.

And so we look at this verse Romans 8:28 and ask, Can we really believe that? '*All things work together for good*.' Well, we might begin by asking in fact, Could Paul have made an unguarded comment? I would only remind you that this expression 'all things' was one Paul used often. 'I can do *all things* through Christ which strengtheneth me' (Philip. 4:13). 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, *all things* are become new' (II Cor. 5:17). 'Christ is before *all things* and by Him *all things* consist' (Col. 1:17). Paul used the expression all the time. He knew it well and so he inserts it here. 'And we know that *all things* work together for good'.

I must also say that this verse in all probability is a parenthesis in this chapter. This eighth chapter of Romans, in fact, does not reach its peak in verse 28. Paul was on to something else; he had a different theme actually. It is as though he inserted Romans 8:28 parenthetically, as if to say: 'Oh, by the way, you know, don't you, that all things work together for good'; for his theme was along the line of what we have *in Christ*, how it is that our destinies are secure. He was building up the case that nothing shall separate us from the love of Christ. This was the central theme. But along the way he just paused to say this.

I am glad he said it. What comfort these words give to me to know that all things work together for good. There are three things that I want to say about this verse, however, and I put these things to you for your consideration.

The first thing I say about Romans 8:28 is that it is a family secret. I address the Christian family this morning. This is not a verse intended to be understood by the world. And so, when you confront those who maintain the existentialist position that there is no purpose in history, there is no explanation for the fact of an earthquake in Northern Italy or a plane crash or famine, or a hurricane; sudden death, sickness, poverty. There is no explanation, the world says, and so the Christian comes along and says there is. But I must warn you, it is a family secret. This kind of thinking is not meant to be understood by the world. Paul said that 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him' (I Cor. 2:14). And so we make a grave mistake when we talk to the natural man about things like this and try to explain to him that all things work together for good, because the natural man will not understand it, it will be foolishness to him. And you must therefore understand that this kind of thinking is to be the family secret. Do not try to get those outside the family to understand it, because those outside the family would say, 'It is not so.'

But Paul says, 'It may not be for you, but *we* know that all things work together for good'. You may not; 'we' know. It is a family secret. The world cannot grasp this and do not try to bridge the gap by rational thinking to make them see it. It is the family secret and it is something we discover *after* we have been adopted into the family. When Paul says, 'We know', he is using a Greek word which implies a mere statement of a well-known fact. He is not even talking about intuitive knowledge. It is a word that expresses knowledge in the same way that you know the distance from London to Oxford. You know that there are twenty-four hours in a day. It is just a well-known fact. And this is the word Paul uses: '*We know*.' It is just a fact; he is not trying to prove it. This is not, I say, the peak of Romans 8; he is saying it along the way; it is just a fact. But remember, it is something the family discovers after being adopted into the family of God. Because we learn it by experience. The reason Paul said it in this way is that it was a testimony; he had learned this.

To put it still another way, Romans 8:28 is true even if Paul had *not* said it. Had he not said it, any Christian should be able to say it anyway. Because looking back we can see that it is true. So Paul is stating it as something he has learned.

But now let us go a step further. Not only is it the family secret; I also want to talk about the family scandal. All of us have skeletons in our closets. All of us have those memories we would like to blot out. We have all done things in the past, some in the distant past, some recent, things that we don't want anybody to know about; things that few, if any, know about. You talk about a secret! We keep the family scandal well hidden! We sometimes use the expression, that so and so is the 'black sheep' of the family. Incidentally, I am probably the black sheep of my family. My relatives and close friends have never understood my coming to the theological views that I came to in the past fifteen to twenty years—that's another story. But I know what it is like to be called the black sheep of the family. But, you see, all we like sheep have gone astray, and when it comes to the Christian family, we are all black sheep. We are all black sheep and we all have scandals of some sort in our lives, even if nobody knows about them. And, you see, the question we must put to Paul is whether *those scandals* work together for good?

To put it more bluntly, the 'all things', does that include our *sins*? Well, candidly, if it does not, the verse has no meaning to me whatever. There is no comfort to be found in Romans 8:28 if it does not include our sins. What comfort is it to think that those things that we did that were *not* bad work out for good? They were good anyway. What comfort is it, even, to put it another way, that as long as we *meant* well it will all turn out O.K.? That also would give me no comfort at all. I would just go on. I would not want to look at that verse.

Can it be true, then, that the bad things of our lives, even the things that we did wittingly, whether it was by virtue of our folly or what, that *all things* indeed include the bad? Well, this verse is in the context of Paul's discussion of our infirmities (Rom. 8:26-27). Let me remind you of something. All of us have infirmities. They are those weaknesses of our sinful flesh. What may be your infirmity may not be mine. What may be my infirmity may not be yours. It is not likely you are going to tell me what yours is, lest I look at you and say, 'Well, surely you don't have *that* problem?' And you would be embarrassed that you had told me. And the same works the other way around. We do not like to talk about them. But we all have those embarrassing weaknesses. It is in *this context* that Paul could utter Romans 8:28. And so we know that *all things*, even those things that spring from our infirmities, shape into a pattern for

good. What can possibly be more comforting than this?

But I come now to my third point, and I want to stress this. That is the family security. What security do we have that Romans 8:28 is true? If it was a parenthetical statement, as I have put it, can we really believe it? Well, I said a moment ago that the verse is true even if Paul had not said it. It is a truth. It is a fact of the Christian life. But now I want to ask the question, *Why* is this verse true? Why is it that we *can* believe it? Let me warn you that it is not true because of a kind of fatalism that some read into the verse. Neither is it a kind of natural optimism. You run into people who say, 'Well, I just believe everything turns out for the best.' Or, another will say, 'I have always been lucky.' Or, as we say back in the hills of Kentucky (I don't know whether this is an English expression or not), 'It will all come out in the wash.'

Why then is Romans 8:28 true? There has got to be a reason that it is infallibly true. I want you to see this. And if you understand this, Christian people, you will never doubt it again. There is a reason that Romans 8:28 is true and that is, *because the glory of the Son of God is at stake*. You are bought with a price; you are not your own. When God adopted you into the family, He made you a joint-heir with His Son, so that *everything* that happens to you affects Him; therefore nothing that concerns you can go unnoticed. And we are told in Romans 8:29 that God predestinated His Son to be 'the firstborn among many brethren.' He predestinated His Son to be the firstborn among the family and it is *because of this*, because the Lord Jesus Christ has taken our case on Himself, because we are His, because His blood was shed for us, Romans 8:28 must be true! That means that God will take particular notice of everything that happens to us and concerns us because we are predestinated to glorification for the sake of His Son. That process between justification and glorification is called sanctification, and God is determined that all things that happen to His people must fit into a pattern for good. Because the glory of Jesus Christ is at stake, because He took our case, because we have been made joint-heirs, God is *determined* that all things which happen to His children work together for good.

Now, let me remind you that the whole verse needs to be quoted. I once asked a person to quote Romans 8:28 back to me and he said, 'All things work together for good.' I said, 'Quote it all.' 'Oh,' he said, 'Is there more?' I said, 'Yes.' He thought a moment and he said, 'Oh yes. All things work together for good to them that love God.' I said, 'Go on.' 'Oh is there more?' He looked at it. 'All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.' You see, this verse does not apply to everybody. It applies to those who love God and know why they love Him. Do you love God? Better still, do you know why you love Him? Do you think there is something different about you? Do you think you are better? Do you think you have worked harder? Do you think you are more clever? 'We love him because he first loved us.' I was reading some time ago about how Charles Spurgeon came to the knowledge of salvation by grace. He said, 'I was sitting in a service listening to a minister preach. The minister's sermon was very boring and my mind began to wander.' He said, 'I began to ask myself, Why am I a Christian?' 'Well,' he said, 'I am a Christian because I believed.' But then he said, 'I put it to myself, Why did I believe?' 'Well, I believed because I heard the Word and it was effectual to me'. Then Spurgeon said, 'Suddenly like a flash it all opened up and I saw that God was at the bottom of it all.'

Christian people, do you understand this, that the reason you love God is not that you are psychologically different, not that there are certain genes and chromosomes in you that make you naturally love God. Oh no, you are children of wrath. You are children of wrath even as others (Eph. 2:3). Your heart is deceitful (Jer. 17:9). There is nothing inside of you by nature that would gravitate toward blessedness. You must understand that you love God because you are 'called', and before this you were predestinated, not of your choosing but according to His own purpose and grace. And now God has taken on your case. Perhaps you look inside your heart and you wonder if God miscalculated when He took on your case! But we can claim the promise. We have been made joint-heirs with Christ and *because of this* God is determined that 'All things work together for good.' It's not because you are better. It is not because your motives are good, they may not be, but because *you are in the family*.

Let me caution you. This verse does not mean that everything which happens is good. Things that happen may be bad. When you have financial disaster, that is bad; when sickness comes, that is bad; when you walk after the flesh, that is bad; when you fall into sin, that is bad; when you behave in such a way before others that they see you are not acting like a Christian, that is bad. I could go on and on. It does not mean that all that happens is good.

Neither does it mean that all things which happen were necessarily

supposed to be that way. Now this is the rut that many people get into. They begin to say, 'Well, it was supposed to happen.' And many people justify their sins by saying, 'It was supposed to happen.' I caution you, you have got not a word of Scripture for that. Be careful about thinking like that lest you justify every evil thing you do and say it was all caused. The verse is not saying that at all. The verse is the promise to *redeem* what is evil. Don't take this verse as a green light for you to live irresponsibly. You see, the fact is, the promise is that the evil *turns* to good. It does not mean the evil *was* good. Sometimes a husband and a wife will get into an argument and she will say to him, 'You shouldn't have done that.' About a week or two later it works out so well, that he says back to her, 'See there, it shows I was supposed to do that, look how it turned out.' And so he makes a big thing of this. Listen, that does not mean that it *was* good from the start. The very fact that something works together for good does not justify the view that it was good in the beginning!

Now, I will admit that God's grace is so wonderful and great that a situation *looks as though* it was supposed to be because God has a way of turning things around, reversing the whole thing. God has a way of taking the worst situation and making it good, so that you are tempted to say, 'Well, I was supposed to do it.' I caution you, you don't think like that. Don't attribute it to the fact that you did the right thing. Don't impute to yourself righteousness. Rather, say that it was the great grace of God that turned it into good in such a way that it seems as though it was supposed to be. It is only the mature Christian, I suggest, who can think like that, that is, who is able to say that God *turned* it for good, without justifying *what* you did. David's sin cannot be justified, but the fact is that God worked it for good in the end. Even the blood-line of the Messiah comes through Bathsheba, an extraordinary thing to be seen in Scripture. You see, God can make it look as though it was supposed to be that way.

Moreover, this verse does not mean that we are supposed to help God out. Some say, 'Oh yes, Romans 8:28 is true but we work with God in it and it will then work out O.K.' Now this is the folly of Arminian thinking, that we keep ourselves saved, that we co-operate with grace. Well, I hope that you don't have that kind of theology but let me warn you that Romans 8:28 is absolutely true and I dare to suggest that if you try to help God, as it were, to make something work together for good, it will just *get worse!* This verse is so true, dear friends, that it works infinitely better if you will simply turn the whole thing over to God. You are not to be a manipulator; you are not called to vindicate yourself. You don't have to say, 'Well now, look, this situation has happened, but nobody understands it. I know that what I did was right. And so, let's see what can I do to make all things work together for good.' I dare say that things will be delayed for you because this promise is not one that is necessarily fulfilled by Monday morning. The fact that it states unconditional truth does not mean that it is going to work together for good within the next 24 hours. Sometimes you can see it in 24 hours, sometimes it takes 24 days, sometimes 24 months, sometimes 24 years. In any case you don't have to help God make it work together for good. It is something *He* wants to do. Don't be a manipulator and try to bring it to pass. Let God do it! Then your righteousness will be brought forth as the noon-day sun. Vindication must come in God's own time.

This verse, I suppose, has given more comfort to Christians than any other Scripture. At least I can say it in my own case. We can look across church history and see how God has used it in a marvelous way. I used to pass by that place on Broad Street in Oxford nearly every day and something would leap within me when I saw that cross embedded in the road and recall what took place in 1555—when seventy-year-old Hugh Latimer was tied back to back with young Nicholas Ridley. As the flames were encircling around their bodies, Latimer looked back at Ridley and said, 'Fear not, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day light such a candle in England as, I trust, shall never be put out.' Now I would submit to you that what happened was evil, it was bad—this burning of these two godly men at the stake. But look how God redeemed it. The memory of that event went so deep into the heart of England that Roman Catholicism didn't have a chance when Elizabeth I came to the throne. Evil was redeemed in this sort of way. Many look at the man David Brainerd and ask, 'Why did God take him at the age of twenty-nine?' But David Brainerd's journal is said to have put more young men on the mission field than any other body of literature in the history of the Christian church.

And so it is, there may be some situation that haunts you; it haunts you because you must admit you were in the wrong and you don't see how it can be redeemed. Know the family secret. It is a promise. Don't try to help it along. Let God do it.