

“GOD WILL MAKE A WAY” (Romans 8:28)

FOCUS

It seemed like this past year was filled with a lot of bad news:

- Downed airplanes – the Malaysia airplane that went missing with 200 people on board – and then the plane with 298 people that was shot down over Ukraine.
- Conflicts and wars – Ukraine / ISIS / Israel and Hamas
- There was the abduction of girls in Nigeria
- And of course the Ebola outbreak.

There was some good news in the past year though too:

- Sochi winter Olympics – Canada did pretty good – third place in gold medals and 4th place overall.
- World Cup – even though Canada wasn't in it.
- And the European spacecraft that landed on a comet some almost 500 million kms away.

I'm sure in your life this past year it was filled with good things and not so good. Ups and downs, blessings and battles, twists and turns.

When I was pastoring in another church a number of years ago I went with our Jr High group in the fall to an amazing maze. It was a maze cut through a huge corn field. You could say it was an **amazing maze of maize**. It was fun to try and find your way through the tall stalks. Some turns would lead you to a dead end. Some turns would lead you right back to where you were before.

Sometimes life seems like a maze doesn't it. We are faced with decisions at every corner of life. One path may lead us out of life's enigmas or deeper into its winding course. At times we get to a point where there seems to be no entrance, no exit, or no escape. Have you even felt that way?

Perhaps in the past year you have experienced something like that. You may have experienced some sort of quandary or maze –you may be now in the midst of a financial puzzle, or a relationship labyrinth, or a spiritual muddle, or a pain-filled predicament.

We also don't know what is ahead for 2015. There may be times when we don't know which way to turn. We don't know what curves life will present us. How will we handle this? How will we get through the coming year out of the maze? How can we get some perspective on the good and bad events behind us and before us?

The passage in the Bible I want to focus on this morning is one that I believe gives us great perspective on the conundrums of living. The passage is a well-known and well-loved one in Scripture – Romans 8:28. I invite you to turn to that passage in your Bibles.

In the middle of the cornfield maze that I mentioned there was a lookout. You could always find it because there was a flag on top of it that stuck out over top of all the stalks. If you found your way there, you could climb up on the lookout platform and see the way out. You could gain perspective on the maze of life.

Romans 8:28 is like that lookout. It helps us to look at the mazes of life from the perspective of God.

“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.” (NIV)

Paul begins the verse with the words – “we know”. This is the confidence; this is the assurance we can have. Like a song by Don Moen that used to be popular - “*God will make a way where there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see. He will make a way for me..*”.

The perspective we need at the beginning of a new year is to believe that God is making a way through the maze, and will lead us safely through to the other end. That's the message of Romans 8:28 – God WILL make a way through the maze of life. Let's take a closer look at what Paul says to us here.

First of all - we need to note - to whom this great promise is applied. Clearly this is not a promise for all people. Paul is not saying that He will make a way for everyone. No - Paul says it is for those that “*love Him*”, and “*those who are called*”. Paul is relating this wonderful promise to believers and to believers in Jesus Christ only.

It may be that you are here this morning and would like to have the assurance that God will make a way in your life too. The first step is to believe in and receive the Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord. When we do that we become a child of God. The promise of Romans 8:28 is only applied to those who are in this special relationship with God the Father.

For believers then – note – Paul says – “*in all things*”, God works for the good. Does he really mean all? Are there not some limitations? Is this all not restricted in any way? The answer is – all means all. All the things that may seem to us bad, and all the things that may seem to us good, plus all the things we are indifferent about. “*In all things*”. What does God do in all things for those who love Him?

The next phrase in the NIV says “*God works*”. Some translations of this verse may give the wrong impression. The KJV for instance says – “*all things work together for good*”. But that does not appear to be Paul's emphasis at all in the context. He is not saying, as some have criticized, “*don't worry about things – everything will be okay*”, or “*all things will work out alright in the end*”. Paul is not just being optimistic. Paul's emphasis is not on the **things** somehow working out for good, but rather on the fact that **God** is working out His plans and His purposes, even if we cannot see it, even if it seems that things are falling apart. Even if we don't like what is happening.

So - What is God working out? What is His ultimate purpose?

The next verse makes this clear – verse 29.

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.”

God is not necessarily concerned with our happiness, wealth, or health, success, or lack of problems, but He is concerned about - our Christ-likeness, and to lead us ultimately to be glorified with Christ as Paul goes on to conclude in v30.

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

In order to bring us to this place, God takes us through the “*all things*”. It may seem like a mess and a maze to us, but God is on the lookout tower. He sees the whole path, and is pointing us to the end.

I heard a preacher tell this story a while ago that I think illustrates the point well. It was a story about a horse rancher. One day he lost one of his prized horses. Some of the townspeople came by to console him. “*Sorry to hear about your bad luck.*”, they said. The rancher said, “*How do you know its bad luck?*”

A few days later an amazing thing happened. The lost horse came strolling back, and following it were 12 beautiful stallions. The townspeople said – “*What good luck!*” The rancher replied, “*How do you know its good luck?*”

A while later the rancher’s son was trying to train one of these wild horses. He got thrown off the horse and broke his leg. The neighbors said – “*Sorry to hear about your bad luck.*” The rancher questioned – “*How do you know it is bad luck?*”

The following week army officials came by house to house conscripting all the available young men for the war that had broken out. The rancher’s son though was passed by because of his broken leg. “*What good luck*”, the neighbours said.

The point is – we can’t always see what God may be doing. “*God will make a way, where there seems to be no way.*” “*In all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.*” You can chose to see your life as a series of good luck and bad luck, or you can chose to believe that God is working out His plans and purposes in the good and the bad of our lives.

The life of Joseph in the book of Genesis illustrates this. EG:

- Joseph was born into a wealthy, leading family. Even more, Joseph was the favourite son of the 12, and did not have to work as hard as the others. On top of this Joseph was blessed with dreams and the interpretation of dreams. He was destined for greatness. What GOOD LUCK!
- But, Joseph’s brothers understandably did not like Joseph the spoiled brat too much. They hated him. The first chance they got they sold him into slavery, and told dad he was had been killed. What BAD LUCK.
- Joseph was brought as a slave into Egypt and began to work for Potipher, a leading official in Egypt. Joseph came to have a place of prominence and privilege, even as a slave. What GOOD LUCK.
- Unfortunately Joseph was falsely accused one day by Potipher’s wife of trying to rape her. He was promptly thrown into prison without trial and without the possibility of parole. What injustice! What BAD LUCK!

- While in prison Joseph proved himself, and soon became essentially the one in charge of the jail. He was even able to interpret a dream from the chief cupbearer of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. The cupbearer was going to be released and said he would put in a good word for Joseph. It looked like he may have a chance of getting out after all. What GOOD LUCK.
- But when the chief cupbearer got out of jail as Joseph had predicted, he got sidetracked by his joy and job and forgot to put in a good word for Joseph. Joseph had to stay in prison another 2 years. BAD LUCK.
- One day though, the Pharaoh himself had a dream that needed interpreting. Finally the cupbearer remembered. Joseph was promptly fetched from prison to interpret the Pharaoh's dream. GOOD LUCK.
- But – BAD LUCK. The dream was about a terrible famine that would come over the whole region for 7 years following 7 years of abundance.
- But – GOOD LUCK. Pharaoh saw the wisdom of Joseph and made him Prime Minister of Egypt to supervise those 14 years. This foreigner as the second in command in Egypt was able to provide for the nation during the years of famine. Even more, because of the extent of the famine Joseph's family were forced to come to Egypt to get food where they were eventually re-united with Joseph.
- What amazing luck! – Joseph's family, the people of Israel, the people of God, were provided for and protected during the years of famine. This was not only good for them, but good for us too. Because out of the line and family of Israel came the Messiah, Jesus Christ – who came to save us from our sin, and unite us with our loving Heavenly Father for eternity. All this through the bad luck of Joseph being sold into slavery.

What GOOD LUCK in the end - or are all the events in life - both good and bad, all under the hand of God for those who love Him? Yes. That's the point. That's the perspective God has. That's the perspective we too need to gain. God is working it out for good to those who love Him and those called according to his purpose.

Joseph himself had this to say later on to his brothers who felt guilty about the terrible thing they had done. *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."* (Genesis 50:20)

"God will make a way, where there seems to be no way. He works in ways we cannot see. He will make a way for me. He will be my guide; hold me closely to His side. With love and strength for each new day. He will make a way. God will make a way." (song by Don Moen)

Listen to the confidence, trust and assurance that Paul's words at the conclusion of Romans 8 express. We can have this same confidence and assurance, as well, as we go into a New Year.

Romans 8:31-39

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? ... Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

FINAL THOUGHTS

So, what do we do when we find ourselves in a maze in the coming year? Get up on the lookout tower of Romans 8, and say – *“I believe that!”*

Chose to affirm – *“I believe that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him”. “I believe God will make a way – even when there seems to be no way”. “I believe others may have intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.” “I believe nothing will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Let me conclude by praying a prayer that someone has written called the *“I Believe” Prayer*:

Father. Sometimes I feel confused and don't understand why things happen the way they do. Yet I believe you love me deeply, and absolutely nothing is beyond your control. Help me to live each day with confidence, trusting in the great promises of your Word. Today I am reminded that “I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living” (Psalm 27). Thank you for giving me the strength to be an “I believe” person. AMEN.