

Resurrection: God's Guarantee for Those Who Love Him

Romans 8:28

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Our church is in the middle of a teaching series in a New Testament book called Romans. Romans was written by the Apostle Paul to a little church in the capital city Rome. It is one magnificent explanation of the gospel; how sinners like us can have right standing (righteousness) before our holy God. The early chapters sweep away all our attempts to save ourselves. Our good deeds and good intentions can't absolve us from guilt. Paul points out even Abraham himself—the man three major world religions laud as a very religious person—even Abraham couldn't save himself. If Abraham couldn't, neither can we.

If Abraham couldn't and we can't, then who can? Enter stage right Jesus Christ. Jesus did for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. He lived the perfect life we couldn't live. His death and resurrection are the two central events in human history. Why? Romans explains,

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:21–24 ESV)

The flow of Romans is from our desperate need of how God's grace meets that need in Jesus. How? *Through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.* There's the gospel. We are not made right with God by our doings but by what Jesus did. Forgiveness of sins and life eternal are conditioned on my repentance and personal trust in Jesus as my Savior. Trust in who he is as the Son of God and what he accomplished on the cross and yes, his resurrection. This is Easter after all, and the resurrection is prominent in Romans:

- *"Concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 1:3–4)
- *"It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."* (Romans 4:24–25)

He was delivered up for our sins (cross) and raised for our justification (resurrection).

Jesus' resurrection verifies many things. It proves God accepted Jesus' sacrifice. It proves Jesus' claims to be the Son of God. Is rising from the dead enough to convince you? What more could he have done? It proves death is not the final word for us. It proves bodies can be resurrected. It proves the reality of the spiritual and the supernatural.

Back to Romans and one of the most treasured promises God makes to us in Romans 8:28,

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Here's the message in a nutshell, Jesus' resurrection proves that God can work anything, even the worst evils, for an eventual and ultimate good. That is not to say evils are good. They clearly are not.

I don't have to know you personally to know that your story is like my story, and the story of every one of the billions of humans living here. We have things either in our past or in our present that are painful, hurtful, unjust, unfair, seemingly random, shocking, disillusioning, depressing, constantly frustrating, despairing, overwhelming, and very much undesirable. Are you thinking about a few those things right now? I can too.

So, we wander into church today on Easter and we hear a promise from God that for those who love God all things work together for good. And we think, *not my thing*. "All things" can't include my thing. There's no way my thing can work together for good. Even God can't make that thing good.

Well, what would it take to convince you that God can overrule even the worst things and use them for purposes that are ultimately good? How about this? What if in the past God turned the worst thing ever done to anyone into the greatest good ever? What if he did it in three days?

So, let's ask, what is the greatest evil or injustice ever done in all of human history? 9/11? Columbine? The holocaust? Those were evil, but the worst evil was the murder of Jesus Christ. Why? There's never been more violence done to a more innocent person.

Jesus was pure and morally blameless. The only person ever in that category. Not only did he NOT do what he shouldn't, he always DID what he should and lived the most remarkable life of love ever lived. The jealousy and hatred of the religious establishment led them to pay off Judas and crucify Jesus. The trial and sentence were a political hit job. Yet, through it all, Jesus was amazing. Even his actions on the cross show his remarkable life to the very end, caring for his mother, evangelizing the thief on the cross next to him, asking God to forgive those who conspired against him. The thief on the cross spoke for all of us, "*We are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.*" (Luke 23:41)

If you can't trust what an apostle says about Jesus, how about trusting a criminal? It was the murder of a man who had done nothing wrong. What would you call that? The calendar calls it Good Friday. Why would we call it Good Friday? The death of an innocent man? The suffering of our Savior? What could possibly be good about that?

It's good only if we see it from the perspective of eternity. The big picture. What was good? The ransom price paid for our sins. Victory over Satan and death. Life brought out of death. Beauty from ashes. A death that brings eternal life. God worked the worst thing ever for good and the resurrection of Jesus shows that even the worst thing ever in the plan of God works together for good.

The resurrection of Jesus is God's forever statement that in his plan and purpose even the worst evils of this world and the horrible things sinners do, somehow, in the mystery of God's purpose, will eventually be worked together for good. If God can redeem the cross by resurrection, God can and will redeem all the sorrows of our lives into an eventual good.

Here's our challenge, how do we define "good?" I recall a dying man coming to a men's group I was a part of. He said, "I have cancer. I only have a few weeks to live." That will get a room quiet, and it did. He talked about Romans 8:28 and his struggle with how his

cancer could possibly work out for good. He said, *"Then it dawned on me that I don't get to define what is good."*

If there's any word in Romans 8:28 that we need to modify our definition of, it's that one. *Good*. All things work together for *good*. We think good is everything awesome in our lives, good health. Good wealth. Good marriage. Good kids. Happy days without end. But clearly God's definition of good is often different from ours. So, what is this promise assuring? What good is he guaranteeing?

What Good is God Guaranteeing for Those Who Love Him?

A resurrected body

If Jesus was resurrected, it is God's guarantee that our bodies will someday be resurrected like his. The whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 makes this point. Here's a highlight:

"For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins...If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead." (1 Corinthians 15:16-17, 19-21)

We humans like having bodies. Anybody out there not have a body today? We like having bodies. We may not like our body but we like having a body. We especially like it when our bodies are working well. But the sad reality is that all our bodies are in an incremental decline. Don't look at your Easter pictures from three years ago. Only the children look better; the rest of us look just a little worse each year. I'm only talking about men. What do the aches and pains and creaking sounds when we get out of bed tell us? This body is decaying.

How does a new body sound? Jesus' resurrection is God's guarantee of our bodily resurrection into a permanent, glorified body. If all the creaky bones and sore muscles and colds and flus and heart diseases and cancers in this life are guaranteed by God to be replaced with a forever body that never will decay, ***who here calls that good?***

Inseparable love forever

Romans 8 continues with, *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39)

How could our forever be "good" if it didn't have love? How lonely we would be forever if there was no one to love or be loved by. It's terrifying to think that hell is loveless. No love. No kindness. Perhaps no communication. Only hatred and grinding despair. Jesus called it forever *"weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matthew 8:12).

But for *those who love God*, God's love cannot be separated from us. The list hits exactly the things that would make us fearful. Can death take me from God's love? Can any human authority take God's love from me? Can any spiritual being take God's love from me? On the list goes with all the things we fear. The conclusion is that there is no height or depth,

person or power, or anything else that can keep God's love from its full expression to me forever. **Would you call that good?**

A life of ultimate meaning/hope

"For those who love God all things work together for good." (Romans 8:28)

Imagine there was no resurrection of Jesus. Imagine he remained dead like everyone else and joined every other religion's key leader as permanently dead. If your religious hero is dead, your religion is doubtful at best. It would mean this life is all there is. This is it. And then where do we go for any sense of our lives to have any lasting meaning or purpose?

Reflecting on her impending death, the French atheist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir stated:

"I loathe the thought of annihilating myself quite as much now as I ever did. I think with sadness of all the books I've read, all the places I've seen, all the knowledge I've amassed and that will be no more. All the music, all the paintings, all the culture, so many places: and suddenly nothing...Nothing will have taken place."¹

Death looms for the atheist, the materialist, the agnostic, the believe whatever, and believe nothing at all. They too are searching for meaning in life. But without any divine promise of redemption, they cling to this life alone. Perhaps that's you today. You're trying to do something significant with your life and trying hard not to think about your death. The rich, the poor, the powerful, the helpless, the human, we are all the same.

The same highs and lows happen to us. Blessings, yes. But trials and suffering as well. The unbeliever experiences bad and knows death awaits. The Christian experiences the same sufferings, but with the confidence that they will lead to good.

Is this a mind game? No. *It's grounded in the historical reality of the resurrection.* If God can make all things good including even the death of Jesus, then God can take the gnarled mess of my life and turn it all into eventual good.

I heard R.C. Sproul at a conference refer to Romans 8:28 and ask, "What if Jesus himself came on the stage now and said, 'I personally guarantee that nothing bad will ever happen to you.' How would we all feel?" Best Easter ever! And isn't that really what the resurrection says? For those who are true Christians, nothing ultimately bad will ever happen.

As many of you know, I'm a golf fan. Sacred ground for me is Augusta National Golf course and the Masters golf tournament. It was last week. Due to weather this past Sunday, the final round of the tournament was played in the morning. As a pastor, I'm busy on Sunday morning. We had friends coming over in the afternoon to watch, so I DVR'd the tournament and very carefully avoided seeing anything that might tell me who was winning. I made it home. The friends were over. An afternoon of golf bliss ahead. I turned on my iPad, not opening any app to take care of something when for some reason a flash banner appeared saying, *Tiger Woods has won his 5th Masters. What? NO!*

Why was I upset? Because watching the final round of the Masters when you already know who wins totally changes the experience. I watched. Tiger missed a putt. Yawn. He pushed

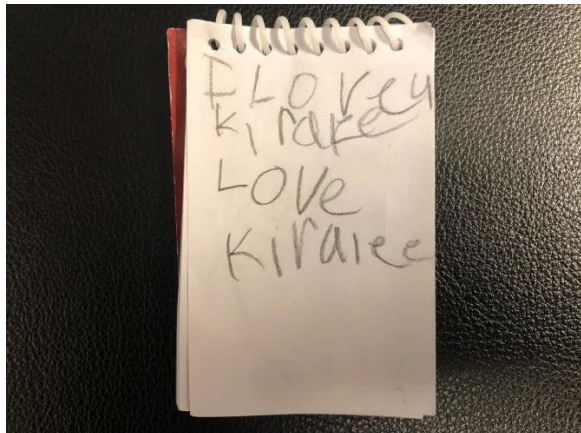
¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance*, p. 657.

his drive into the woods. Yawn. My friends were losing their minds. Me, nope. Why? I know how this thing ends. I don't know all the twists and turns, but I know in the end who wins.

The resurrection of Jesus is God's flash banner announcing who wins in the end. We don't know how everything gets there. Life throws us double bogeys and out of bounds. Lost balls and penalty strokes. The winds of life blow and bad things happen. But our experience in them is so different. How? "*All things work together for good.*" How can we be sure? On the third day Jesus rose again. Paraphrasing J.R.R. Tolkien, this means, "*Someday, all the sad things will come untrue.*"²

This brings us back to the condition of Romans 8:28. It doesn't apply to everyone. "*For those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*" (Romans 8:28, emphasis added) The condition is you must be a Christian. It is defined here as someone who "*loves God*" and is "*called according to his purpose.*" This is not a sentimental or selfish love; it is a love in response to God's love for us. It doesn't make us Christians; it indicates who is one.

Below is a note we found on the table one day, written by our eldest daughter. It says, "I love u Kiralee. Love, Kiralee." Children! Yet what a perfect summary of our natural love. Me. Self. Loving God truly indicates God's saving work in our lives. This comes as we repent of the very sins Jesus dies for, embrace by faith Jesus as my Savior, Lord, and King. Now I love him in the Romans 8 sort of way.



Dear friend, what better Sunday than Easter to trust in the crucified and risen Christ?

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² J.R.R. Tolkien, *Return of the King*, p. 246.