

Sermon Summary – Sunday 19 March 2023

Do Not Lose Heart (Calven Celliers)

“If God is all-powerful and in control, then why does He allow so many bad things to happen in the world?” Let’s make that more personal, let’s bring it home. If God is all-powerful and in control, then why does He allow so many bad things to happen in your life and my life? That is hard for anyone to understand. People have struggled with that question for thousands of years. No responsible person of faith can avoid wrestling with this question because if we are totally honest with ourselves then we have to recognise that sometimes what we know about God and what we see in real life can collide. I don’t know of any Christian who does not puzzle over their faith with questions which seem to have no answer. And this must surely be one of those questions that ranks top of that list?

When we as Christians say “*God is in control*,” what I think we mean is that God allows things to happen, or stops them from happening, according to His good and perfect will for our lives as His people. In other words, God designs, ordains, and governs. And that means that nothing happens outside what God knows will happen and allows to happen. Everything that happens to us as believers is ‘Father-filtered’ and He uses it for good even when forces of evil or others intend it for bad.

Read 2 Corinthians 4: 16 – 18. The word achieve means to *bring about or reach a desired objective or result; to get or attain as a result of*. The troubles that Jesus guaranteed us in the Gospel of John 16, are *achieving* something. Not one of us is immune to problems or isolated from suffering. None of us will ever get to skate through life on this side of eternity problem-free, and with good reason. Not only is there purpose to everything that we go through, there is significance too. Scripturally we are told that God doesn’t cause all things to happen, but He uses all things for our good and His glory. He works in and through all things. God has a purpose behind everything.

Read Romans 8: 28.

The context of this passage shows that in the midst of a world that groans under suffering and evil, God’s main concern is conforming His children to the image of Christ. And He works through the challenging circumstances of our lives to help develop Christlikeness in us. We can be assured that whatever difficulty He has allowed in our lives has been Father-filtered, through His fingers of wisdom and love.

We find perhaps the greatest comfort of this verse in the first three words, “*And we know*.” Our hope in difficult times is not based on wishful thinking or optimism; our hope as born-again believers is an iron clad certainty based on the truth that God is sovereign, and that He loves us. When we cannot comprehend why trials come and struggle to imagine that anything good can come from them, we can rest in the security that God is in control; and that He always has our best interests at heart. Knowing brings comfort and peace, and for that reason, it is worth noting that Paul did not say “*we think*” or “*we hope*”, on the contrary, we can “*know*”— in other words be certain about, and sure of the fact — that all things work together for good.

But no matter how optimistic you are, some things just *suck* [excuse the coarse expression, but that’s how we honestly feel sometimes]. The promise that God works all things together for good does not mean that all things, taken by themselves, are good. Some things and events are decidedly bad.

But God is able to work them together for good. He sees the big picture; He has a master plan. Our God is more powerful than all the forces of evil and all the rotten things that happen in our lives. Declare that over your life right now: **My God is more powerful than...** *[you fill in the blank – whatever adversities you're facing]*.

God took death itself and used it to redeem all of humanity. He reached down into the depths of our brokenness and began the restoration process.

Romans 8:28 does not mean that all things are good, but rather that in all things God works for the good. Think about it like this: God is redeeming all things. He is *"making all things new."* We have to remember that *"for our good"* does not necessarily mean *"for our pleasure"* or *"for our comfort and security"* but for our ultimate good.

It's a travesty when commentators and preachers reference Romans 8:28 and only focus on the first part of the verse and never explain what *"those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose"* really means. Romans 8:28 is a promise for believers. Those who are living for, and following Christ. This verse says to those who love God and are in a living relationship with Him, *"Even though bad/sad/evil/wicked things will touch your life, I (God) will use them to ultimately bring about good in your life."*

"God allows what he hates to accomplish what he loves." [Joni Earekson Tada]

And what does God love? God loves for people to enter into a personal, living relationship with Himself, and once we know Him, then to make us more like Jesus.

And since God intends to make us more like Jesus, then it makes sense that He will take us through the same experiences Jesus went through. Why would God exempt us from what He allowed His own son to experience? – **Read Romans 8:17.**

We are like jewels, shaped with the hammer and chisel of adversity. If a jeweller's hammer isn't strong enough to chip off the rough edges, then God may use a sledgehammer, and if we're really hard of hearing and stubborn, He may even use a jackhammer. Every circumstance is a character-building opportunity. And I know it's not the easiest thing to hear, but what happens outwardly in your life is not as important as what happens inwardly. Why? Because your circumstances are temporary, but your character will last forever. Our decision to align our will with God's and to always trust Him will be rewarded.

Now there's something to think about! It's all about eternity. How do you feel about your present sufferings? Know this – they are worth it if they affect your eternity! As followers of Christ, we need to live in the light of eternity. There is more to life than just the here and now; this life is preparation for a life to come. When you live in the light of eternity, your values change, you use your time and your resources more wisely. You place a higher premium on relationships and character than on the short-lived pleasures that this life has to offer. Measured against eternity, our time on earth is just the blink of an eye, but the consequences of it will last forever.

So, would it be fair to say that the reason God, who is all-powerful and in control, allows both good and bad things to happen in your life and mine, is because life on earth is a test preparing us for our eternity. Character is both developed and revealed by what we go through in this life. God is constantly watching how we respond to people, to problems, to success, to conflict, to illness, to disappointment. You will be tested by major changes, unanswered prayers, underserved criticism, impossible problems, senseless tragedies, delayed promises, and times when we can't sense God's

closeness. When you live in the light of eternity, every day is an important day, and every incident has significance to develop and deepen your character, to demonstrate love, and to depend on God.

And it's important to hold onto this truth, especially when life is tough, God never allows the tests you face to be greater than the grace He gives you to handle them. Just know that God sees, He notices, He strengthens, He sustains, and He rewards. **Read James 1:12.**

Therefore, do not lose heart! Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.