

We're going to read this morning from one of the most read and perhaps best known passages of the Bible. We all go through low points and high points, and the last few verses of Romans 8 have been described as one of the high points, maybe the highest point of Paul's experience as recorded in the Bible. These verses describe the climax of his knowing that he is in Christ, and in Christ forever and there is **nothing** in this whole wide world or even in the **universe** that can alter that fact. Nothing. He's convinced. He **knows**. How marvellous.

Of course we could do a whole **series** of talks on the contents of this chapter - Romans 8 – but let's start at that amazing verse 28 this morning. [Read]

Seventeenth century preacher Thomas Watson wrote this: "Faith will make us walk, but assurance will make us run: we shall never think we can do enough for God. Assurance will be as wings to the bird, as weights to the clock, to set all the wheels of obedience running."

In the 70s, singer David Cassidy sang these words: 'How can I be sure, in a world that's constantly changing, how can I be sure where I stand with you? How can I be sure? I really, really, really want to know.'

And I think this question – if we're honest – is a question we **all** ask at some time in our lives. What **is** our relationship with God? How can we be **sure** we're right with him? We're made in God's image, the Bible says, and if we're living without God, there's a hole in our lives that only **God** can fill. But that doesn't exempt Christians from also asking this question throughout their lives, because there are times when we feel far from God. How can we be sure of where we stand with him as we go through those times?

How can we be sure of our right standing before God, when so many things seem to oppose us, they seem to point to a **different** conclusion, that our relationship with God is **not** right. In those last few verses, Paul says, '*I am convinced that [nothing] will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*' But how can we be sure when we have to go through so many negative events and situations, bad things happen in this life to **Christians** too. Times like this come to the most **godly** of men and women.

How can Paul say with such certainty in verse 28, '*We know that in **all** things God works for the good of those who love him.*' It'll all work out for our good? Easy for **him** to say. **We're** not so convinced. Times have changed.

Pressure on us nowadays is **immense**. The difficulties and problems we face nowadays are so much more complex than in Paul's day surely. There **is** a recession on, you know. We've got it really hard now.

But hang on a minute. **Is** it so easy for him to say?

Look at the things he went through – floggings, beatings, stonings, riots, imprisonment, earthquakes, shipwreck to mention a few - yet he was convinced that in **all** things God works for the good of those who love him, **nothing** could separate him from the love of God in Jesus.

Perhaps it was **because** of all the things he went through that he was convinced. Perhaps we've got it too **easy** – we've not been carried by God through those times of testing, suffering and persecution so we've not come to that point of realisation that **Paul** has reached. Perhaps.

Paul was convinced – **we** need to be convinced too. But how **can** we be sure we'll remain in God's love forever? How can **we** - like Paul – know that God works in all things for our good?

I'm going to suggest three things from this passage that should give us Paul's confidence: we can be sure because

- We're changed through God's work in us,
- We're safe because God loves us, and
- We're kept because he holds us.

Let's look firstly, then at verses 28 – 30, and see that **we're changed through God's work in us**. There's some wonderful truths here that we really need to think about for a few moments now, but much more in the quiet of our homes, because if we grasp these truths, we can be **absolutely** sure of right standing before God.

How can we know that God works in all things for the good of the Christian, of the believer, of those who love God through Jesus? Precisely because it's **God** who works in all things. Because it's **God** at work. Because it's **God** who is doing the work in you and me. If it was **me** working out the way things were going, if it was down to **me** to manipulate situations so that they all work out for my good, I would have **no** confidence that it would all turn out right. No way. But it **isn't** me, it's **God** who works.

I don't know about you, but I get very frustrated when I start something but find that I can't finish it. All those unpainted model aeroplanes, those model buildings without rooves, or doors. I have limitations – whether it's time, or energy or just the ability to do a good job, and I fail to finish the job, **whatever** it is.

Thank God he's not like that. God is **perfect**, God knows everything, God can do everything except fail. So when Paul says here that God works, we can be certain that he'll do a **perfect job** according to his purpose.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes that he '*is confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.*' God sees the end from the beginning, we **don't**. God knows the path he is taking us on. King David accepted that God would sometimes take him through '*the valley of the shadow of death,*' but also that he would ' *dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*' Psalm 23:4, 6.

Verse 28 of our passage says that those who love God have been called according to his purpose. God has a purpose in calling men, women and children to himself. And shouldn't we believe that he'll work continuously and tirelessly until that purpose he has for his people is **fulfilled**? I believe we **should**. God works. **Nothing** can stop the work that God is committed to achieving.

God works. He's started the work. In a miraculous way, the Bible says, God knew us before we were born, he **foreknew** us, David recognised this in the Psalm we were looking at recently, Psalm 139; he wrote '*All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*' Psalm 139:16. God knew and **loved** his people before they knew him. '*We love, because he first loved us*' John says in his letter.

God has a purpose for his people, verse 29, he's predestined them '*to be conformed to the likeness of his Son,*' - this is God's saving purpose – this is his **work**, the work that he's started in those who love him, the work he'll certainly complete. What an amazing thought, what an amazing prospect, what an amazing future is ahead for those who know and love Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Let's think about this for a moment – '*be conformed to the likeness of his Son*' – what does it mean? Of course what it doesn't mean is that we look like him, and the films and pictures we've seen of Jesus won't help, because they depict him in a certain way. We have to look beyond those images, and find what the Bible says about Jesus.

We'll be conformed to the essence of his being. Remember that Hebrews tells us, *'The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.'* And there are verses in the Bible that indicate that we too can share in radiating the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 3:18 is great, talking of those who know and love the Lord, it says, *'And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being **transformed** into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.'* When we become a Christian, God **changes** us, **renews** our minds and hearts, he begins a work of transformation, and carries it on throughout our earthly life.

Don't you want this to be true of **you**? It can be.

As we become more like Jesus, *'we shine like **stars** in this depraved generation,'* Paul says to the Philippians. Jesus **himself** says, *'You are the light of the world ... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.'* Matthew 5:14, 16. **This** is the work that God does. This is the work that God will do in **you**. God begins a work and will complete that work so that the world will **know** that he is God, so that the world will recognise him as Lord and will praise him.

I could go on about this because the implications are mind-blowing. Why not talk about it after this meeting? Why not think about it this afternoon? Could there be a better use of your time than this? I think not.

Where do you stand this morning? The invitation's there for everyone. God knows not all will **accept** the invitation, not **everyone** will turn from their godless lives, not **everyone** will experience his life-changing grace and mercy, not **everyone** will feel his Spirit's work in them making them like Jesus. But if you hear God speaking to you this morning, I urge you, don't refuse his invitation. Turn to him and be saved. Be **changed**. Be **conformed** to the likeness of God's Son. This call is to **you**. Come to him. He wants to begin a work in you.

We're changed through God's work in us. How can we *'know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him'*? We **can**, because it's God who is at work, God is working out his purposes for you, and he will **complete** that work of conforming you to the likeness of his Son. What greater assurance can there be?

My second point is that **God's people are safe, because he loves them**. Look again at verses 31 and 32.

The bottom line is this – God is the One who loved us and gave himself for us. God did not spare his own Son in order to save us from eternal separation from him, in other words, eternal **death**. He didn't consider the cost of sacrificing his only Son too high a price for your salvation. God the Father **willingly** gave up his own Son, Jesus, so that each of us could be made **free** from the guilt of our sin. The first verse of this chapter reads, '*.. there is now no condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus.*'

Those who come to God recognising that Jesus' death on the cross and his being raised from the dead have taken away the punishment **they** deserve for their neglect of God's way, are free to have their relationship with God **restored**.

And what verse 32 is saying, is that if God's love is so great that he sent his Son to die on our behalf, that cruel death on the cross, **surely** this guarantees that God's love will keep us **safe** in relationship with him.

God is love. His love is perfect. His love never fails. His love is everlasting.

We may waver in our love – today we're hot, tomorrow we're cold – we're fickle, we can fall in and out of love at the drop of a hat. Today's love can be tomorrow's hate. Like our favourite toy yesterday, easily tossed aside today.

But thank God **he's** not like that. His love is steadfast and everlasting. Jesus wouldn't have needed to die, if God's love only lasted for a moment. The sacrifice would not have been worthwhile. God's love for you and me is shown in Jesus' work on the cross – out of his intense love for us, he died to save us. He **still** loves us with that same love. His love will never fail. We are safe, because he loves us.

And verse 34 tells us that Jesus' love **continues** for us as he's there, '*at the right hand of God and is also **interceding** for us.*' This means that Jesus is there praying for us, whenever there are any accusations against us, Jesus says 'No, he or she is my child, I love them, look at the scars and nail-prints -I **died** to take away their guilt, they're **safe** in my love, they're **safe** in my hands. You can have no claim on them, they are **mine**, I hold them safe.'

While we're living this life there will be times when we feel got at, in one way or another – and the Bible is very clear about this, it's not hidden away – there will be times for all of us when we ask ourselves the questions here in verses 33 and 34; '*Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? Who is he that condemns?*' – and sometimes we may **feel** like saying, 'well actually the whole **world** seems against me. My own weaknesses and **failures** seem to be against me.

And the devil is **definitely** against me, and tries to convince me that I'm still guilty, and I'm not a good Christian, and I'm going to die, and God **doesn't** love me after all.'

But *'If God is for us, who **can** be against us?'*

I don't know if you've heard of the card game 'UNO': you have to get rid of your cards first; you play with a special pack of cards which have consequences for the person who comes after you – sometimes to pick up a number of cards, or miss a go, or change the colour of card you can play. But there's one special card you can play which overrides **any** card that's played before you, no matter **what** it was. You will always **win** if this is your last card.

Jesus said, *'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have **overcome** the world.'* John 16:33. No matter **what** this world throws at God's people, no matter how we **fail** to be the people we know we should be, no matter how **strongly** the devil tries to accuse us and condemn us – **God** is for us, we have this special card, **nothing** and no-one can lay guilt at our door any more because God loved us and gave his Son for us. God has made us right with himself. God has saved us. We are safe because God loves us. His ears are closed to accusations and condemnation of his people, because Jesus' loving words are **louder**, 'They are mine, they're safe.'

So we can trust God to keep us **safe**, because he loves us with an everlasting, unchanging love. No matter **what** troubles we may face, we can trust that in all things God works for our good, because he loves us so much that he didn't even spare his own Son. We can be sure, because God loves us.

We're changed through God's work in us, we're safe because God loves us, and thirdly, **we're kept because he holds us**.

We come to the climax of this chapter in verses 35 to 39. We find another question here – *'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?'* And again we may be tempted to start thinking, 'Well, the world might, or my weaknesses might, or the devil might ...' But Paul says most **emphatically**, 'No!' Even though we may face persecution and even **death**, verse 36, nothing, absolutely **nothing** *'can separate [God's people] from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'*

Nothing. Nothing at all. There's no point you trying to think of something that'll keep you from his love, because Paul goes through every possibility.

Not even a hostile world? No. Not even the disasters of our world? No. Not even my lack of food, or, clothing, or a home? No. Not even my failure to do the right thing every now and again? No. Not even things I can't see? No. Not even things I can't imagine? No. Not even things of the spiritual world? No. Not even things I haven't even thought of yet? No, nothing at all.

Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians what he prays for his fellow believers. Ephesians 1:18-21 says this, *'I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age, but also in the one to come.'*

Paul is convinced that nothing can pull us from God's love, because God's great **power** holds us. It's not our weak grasp of **God's** hand, it's his powerful, strong, firm grip of **ours** that will make sure we don't fall away. God's power is at work in us, **incredibly** the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Think about that.

All these things in verses 35 to 39 that you could think of to separate us from the love of God, have **no** ultimate hold over God's people, because God has raised Jesus far above any authority and power on earth and in the spiritual realm, whether now or in the future, and he is in control of **everything** that **he** created.

The cross is the **guarantee** of victory over all these things – Paul can say *'in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.'* Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, because he **loved** us, and **died** for us, and **rose** for us, and **prays** for us, and **rules** for us.

Nothing can pull us out of God's hands – his hold on us is so powerful. We are kept because **he holds us**, and his hold of us assures us of God's blessing and sustaining.

How can we be sure that nothing can separate us from God's love? Because he holds and **keeps** us in his powerful hands.

How can we be sure that in all things God works for the good of those who love him? Because Jesus is Lord over all, and he's in control of all things. Even when it doesn't make **sense** to us. Even when it **hurts**. Our God is in control. This fills us with hope and assurance.

Of course I must stress those words *'those who love him'* in verse 28. How can we know that God works for the good of those who **don't** love God yet? We can't. Those who don't love God yet are outside his kingdom. Until you **come** to God, until you hear and **respond** to his call, until you're **changed** by God's work in your hearts and minds, you **can't** be safe and kept by God. If this is you this morning, please think very **seriously** about these things you've heard. To know the reality of these things in **your** life, you must come to Jesus and be saved. Do it today.

Most of you'll have heard of Joni Eareckson – her first book is in the library. At the age of 17 – her whole life ahead of her – she had a diving accident which paralyzed her from the neck down. **Devastating**. Condemned to a wheelchair for the rest of her life. **Imprisoned** in that chair. But as her life went on she got to **know** that chair as her friend, because it enabled her to speak to others about **Jesus**, the Lord she found because of her situation. She was invited to speak of her experiences and love of the Lord. She learnt to paint using her mouth, and wrote PTL on each.

When explaining why she did this, she said this: [Joni P.199 "It stands for – circumstances."]

How can we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him? Because God **works** and **continues** to work in those who have responded to his call; he will **complete** his saving work in those that recognise that Jesus died and rose for them; Jesus continues to love his people and so they will be kept **safe** in his all-powerful hands; God has a **purpose** for his children – to become more and more like Jesus – he **won't** let go, and his purpose **will** be fulfilled in **all** those who love him.

Doesn't this fill you with **assurance**? Are **you** sure? Are you, like Paul, **convinced** of your right relationship with God? I pray that you **are**, and we can **all** look forward to the wonderful outworking of God's **power** in letting us reflect the glory of God, and shine like **stars** in this dark world of ours.