

Romans 8B (2017)

- We're returning to Chapter 8 and Paul's climactic explanation of our security in Christ
 - Starting in Chapter 6, Paul began explaining what changed for the Christian as a result of having placed faith in Jesus Christ
 - First, we received a new spirit given to us by the Holy Spirit, made in the nature of Christ's sinless spirit
 - Secondly, for a time we contend with a sinful, fleshly body, which means we still experience sin until the body dies
 - Nevertheless, despite the presence of sin in our life, we are still righteous in the spirit, made so by Christ
 - Furthermore, when Christ lived on earth in the flesh, He satisfied all the requirements of the Law, including paying the Law's price for sin which He did not commit
 - Christ did all the right things while suffering the penalty for our wrong things
 - Therefore, God can be just in assigning us His sinless spirit by faith, giving us credit for what Christ accomplished on our behalf
 - Our new spirit is alive in Christ, credited with having met the Law and free from the penalty of our sin
 - So now our minds are set on the things of the Spirit, sharing a desire for what God desires, acknowledging the Law is right even as we fail to keep it on occasion
 - We live a life of peace with God and set our minds on our eternal future
 - And these things remain true despite our sin because our spirit remains Christ-like
 - And as our body goes to the grave, so goes its condemnation
 - So that at our judgment, we stand approved in the spirit because Christ has won that victory for us

- Therefore, Paul opened Chapter 8 declaring that there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus
 - There will be no condemnation at our judgment moment, but there is now no condemnation either
 - When the Father looks upon us now, He sees our sinless spirit
 - That righteousness was won by Christ and credited to us
 - Paul then continued in the first half of the chapter contrasting the way of life and future for the unbeliever vs. the believer
 - He used several arguments to reassure the believer that we have been changed by our faith
 - And though we still stumble, our concern over sin and our worry about salvation are themselves evidence of our changed heart
 - While before we had a mind hostile to God, now we call Him Father
 - Where before we lived in the flesh on a path to death, today we operate with the Spirit and mind of Christ
 - Where before we had a spirit enslaved by sin, today we have a choice of whether to sin or not
 - Where before we were distant from God, today His Spirit lives in us testifying to our heart that we are His
 - All of these experiences are unique to the believer and therefore they reinforce to us that something is different, something has changed
 - These experiences become our assurance that we have no condemnation
 - A Father doesn't condemn His children
 - The Lord can't condemn a perfect spirit
 - The Lord didn't die for us only to require we die for ourselves also
 - And the very fact that we have concerns for our salvation is proof in itself that we are saved
- That leads us to the second half of Romans 8, where Paul begins to consider external threats to our salvation
 - Specifically, the question of suffering

- Sometimes it's expressed as "Why do bad things happen to good people?"
- The question presupposes that the Universe hands out consequences according to personal value or worth
- Those who do wrong will suffer bad things while those who do well will experience only good things = karma
- Or at least that's how we feel it should be
- And because even Christians may tend to think that way, the question arises of what does our suffering say about our relationship with God?
 - Might our suffering for one reason or another suggest that our eternal security is in doubt?
 - For if God truly loves us and if we have no condemnation, then why would God permit bad things to happen to us?
 - Why would Christians see suffering?
 - Why would the Lord treat His children no differently than the rest of the world?
- It's a legitimate question, but when we ask it, we're thinking too narrowly about God's purposes in our life and in Creation overall
 - So for the rest of this chapter, Paul addresses the question of suffering
 - Why does God permit suffering and what does suffering say about our eternal security?
 - Paul begins looking at the question in terms of His plan for Creation itself

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Rom. 8:19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.

Rom. 8:20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope

Rom. 8:21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

[Rom. 8:22](#) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.

- Obviously, Paul's moved to the topic of suffering, but it actually starts a verse earlier
 - Last time, we looked at vs.16-17 where Paul introduced the idea of suffering as part of the Christian experience in this age
 - Just as we will share in Christ's glory in the age to come, we will also share in Christ's experience on earth
 - God's children will know suffering on earth for the same reason Christ did
 - Because the enemy seeks to persecute those who belong to God
 - And the sin of the world serves as the enemy's tool box, which he can bring to bear against the believer as God permits
 - Paul then moves directly into a discussion of the meaning of suffering, and of course the first thing he does is put sufferings in perspective
 - Specifically, he puts them in an eternal perspective
 - He says the sufferings of our present time are not comparable to the glory to be revealed
 - That's where we start whenever we broach this topic
 - We can't evaluate outcomes until all is said and done
 - Until we see how God deals with each person in the end can we say for sure who has received good things and who has received bad things
 - Remember the story Jesus tells of Lazarus and the Rich Man in Luke 16

[Luke 16:19](#) "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day.

[Luke 16:20](#) "And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores,
[Luke 16:21](#) and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores.

[Luke 16:22](#) “Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried.

[Luke 16:23](#) “In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.

[Luke 16:24](#) “And he cried out and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.’

[Luke 16:25](#) “But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.

- If we tried to assess God’s goodness for each of these men prior to their deaths, we would have been working with only half the data
 - But after they died, then the full story will be known
 - And according to what Jesus taught, the rich man (who is an unbeliever) received good things in the first life
 - This was God’s choice for the man, yet it didn’t begin to reflect on the man’s true relationship with God
 - The mere fact that God granted the man earthly riches said nothing about God’s pleasure with the man
 - Instead, they were a limited benefit that disappeared in eternity
- Following death, the man began to experience his eternal existence, which was far less desirable
 - Conversely the man who suffered most of his life on earth – again, by the Lord’s sovereign will – saw great comfort
 - Now we understand that the Lord’s love truly rested on this man, despite his poor circumstances on earth
- So this story teaches two fundamental truths:
 - God lets His children suffer for purposes of His own
 - And our relationship with God cannot be measured by the quality of our earthly life
- Obviously, Christ’s own life is the ultimate example of this principle

- Christ suffered in ways none of us ever will, since He experienced eternal separation from the Father – to say nothing of his pain and suffering
 - Yet Christ is beloved of the Father, His only begotten Son
 - Clearly, we can't measure the Father's pleasure in His Son, as Isaiah says

Is. 53:10 But the Lord was pleased

To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
 If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,
 He will see His offspring,
 He will prolong His days,
 And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand.

- Notice the before-and-after quality to this verse
 - The Father was pleased to crush His Son, putting Him to grief
 - But in doing so, the Father would prolong Christ's days and the good pleasure of the Father would be Christ's
 - He's referring to the glory that Christ will enjoy when He rules the world from the seat of David
- So Christ too experienced suffering while on earth, but we can't judge God's pleasure in His Son from that perspective
 - We have to wait to see the end of the story, which we won't see until we're in the next age with Christ
 - That's the age Paul is speaking about when he says that our present sufferings can't be compared to what's in store for us
 - If we could look ahead to see what God has planned for us, we wouldn't be thinking much about our problems now
- In fact, they would seem like nothing compared to what's coming
 - You might compare them to the relationship between the pain of childbirth, compared to the joy of having a child for all your life
 - A few hours of discomfort can't compare to years and years of joy

- Likewise, we can't lose an eternal perspective on our sufferings or else we let them erode our confidence in God's love
 - If you're having an especially bad day or week or year or season of life, it doesn't mean God has stopped loving you, stopped caring, or stopped listening
 - There is something God is doing for your benefit
 - But for some reason that benefit depends on you suffering, at least for a time
 - The benefit God has planned literally couldn't be achieved any other way
 - And you're not alone, because Paul says the entire Creation is in the same boat with you
 - In vs.19-22 Paul describes the suffering of the Creation
 - He's speaking literally of the entire Universe, everything God created in the first week
 - In v.19 Paul says the entire creation anxiously longs for the arrival of that next age
 - Anxious longing could be translated as eager anticipation, a desire or longing for the arrival of that outcome
 - How can inanimate things long for something?
 - It's not necessarily a conscious longing
 - Rather, Paul's referring to Creation's situation under the curse
 - It's not that the Creation is consciously aware of its fallen state, but that it exists in an unnatural state
 - It experiences death, disease, wearing down and corruption as a result of the curse
 - This is not the natural, intended state of God's design for His Creation
- Nevertheless, the Lord placed the Creation into this state when He pronounced a curse on it
 - Paul says in v.20 that the creation was "subjected" to this futility

- The One Who subjected it was God, of course
- So this is the ultimate example of God allowing suffering
- When someone tries to tell you that God isn't responsible for suffering existing in the world, remind them where the curse came from
- Obviously, the curse itself was the result of Adam's sin,
- But nevertheless the Lord is the One who place the world in this state of futility
- But Paul also says that the Creation didn't accept the curse "willingly," that is, it wasn't the result of anything the Creation did to deserve it
 - The creation itself was innocent in the matter of the Garden
 - Still, the world was unwillingly subjected to the curse
 - Just as God's children often find themselves under difficult circumstances that were no fault of their own
- Paul says that it was subjected in this way by God, in hope that Creation itself would be set free from slavery
 - Paul's referring to God's ultimate plan for Creation
 - When Adam sinned, he brought sin into the life of mankind
 - Left unchecked, Adam's mistake would have doomed all mankind to live with sin, apart from God
- And even if God acted to redeem mankind, as He has done through Christ, still we would have bodies corrupted by sin
 - So there could be no escape from sin and sin's consequences
 - This would have been the eternal state for mankind
- Therefore, God acted to correct for that problem, but His solution required that pain and suffering precede glory
 - Before God could put an end to sin in the life of every believer, He needed to put an end to all sinful human flesh
 - To do this God pronounces a curse on the earth, from which all flesh comes

- He did this to set up opportunity for our bodies to be replaced
- And with us, the earth itself will be replaced
- So once more we see this before-and-after process
 - Initially, the news is bad
 - The world is subjected to futility
 - But it was done in hope of being set free from its corruption to sin
 - And to be prepared to receive the sons and daughters of glory who will occupy it one day in new, eternal, sin-free bodies
- Can you make the comparison to your own situation again?
 - Just as Lazarus suffered before receiving his reward
 - Just as Jesus suffered to receive His reward
 - Just as the Creation suffers for a time looking forward to its day of redemption
 - So then we too will know suffering for a time prior to receiving the fullness we're anticipating through our faith in Jesus
- Remember my example of childbirth from a moment ago?
 - Paul alludes to this same analogy in v.22
 - He says the world is suffering the pains of childbirth
 - It's a reference to this theological principle, that God brings us sufferings to lead us into glory
 - That He must deal with sin through a period of atonement and anxious longing before He reveals the glory to come
- The delay between one and the other is explained in Hebrews 11
 - God has designed the plan of redemption so that no one will receive their glory apart from the rest of those included in God's plan
 - We all go into glory together, which means those who lived earlier in this age must wait for those to come later

- And the Creation itself must exist in this state of futility for many centuries awaiting the final generation of God's people to be born
- Or as Hebrews says:

[Heb. 11:39](#) And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised,

[Heb. 11:40](#) because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect.

- The saints of old never received what they had been promised, the writer says, speaking of the promises of a kingdom on earth
 - Why have they not received it?
 - Because the writer says that God had something better for us, that is the saints of the New Testament
 - God had a plan to reveal His Son and grant the earth a time to know Him prior to the judgment and the kingdom
 - So that those OT saints could not be made perfect apart from us, the writer says
 - This is the fundamental reason for why suffering precedes glory
 - We must live in a sinful body before we occupy a sinless body
 - We must live a life on a sinful earth before we can enter into the life in the kingdom
 - And we must all wait for the arrival of that kingdom because we all spend the same length of time in it
 - So no one can arrive earlier than anyone else
 - Paul says this principle can be pictured through childbirth
 - The pain of childbirth was something God instituted when He responded to the sin of woman
 - But when God brought pain to childbirth, He was granting women a blessing of carrying an example of this principle in their bodies

- All mothers are giving a living example to the plan of redemption
- As Christ had to suffer to make possible our spiritual birth and a life of glory, so women suffer pain to bring forth new life
- God made the pain a part of Creation, but He instituted the suffering to bring the world to glory
- Next Paul moves from suffering in Creation, to examining the meaning of suffering in our personal experience

Rom. 8:23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Rom. 8:24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?

Rom. 8:25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

- We too suffer (or groan) under the burden of the curse in our bodies
 - We too feel the weight of the curse in our own bodies
 - We suffer sickness, pain, toil, sweat, weakness, aging, and physical death
 - Paul says we know these things even though we have the first fruits of the Spirit
 - The term “first fruits” refers back to the requirement in the Law
 - In the Law, a farmer’s proper service of worship to God was to offer back to God the first produce from his harvest
 - It was a way of acknowledging to God that all the farmer received was from God’s grace
 - Paul uses that term to refer to the deposit of the Holy Spirit in each believer
 - The Spirit is the first part of what God has planned to give us in Christ
 - He is the first fruits of glory, and Paul says despite having this deposit, nevertheless we still suffer

- This one verse is a silver bullet putting to death the prosperity Gospel or any version of that lie which maintains that God wants us to be happy, rich and free of sickness
 - Paul says that's not true, at least not while we live on this earth in this body
 - He says even we groan within ourselves
 - That's another way of saying we too know the feeling of suffering inside ourselves
 - Even believers will have this experience, and it's one God ordained for all humanity in the curse
 - Just as God brought childbirth pains to women and brought the Creation under a curse and brought Jesus to pain on the cross
- But like Creation itself, we bear up under the curse knowing that in a day to come we will experience the redemption of our body
 - That's what living with eyes for eternity means
 - It means not fixing your gaze on the problems of today to the exclusion of appreciating where the Lord is going
 - Rather, we are to live in the midst of suffering without allowing that suffering to define us or obscure our hope for the eternal
 - Too often Christians respond to this truth with a "yes, but..." mentality
 - We agree that the eternal place of our glory should be our focus
 - But then we quickly say but I have to deal with the problems of today and they are causing me great grief
 - That's trying to have your cake and eat it too
 - Of course, we must deal with what life brings us
 - Just as Christ had to deal with the cross
 - But for Christ, the suffering of the cross wasn't a problem to be solved
 - It was an experience to submit to, for the good things God intended to accomplish through it
 - So it should be with us in our everyday concerns

- They are not problems to be solved, even as we must work to address them in one way or another
- Rather they are experiences to submit to in a trust that God is using them to produce good for us
- And in that we can endure the present without losing an eternal perspective
- More importantly, we don't begin to worry that they are a threat to our relationship with God
 - We have been saved by a hope that Christ will raise us from the dead, just as He was raised
 - And that hope is based in a promise from God, so we have taken it as trustworthy
 - But still, it is a hope, since we have not seen it happen as yet
 - Therefore, Paul reminds us in v.24 that we shouldn't be surprised that we don't see good things while we're waiting for our redemption
 - We hope for good things in eternity, and that hope is our faith in God to fulfill His promises to us
 - But when we demand that He present those good things to us now, as those who preach the prosperity Gospel will tell you, then we stop operating in faith
 - Paul says who hopes for what he already sees or has?
 - So in truth, those of faith should expect to be without what we expect while we are in the body
 - But we expect good things to follow this age
 - And that's why we call it faith
 - Don't trade that eternal hope for something of this world, for Paul says that isn't faith
 - But for the one who remains fixed in that eternal hope, who lives with eyes for eternity, that one will persevere
 - Perseverance is not something that comes and goes for the believer

- The believer who has his or her hope in eternal things, will persevere in earthly suffering because we understand that's what comes before glory
- Like the mother who perseveres through childbirth pain because she knows where it's leading
- So ironically, the one who puts his hope in temporal glory, prosperity or healing or whatever, that person is less likely to persevere
 - Because as they place their trust in something they expect to see, when it doesn't materialize they give up
 - But since we know we will not see our glory before our death, we have every reason to persevere in waiting and serving Christ
- And we don't do this waiting alone

Rom. 8:26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words;

Rom. 8:27 and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

- In the same way the Spirit works with us to support us through our weaknesses
 - When we feel like we can't go longer in this world, when we can't find hope, when we don't see the goodness of God, or when we doubt God's love...
 - Then the Spirit intercedes for us
 - When we don't even know how to pray or don't even think to do it, the Spirit prays for us
 - The Spirit of God brings petitions before the Lord on our behalf, interceding for us
 - This is a stunning revelation for the believer
 - None of us are satisfied with our prayer life
 - We all know we should spend more time in prayer, but even when we're failing in this area of our walk, did you know the Spirit is still interceding for us?

- And His interceding far exceeds even our own
 - He can communicate with the Father in ways too deep to be expressed in words
 - So that even if we were inclined to pray as the Spirit does, we couldn't do it
 - We don't have the capacity to speak to God the way God can speak to Himself
- And when the Spirit prays, he knows our hearts even more fully than we know ourselves and He knows the will of God perfectly
 - So when the Spirit prays on our behalf, He prays for exactly what you need, even things you yourself don't know or won't acknowledge
 - And He prays in keeping with the will of God, something He knows infinitely better than we do
- So here's what that means...the Spirit is bringing us through this life in ways perfectly suited to benefit us and please the Lord
 - Which means that when we were too busy pursuing the world instead of praying, or praying for selfish, stupid things, the Spirit was way ahead of us
 - He knows the sin in our heart, so He prayed for circumstances to expose it causing us to confess it and put it away
 - Or when we were getting spiritually lazy, He prayed for the Lord to send us trials so we could experience some suffering to strengthen our walk
 - In other words, the suffering we know is sometimes things the Spirit intercedes to bring us so that we might please God
 - This whole world of suffering is a learning laboratory for us while we wait for what God has promised
 - We make the best of it by learning the lessons the Lord brings us, while maintaining eyes for eternity
 - Knowing that the present sufferings are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed

- When you understand this principle properly, you begin to see everything that's happening in your life in a different, and more spiritually-mature, way
 - You begin to understand God's control over everything that happens
 - And equally important, you appreciate the potential for good things to come from even the worst experiences in life
 - Just as your own salvation came from God dying in your place
 - Paul summarizes this in one of the best known passages in the New Testament

[Rom. 8:28](#) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

[Rom. 8:29](#) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

[Rom. 8:30](#) and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

- While many believers can probably quote Romans 8:28, we probably overlook where it starts
 - And we know...
 - Paul begins with an assumption that we understand and agree with this principle
 - It's almost as if he doesn't think he needs to convince us of anything
 - How can he be sure?
 - Because it's the natural conclusion we come to after appreciating the enormity of Romans 8:1-27
 - Those circumstances that lead to suffering are ordained by God according to His will for us and to our benefit
 - Often they are the direct result of the Spirit of God interceding to bring them about
 - Therefore, there can be no such thing as something bad that God isn't using or in control of for His purposes

- Paul says God is not passive in the time we spend on earth waiting for our glory
- Rather God is active in our circumstances, causing things to go as they do
- He works, He actively intercedes and brings to a purposeful and intentional end
- But notice an important caveat in this verse: God is working in these ways for the good of those who love Him, those called into faith according to God's purpose
 - So there are the "haves" and the "have-nots" in God's economy
 - The believers will find that all circumstances in their life, even the very bad ones, will have been used by God to bring good outcomes in eternity
 - While in the case of unbelievers, God is no less in control, but His purpose is not to bring them good, eternally speaking
 - There would be no purpose in God causing things to happen for good in the life of someone not called into a relationship with God
 - Because that person will never be able to take advantage of that good outcome
 - It would be like God working circumstances for the good of that Rich Man from Luke 16
 - If God has no plans to call such a man into faith, then those good lessons will never pay off for him
 - So the confidence we have in God's plans are limited to those who are God's (or will be in an appointed day)
 - We can't tell the unbelieving world that everything will be OK in the end
 - Or that God is on their side
 - These are false assurances
 - Instead, we must tell them the Gospel so that Romans 8:28 will become true for them

- So as we reach v.28, we come to understand that as we wait patiently in hope for our resurrection, nothing we face here poses a threat to that outcome
 - Life may be hard, we will have trials, the enemy will bear down on each of us in his own way
 - But nothing comes between us and God
 - Nothing can frustrate our hope, nothing has enough power to stop the good that God intends to bring His children
- Which leads Paul to his crescendo

[Rom. 8:29](#) For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; [Rom. 8:30](#) and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.

- Understanding this verse properly rests on two things
 - First, are you keeping Paul's point in mind and not straying into wrong alleys?
 - Secondly, are you willing to read the words and accept their plain meaning without explaining their meanings in novel and imaginative ways?
- Let's begin with some observations
 - First, there is an obvious chain of events being described here
 - Paul connects his chain with the linking word "also"
 - And God is the actor in this chain
 - Paul repeats "He" before every verb in the chain
- So God does one thing, and then He follows with another thing for the same group
 - And each link in the chain is as certain as the previous link, according to Paul
 - So if the first link is true, then all that follows will always be true
 - Paul never inserts a conditional phrase or thought in this chain so if the first is true, then the last will be true

- Likewise, if the last is true for someone, then the first link and everything in between was also true
- Second observation, Paul is using these verses to support his earlier statement that we can be assured no bad experiences in this life will bring our undoing
 - You can see his point clearly by briefly looking at the succeeding verse

Rom. 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

- Clearly, Paul wants to assure the reader that what God has begun, He will certainly finish, since all the work is His
- In fact, if any link in the chain could be seen as in doubt, then Paul's entire point becomes moot
- If the entire chain is not unbreakable, then Paul's assurance is empty and worthless
 - He can only assure us of God's faithfulness and sovereignty over all circumstances in our lives if his example is without exception
 - Every link in his chain is an absolute certainty, because each step is accomplished in God's will and plan
 - And God's will cannot be challenged
- So now let's look at the chain
 - First, who are those in this verse?
 - Is it all mankind?
 - No, because the people in view in this chain are the same ones as those in v.28: Christians
 - So we're not talking about unbelievers
- Next link: God foreknew
 - Much has been made of this word – *proginosko* – from which we get the word prognosticate
 - It means to understand the future with certainty
 - God's understanding predates all knowledge
 - He knew the Christians before time began

- We were on His mind before we had a mind
- Those He foreknew, God also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren
 - Here's where our careful observation of the plain language is key
 - Those He foreknew God also predestined
- I can't hardly think of a word in scripture more emotionally charged than predestined
 - *Proorizo* – It means to determine beforehand
 - One of my favorite uses of the word comes in an often overlooked passage of Acts

[Acts 4:27](#) "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,

[Acts 4:28](#) to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

- In that context, the meaning of the word is easy to see
 - Stephen is speaking about how God had intended that Jesus would die on the cross
 - His death was no accident. It was bad luck
 - It didn't happen at the whim of Pontius Pilate
 - It didn't happen because the Jews conspired to cause Jesus' death
- Stephen reminds the crowd what we all know from scripture, that the Father intended to put His Son to death from long before it happened
 - And He determined the manner of that death
 - Stephen says that Jesus died because God predetermined that Jesus would die on the cross
 - And when the appointed time arrived, God's predetermined plan was carried out under God's guidance and direction

- As Stephen says, they did whatever your hand and purpose predestined
- So let's take that simple meaning and bring it back to the text
 - God predetermined that "those" He foreknew would be conformed to the image of His Son
 - Image means likeness or representation
 - To be conformed to His likeness means to be a Christian, to be saved – but it's deeper than that
 - It's also to join Him in His suffering and ultimately to join Him in glory
 - Remember Paul's point is that nothing can stop this chain of events
 - God knew you from before the beginning, assigned you to become like His Son and made that determination before the world began
 - How can anything in this world interrupt a plan that began before the world itself was established?
- That's how Paul can bring the chain to conclusion in the next verse: called, justified, glorified
 - Since God determined to conform you to His Son's likeness, then naturally God must act according to His plan to call you into a relationship
 - So that as you answer that call, you can be justified through faith
 - And surely if you have been justified through faith, then you can be sure that you will see the glory or resurrection on a future day
 - That's Paul's point...it's the climax of his essay on righteousness
 - He has been describing a chain of events that led to your salvation
 - And for every believer who has ever read this letter, they can look back and see every step in this chain as a part of their personal history...
 - Every link except one...no believer reading Paul's letter will have yet experienced the last step

- The step of glorification...this is the final step for all of us
- So Paul wants the believer to be as assured of the future fulfillment of that step, as we are sure of our past steps that brought us to where we are now
 - This assurance is possible because God had the whole thing determined before even step one happened

[Eph. 1:3](#) Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

[Eph. 1:4](#) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love

[Eph. 1:5](#) He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

[Eph. 1:6](#) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.