

Redemption's Golden Chain
Romans 8: 29-30

Sermon by Rev. Nathan Eshelman
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The question would simply be: whence proceeds this faith which God foresees? And the only biblical answer is that the faith which God foresees is the faith He Himself creates. – Professor John Murray.

Thesis: Paul explains what lies behind his statement “those called according to his purpose.” Paul shows that the Christian hope is linked into eternity past, in the present experience of this life, as well as into eternity future.

I. Linked in to Eternity Past

- A. Foreknowledge
- B. Predestination

II. Linked in to Our Experience

- A. Calling
- B. Justification

III. Linked in to Eternity Future

- A. Glorification

When I first became a Christian, a friend of mine whose father was an evangelical pastor, he asked me and another friend who was also a new convert if we would help him out with the young people in his church. So we offered and we agreed and we helped him out, and one day he asked me and this friend if we would come into his office because he wanted to talk to us about some things. In that office he asked me and my friend to stop talking to his young people about predestination and to stop talking about election. He went on to say that he did not know where he stood on the topic, but he wanted his people to focus on things that are practical and useful to the Christian life. Now I am not saying that when I was a young Christian I had all the tact that was needed to talk about sensitive matters, but I was aware and even then I knew that predestination and election were practical matters. As we look at Romans 8:29-30 today, we will see that Paul uses these verses as a part of his larger argument that we cannot be separated from the love of God. Remember last week when we saw that Paul was telling us that all things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose; here in today's text Paul will tell us something more about what that “being called according to his purpose” looks like.

Let's read today's text again. Romans 8:29-30 “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.”

So we will look at this text under the theme “Redemption's Golden Chain” – we will see that this Golden Chain of Redemption has links in eternity past, has links in the present experience of the Christian, as well as links in eternity future. Golden links connected called Redemption’s Chain: Like a golden necklace that is linked together with each link essential to the whole. This term “Golden Chain” has been used for hundreds of years to describe these verses. If you would go to Google and search on this term you will see that this term has been used for a long time to talk about this text. I would also like to stress how Paul is using these doctrinal truths. Paul is giving the believer further comfort and is grounding them in these things that we see today. For Paul, the doctrines are intensely practical because it deals with our assurance and our understanding of the way in which God's love for us is applied to us. So as we work our way through these two verses this morning we need to remember this foundation: All things working together for good for those who love God. And, here Paul is telling that if you fit that category, if you are one of those who love God, here is how it happens, and this is further comfort for the believer.

So let's look at how this is linked in eternity past for our first heading, linked in eternity past. We see right away that Paul is speaking of something that has happened in the past. He says, “Those whom He foreknew He also predestined.” We need to look at these words and see what Paul is teaching us. We need to look at these words and ask what do the words foreknew and predestined mean. The first word is “foreknew” and is a word made up of two other Greek words, before and know. Simply, it means, to know before. Now there is a common misunderstanding of what this word means. Some would say that it means that God looked down the corridors of time and took notice of all those who would choose Him and have faith. The false argument is: God chooses those whom He saw ahead of time would profess faith; they say that foreknowledge is God knowing what we would do. (This is not what the scriptures teach.) What comfort is that for you? It's not for me, I'll tell you that. If God bases his love for me on some good deed that I have done – I am not comforted by that. Maybe you have been better Christians than I have and more faithful. But I cannot imagine God looking onto my life and finding enough value to say that I am going to elect that person to be a Christian. It is not comforting to me. If God bases his love on some good deed that I have done, it actually terrifies me a bit. This false understanding of the word “foreknow” – this “corridor of time” understanding – is insufficient because it stands on the work of man rather than on what God has done!

Notice the five big words in these two verses: Foreknow, Predestined, Called, Justified, and Glorified. These words are not centered on me nor on what I have done, not one of them. Each of these words is focused on the work that God is doing. God foreknew. God predestined. God Called. God justified. God glorified. Foreknowledge cannot be based on our ability to have faith or do good works, because it is based on God and what God wants. The word 'foreknew', as I said simple means to know before hand. This

knowledge of God is not merely cognitive knowledge. It's is not just Oh I know that someone will exist. It is an experiential, intimate, loving, and committed knowledge. As we said last week the promise of all things working for good is only extended to those whom God has called and those who love Him. So those whom He foreknew are those whom God places his love upon that they may in turn love Him. Paul, in the book of Ephesians, says it like this: "Even as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us for adoption as sons and daughters.

So we see that this before hand 'foreknowledge' goes all that way back to before the foundation of the world. Not simply looking back in time, it goes before time. Before the foundations of the world, God placed His love on me. Imagine that. Before the world was even created God knew you, and He knew whether He would love you or not. Is this practical? Can you apply this thought to your life? I think it is immensely practical. If I judge my faith on the way I live my Christian life, it has many ups and downs. But, if I can reach out and grab onto the love of God that He had for me before the foundation of the world, I can apply that to my life. People always say that they want preaching that is applicable; predestination is applicable. In the mind of God before I ever existed, before this church ever existed, before this denomination ever existed, before man ever existed, God knowing me in his mind is great encouragement.

I used this idea of foreknowledge while evangelizing someone recently in speaking about loneliness. In a city of 12-15 million people we can be lonely. There are millions upon millions of people here, and do I matter? Does anyone notice me? Would anyone notice if I was not here? It is easy to be lonely in a place like this, but we can take comfort because we are noticed. We are noticed and have been noticed since before the foundation of the world. Not because of any good in me, but merely because God has chosen to love me in Christ Jesus. Can you apply that? God applies this thought as well, doesn't He? God applies foreknowledge. God says that because He loved you before the foundation of the world He also would predestinate you. Predestination is the application of God's foreknowledge. People will try to tell you that predestination is not practical. Like my friend's Dad who was a pastor. He would say it is not practical to speak of predestination. Of course it is practical! It is the practical outworking of God's foreknowledge. Without predestination we wouldn't have a Christian life to even think about, let alone apply! It is extremely practical.

Predestination is also linked in eternity past. The word predestined means to determine one's destiny before hand. This is another word which evokes passionate responses in the Christian church. I have head numerous times from evangelical friends, "You don't believe in predestination, do you?" I'm sure that many of you have heard the same question from friends, and that question always has surprised me. Of course I believe in predestination; the word is right there in the Bible. It is so much easier to say you

believe in predestination that to say “Yes, I believe in Calvinism.” Predestination is something in the Bible, and again it is very practical. Paul is using this in a very practical way; he is not saying “take comfort in your salvation and make for yourselves a little Christian ghetto and refuse to engage the world.” Paul is emphasizing that since you are predestined, you must live in a certain way and engage the world in a certain way. Friends, predestination has a purpose it is so that we can be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. This is where sanctification comes into this chain linked in eternity past. We are foreknown and predestined for the purpose of being sanctified in this life, predestined so that we can be holy and become more like Jesus Christ as determined in eternity past.

This is a golden link to eternity past, but it is also a link in the present experience of the church as well. We see that there is something for the here and now – this is not just something that happened before the world was formed. So often when we here people talk about things that happened long ago we get a little bit tired. We are Americans and we like things fresh and new. The oldest thing in our country is probably Sears. We don't like thinking about things from long ago, we like things now and current. Paul teaches that there is a link in this Golden Chain for current and now. Notice our text, “And those whom He predestined He also called and those whom He called He also justified.” These are part of the experience, the beginning experiences, of the Christian life and they are for now. They are not only from eternity past; they are for the current experience of the here and now. There is no Christian on this planet that has not experienced both calling and justification. Of course, they may not understand those terms or use those terms, but all who are true Christians have been called and justified.

The word is “called”, and what does this word “called” mean? To be called is divided into two understandings. There is the external call and the understanding of the internal call. The external calling is when the Gospel goes forth, and any time the Gospel is presented and it falls on men's ears that is the external call. The external call is universal, meaning that anyone can hear it. Just last week we took a friend to see Hollywood; he wanted to experience Hollywood. As we were driving past the so called “normal” things on Hollywood Blvd, we noticed a large number of self-professed Christians with big signs that talked about sin and the Bible and how there is life in Christ. There were some who were talking to people o Hollywood Blvd and they were speaking loudly enough such that people could hear them. That is an example of the external call, people hearing the gospel. Anytime I preach from this pulpit and call each one of you to respond in faith it is an external call. Each time I call you to either faith in Christ or to greater obedience in Christ, I am providing an external call. In the New Testament those who give the external call as pastors are called heralds. Now heralds were those runners who in ancient times came with an announcement to proclaim. If it was a public announcement then they would run into the center of the town hall and cry out their news for all to hear it.

However, it is the inward call that Paul is primarily speaking about in our text. If you have been foreknown then you have been predestined, and if you have been predestined then you have been (or will be) called inwardly. I told many of you about the two young ladies that I met on the plane on the way back from the church planter's conference. I had an opportunity to have a 5 hour conversation with them about Jesus Christ and how Christ came to die for hurting people and broken people. Now, I have not received a phone call or an email, but if one of those young ladies began to ruminate on the things that she heard from the word of God that afternoon (an external call). If she ruminates and the Holy Spirit begins to call to her, then she would begin to respond to the external call given and it would become a true inward calling. It would be the Holy Spirit beginning working on the heart causing her to believe the Gospel that Jesus Christ died for sinners. The only way that the message can be believed is if we have been called inwardly.

Remember in Mark's Gospel when Jesus comes to the house of Jairus to minister to his daughter and when He gets there she is already dead? They were hoping that Jesus would make her well, but what did Jesus do? He went up to her and He said in Aramaic, "talatha cumi" which means "little girl, get up." And, what happened? She gets up; she comes back to life, didn't she? Now you or I could be standing over this little dead girl and we were asked to help, we could not help in that way. We could stand over here and say "little girl, get up." We could beg and plead and manipulate and make promises to God, but it does not mean that she is going to get up, does it. But Jesus Christ stands over the body the dead body of a precious little girl and He says, "talatha cumi: Little girl, get up." Jesus can do this because He calls effectually. And she responds! She has been called. It is a command from the Lord Jesus Christ! Little girl! Get up! And you and I have been dead in trespasses and sin, and if we are called the Lord Jesus stands over our dead bodies and He says, "talatha cumi: Little girl, get up. Little boy get up! Be regenerated and believe the Gospel for the remission of sins! Become alive!" And Jesus Christ calls those whom He foreknew, those who were predestined, and they are forgiven their sins. They are now able to respond to the Gospel in faith. Taking hold of that promise for Christ's sake and believing it!

And what happens when we believe? Justification is the next part of the chain in our present experience. We are justified; this is also in our present experience. When we believe the Gospel, we are justified, saved from our sins, justified by faith. We are no longer held accountable because Jesus Christ was held accountable for our sins. We are given faith and regenerated hearts, and we reach out by faith and grab hold of that gospel and promise of redemption, that promise that our sins will be forgiven, and we are justified. Now, is that practical? Doesn't that sound like something you can apply to your own life and the lives of those with whom you talk? It is very practical.

Why is Paul telling us again about justification in this section of the epistle? Remember that he has already spent at least two chapters on justification. Now the reason that he brings this up again is that it is a practical application of what it means to love God and be those called according to his purpose. We have been freed and we can be assured that we are redeemed when we secure in God's love. Remember that this is right in the middle of this subsection on how all things working together for good. Sometimes when things do not seem to be working for good – sometimes when we sense that we are under God's hand of discipline we question whether we are in Christ. I think that this is a common thought. I remember hearing teenagers say when I worked at the hospital that their parents do not love them. When you would question them on this, often they would say that they were disciplined or held accountable for their actions. Paul is guarding us against the temptation of these sorts of doubts as to whether our Heavenly Father loves us. All things work together for the good of those who are called according to His purpose. Grounded in this golden chain linked in eternity past and linked in this Christian experience being called and justified, this roots us into God's love giving us assurance of our salvation and the ability to move ahead with greater obedience to Jesus Christ.

And we are given further hope in our text. We are told that Jesus Christ is the first born among many brothers. We are shown that we are a part of this family of God with Jesus Christ as our elder brother, and He is the example of what God will do in us as we are conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ. When we begin to understand this chain of salvation we see that these things are not cold and harsh doctrines, as they are often accused, but they are warm and comforting truths from the word of God that are intended to be practical for our lives as the people of God.

There is one more link that Paul has for us in this chain. We have seen the two links in the past (foreknowledge and predestination), and we have seen two links in the present (calling and justification), but the last link is one that is linked in eternity future. We see “glorified” as the final link. Now those of you who have studied the English language may think well, that's strange. Paul is giving this in the past tense in our text. I haven't been glorified, and frankly I don't know anyone that has been glorified apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. Well, you are correct; it is in the past tense. You would think that Paul would have said something along the lines of: You were called, you were justified and you will be glorified. But he doesn't! The only way that we can explain this is that Paul is so sure of what Jesus Christ has purchased that he can say it all in the past tense. When Jesus said, “It is finished”, He meant all of the work of redemption is finished. One day we will be raised from the dead, and those who are in Christ will have their bodies renewed and reconnected with their souls, and at that point we will be perfect, as He is. As we look forward to that time of resurrection and being restored, we can have all assurance beyond doubt that it will happen. Because it has been purchased, we have been glorified with Him. It has already been purchased.

So as we reflect on what this golden chain of redemption what are some practical applications that we can take along with us? First, we see that predestination and election are not cold doctrines. They are revealed to us for our comfort and our sense of security in Jesus Christ. We need to think about them in these terms. These are comforting words from God, and we need to teach them to our children in these terms. And, we need to shake off the prejudices that so much of the church has against the doctrines of grace. They are doctrines of comfort for the saint.

Another application is when we question whether we are in Christ all we need to do is to grab onto one of these links. The Puritan William Perkins was the man who coined the phrase “golden chain” over 400 years ago. He said there is a golden chain and when we struggle with our assurance we need to look at this as a golden necklace all linked together. When we are questioning whether we have been predestined we need to reach out and grab one of those links. As you move that link the other links move as well, because they are all connected. Take comfort in that. I can reach out and say that I am predestined because I know that I have been justified. We can do this with all of the links. If you are asking, “Did God really love me before the foundation of the world,” then reach out and grab ‘calling.’ I know I have been called, therefore I know that God has loved me before the foundation of the world. This is very applicable for our lives.

Finally, if you are unsure if any of this related to you, if any of this is for you, seek Jesus Christ. Seek Jesus Christ and ask Him to save you from your sins, so that you to may reach out and grab hold of one of these links to have comfort and assurance of your salvation. Friends, receive comfort from the doctrines of grace. Do not be ashamed of them, because they are given to us so that we may be assured of His great love for us.

Amen.