

I'll say up front that today will be difficult for some of you, but my promise to you and before the Lord has always been that I want to preach and proclaim to you the full counsel of God, even when it's not popular and even when it becomes maybe a spacemaker in here. So I'm going to be obedient before the Lord on this text today. But let me set up where we're going. Since August, we've tried to say, "Hey, this is what we're doing here. This is what God's about. This is what the church is for. This is how we're going to see it work by the power of the Holy Spirit." So we've done that based off of a singular statement. We exist, the reason the Village Church exists is to bring glory to God by making disciples through gospel-centered community, gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered service and gospel-centered multiplication. So we have broken that thing down into little chunks and really dug as deep as we can. So we started week one with this idea that God ultimately is about God. Yes He loves you, yes He provides for you and yes He cares for you, but the motivation behind that provision, care and love is the glory of His name and the worship of His perfection. So ultimately, you are not the center of the universe; God is. And although that offends our modern sensibilities, our greatest hope in the world is wrapped up in God being about God and about the praise of His glorious grace.

And I said there were several reasons for that. If God is after the praise of His glorious grace, He is not after my begrudging submission. He's not after me going, "Well, I had better behave myself or He'll send me to hell." That's not what He's after. He's after my joy. This runs very contrary to the secular world and how it thinks. When the Word of God says, "Sex is handled like this. . . money is handled like this. . . marriage is handled like this," this is not God trying to flex you into a frustrated existence where He robs you of all joy. Rather it's Him leading you into the fullness of joy. The issue is you think you're smarter than God. Some of you just want to get with me and explain to me how your circumstance is the exception to that. "You don't know my wife. . . you don't know my husband. . . you don't know my kids. . . you don't know my financial situation." You know why the rules don't apply to you. And that's why I say you're your own worst enemy. No one has robbed you of joy like you have. Because you think you're smarter than God. Or maybe it's not you but it's the modern day understanding of the world that you think is smarter than God. So God often gets painted as this 1970's, out of touch, no longer cool kind of deity who just doesn't know how things are right now. And some of you live your lives that way. But we said ultimately God is for God, and that's good news because the commands of God lead us into joy, not begrudging submission. Now I'm not trying to pretend that that's always easy. Sometimes it's hard. I'd be a liar if I said that was always awesome to do it. It leads to joy, but sometimes the process is painful.

And then the second reason it's such a good thing that God is for God is because I've been set free from the universe being about me. Do you know how much conflict, how much anger, how much frustration in your life is birthed out of you thinking that the world is about you? Do you know how much of your marital conflict is birthed out of you believing that your spouse has been given to you to make much of you, to meet all of your needs, to do this and that? You weren't given a slave; you were given a co-laborer. And it's when you understand that ultimately marriage is about God that you begin to be set free to love your spouse regardless. But when your spouse has been given to you for this, this and this, if they don't deliver (and they can't), then you're going to fight. Do you know how much a better human being you are, how happy you are if you understand that ultimately everything is about God and not about you? It is a freedom that few taste. Nobody in here would think that they're smarter than God or that they're acting like God. No one in here is going to go, "I am God!" Because if you did that, we'd all call you crazy. The problem is you won't declare it; you'll just live like it. And that's where water gets muddy and things get confusing. Because you don't have the courage to come

out and say, "I am God. People should serve me. People should do what I want them to do." You would never say that. You just get frustrated when they don't. You just find some piddly thing to attack so you can hide the fact that you think you're God.

So we exist to bring glory to God by making disciples. So we talked about how God displays His glory in a thousand ways, but primarily through His covenant people. So that began with Abraham and Israel, and that has moved to the church as the gospel of Jesus Christ was always meant to break down the hostility walls between ethnic groups, between all socioeconomic statuses and He was to create one family, and it was going to be beautifully diverse and rich in color, culture, style and expression. And the church's role and goal is to make disciples by the power of the Holy Spirit. So if I can push on this, the goal is not converts but disciples. So yes and amen, we want to see people surrender their lives to Jesus Christ, but that's a front door; it's not where it ends. Conversion is not where it ends; it's where it begins. So when you don't understand what's happening, then you've got people who are converted but never transformed. And that's problematic. Because you were robbed of joy and God is robbed of glory.

And then we set out to discuss how then will the Village Church set out being obedient to God by glorifying His name in making disciples? We said we do that in four ways, and there is an organizational component and an organic component to each of these. Gospel-centered worship, gospel-centered community, gospel-centered service and gospel-centered multiplication. Gospel-centered worship is where our affections are on the Lord, and we have hearts that are stirred up and make much of Him. Worship is not restricted to singing. According to the Bible, there is a way to drink coffee that is worshipful. There is a way to eat food, there is a way to interact with people and there is a way to enjoy sports that is worshipful. And there is a way that's worshipful in a sinful way. And then we talked about gospel-centered community and how, when the gospel is our foundation and the fuel that makes our relationships go, we're much more patient with one another and we have greater concern for one another. And that moves us to gospel-centered service, which then frees us up from things being about us in order for us to help, serve, encourage and speak life into others instead of a life-sucking leach that has to have everybody making much of them in order to feel comfortable. And then we ended with gospel-centered multiplication, which is simply that we have been reconciled and set free to be used by God in reconciliation of others to Christ.

So now I want us to walk away from the statement and start talking about distinctives here at the Village, things that we believe are important that you know we believe before you decide you're going to do life here, before you decide you're going to connect here. We need to get all our cards on the table, and that's what we're going to be doing the next couple of weeks. I'm going to start today with something you might think is simple, but I have found that people are a bit biblically illiterate on how it works. And because of their illiteracy, they are robbed of worship, which robs them of deep community, which robs their ability to serve and robs their efforts at multiplication. What I need to talk to you about is simply salvation, conversion, how it works. How did you come to know, love and worship Jesus Christ? Because if you get the answer right, then you get to attack and assault all the things that destroy a church from the inside. If you understand how you were saved, how you were converted, how God saved you, then pride is impossible, arrogance is obliterated, license in regards to living a life of sin evaporates and gratitude explodes. There are few things that remedy the ills of your life like gratitude, being grateful, being aware of what has actually occurred. The more you're awesome and God just partners with you in your awesomeness, the more frustrated you're going to be. The more God is supreme, the more you're a sinner in need of salvation, the more worship will flow out of your heart.

So open up your Bibles to Romans 8. Romans 8 is a tricky text, and I'll tell you why. Most Christians like parts of Romans 8. They quote it, they like it and they'll point to stuff out of it. They don't like all of it; they just like parts of it. But in order for me to stand clean before God, I've got to give it all to you. So let's go. We start out with a verse that everybody loves. Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good. . ." Now we love that one.

That's on coffee cups and we quote that to people all the time. When you go through a dark season, somebody is telling you this verse. "You know all things work together for good, brother." Because I'm not yet mature in my faith, I always want to punch people in the face when they say that and go, "I guess that was for your good. I guess that was part of your sanctification. You got a little blood right there." So he's saying all things work together for good for those who love Him. So this is not true for everyone. It is not true that all things work together for good for everyone. It's true for those who love God. And then look at the next line, because it's very important. ". . .for those who are called according to his purpose." So this is hard but true. My life serves a purpose, and it's not mine. My life serves the purpose of the eternal God, and it serves that purpose in joy and in sorrow.

Now this is the verse that everybody likes. They skip verses 29-30 and then go to verse 31. "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" Now here's the problem. He just said, "What then shall we say to these things?" So if you skip "these things" and then get to the conclusion, you've lost the meat. It's like watching the last fifteen minutes of a movie. You might like how it ends, but you have no idea how you got there. So I want to tell you how we get there, and it will be interesting for us. Verse 29, "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." Few things in Christian history or in modern times have caused as much conflict and as much division as this idea of foreknowledge and predestination. So I want to just throw my cards on the table early. I am not interested in debate or starting a fight. What I want to do is read to you the Bible. If you get bothered, you get bothered by the Word, not by me. I will saturate today in the Word of God. I will not just come out of this one text. I will go to other texts. We're going to spend some time in Ephesians 2 and we're going to get to the bottom of what's happening. But people are uncomfortable with this. They're uncomfortable with the idea of foreknowledge and predestination, so there is one of two games that they like to play, and I'll tell you the problems with them.

The first one is that they just say, "Well, what does foreknowledge really mean? What does predestination really mean? What does he mean by these words? Because I know this word means this, but I think Paul is saying this." If you've read the New Testament at all and if you've read anything that Paul wrote, does he come off as a guy who uses slang? If Paul calls you a fool, he's not saying, "What's up, fool?" He's calling you a fool. In Galatians, when he says, "Watch out for those dogs," he's not talking about his boys. He's saying, "Watch out for these dogs, these beasts, these brutes." Paul doesn't use slang, so when he uses the words "foreknowledge" and "predestined," he's using them as they are meant.

Now the second game people play because they're anxious about this and don't know how it works is they'll simply say, "Well what foreknowledge means is that God knew who was going to choose Him in the future and then in retrospect wrote everybody's name down in the Lamb's Book of Life. So He knew who was going to take their faith and put it into Christ. And since He knew that, He could write them down at the beginning. So as it plays out, He knew who was going to take their faith and put it in His grace." Now there are a couple problems with that, and I'll start with the smaller one. First, that puts God inside of time rather than outside of time. So what you've done in that grid is you have decided that God has to get the Lamb's Book of Life, has to get into the Delorean, adjust the flux capacitor, jet throughout all of history and figure out who is and isn't going to put their faith in Jesus. And then He gets back in the car, goes back in time to the beginning and before everything has begun and puts name in the Lamb's Book of Life. So that's problem number one. The God of the Bible is not inside of time. He is outside of time. And this is going to stretch our finite minds. That means that yesterday isn't something He knows about, but it's a place that He is. And today isn't something He knows about; it's a place that He is. Next year isn't a thing that He knows about; it's a place that He is. And decades from now is a place that He is. A century from now is a place that He is. It's not something He knows; it's a place that He is. He is eternal, He is always and He is everywhere. This is the God of the Bible. And that's solving the small problem. Here's the bigger problem. The assumption with that view that God knows the future, figures out who will choose and in retrospect writes their names in the Lamb's Book of Life is it assumes that the faith to believe in grace is yours to begin

with. Flip over to Ephesians 2. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." According to the Bible, the faith to believe in that grace isn't yours either. But the faith to believe in the grace of God found in Jesus Christ was given to you by God so you would have nothing to boast in but the cross of Christ. So if you are a Christian, you have nothing to boast in, nothing to exalt in, nothing to point to outside of Christ and Him crucified. It's why Paul would say in Galatians 6, "God forbid if I boast in anything other than the cross of Christ." It's all you have if you're a believer in Christ.

So I've said what this idea of predestination and foreknowledge is not, so let's talk about what it is. To be biblically fair, you have to let the Bible interpret the Bible. So what we're going to do is take this word "know" (which is the root word in foreknowledge or "to know before") and ask: how is it used in the Bible and what does it mean? Because there are some peculiar things. Here's Amos 3:2, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth. . ." So this is God speaking to His covenant community Israel through the prophet Amos, and He says, "You only among all the families of the earth have I known." Now what's the problem with that? For starters, it's not completely true if we define the word "know" as all-encompassing. Because God does know the other families of the earth, doesn't He? Is God ignorant to the Assyrians? Is He unaware of their existence? Is He unaware of the Philistines? No, He knows all the families of the earth, but in Amos He's saying, "You alone have I known." So it appears early on that there is a way of knowing that is different than simply a way of knowing. I know that's exactly identical in language, but I'm hoping you follow me. He knows Israel, His covenant people, in a special way that is different than the way He knows all things. Because He does know all things. Can you surprise God? Jesus has a big birthday coming up this December. If we wanted to throw Him a surprise party and have Him over, could we do that? Is that possible? No. One of the greatest comforts in my heart ever is this reality that God is never surprised. He is never shocked. He has never had to form a counsel meeting and brainstorm some solutions. That has never been true about our God. Psalm 1:6 and Matthew 7:23 actually play off of each other. Psalm 1:6 says, "the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." So He knows the way of the righteous, but he also knows the way of the wicked, because He knows they're wicked. So if He said, "I know the way of the righteous" and just stopped there, that's one thing. But He says, "I know the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." So He knows they're wicked. Now let's look at Matthew 7:23. "I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness." So He knows them, but He knows them in a different way than He knows the righteous. Are you with me? There's one more. If you're still a little lost, this one solves it. This is a relational picture out of Genesis 4:1. "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." Now there is knowing, and then there's knowing. So we know that Adam and Eve have met. They met in chapter 2 and they had the fall in chapter 3, so they aren't strangers. But in chapter 4, Adam knew Eve and we've got ourselves a baby boy. You know that's different, right? There's a way of knowing, and then there's a way of knowing that leads to a child. Have you ever heard the phrase, "Knew her in the biblical sense"? That's Genesis 4:1. So there is a way of knowing that is intimate and filled with love, and there's a way of knowing that just knows of. Even if they know all the details of, it's different. This word "knowledge" could literally be translated "love." "Those whom God foreloved" According to Ephesians 1, before the foundation of the earth was laid, God had set His affection on you, His love for you, His delight in you. Before you had done anything positive or negative, the God of the universe says, "I will delight in that man/woman. I will rejoice in them, I will make a way for salvation for them and I will woo them, find them and save them."

Those whom He foreloved, He also predestined. Now I'm not a fanboy. Calvin had some issues. He had a man killed one time for losing a debate against him. He had flaws like the rest of us. So I couldn't care less if you called yourself a Calvinist. I couldn't care less if you knew what TULIP meant. But I do want you to be in glad submission to the Word of God and rejoice correctly in your salvation. So I have no agenda other than unpacking the Word. And here's what it says. "For those whom He set His affections on, He predetermined to conform them to the image of His Son." Which means before you were, God had determined in His heart to shape you and mold you into the image of Jesus Christ. Which means, in times of joy and sorrow, God is shaping. In the mundane rhythms of life, in the boredom that you sometimes

feel, in the routine that you get yourself into, God is molding and shaping you into the image of His Son. Why? Because He set His affections on you and determined to do so. And if God determines, He doesn't fail. God doesn't risk and God doesn't fail.

"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." So Christ is my brother because of what God has done in Him. Which means we are sons and daughters of the King. Now here's where I think it just gets spectacular, as spectacular as that is. Look at verse 30. "And those whom he predestined he also called. . ." Now I love watching this. God calls people in so many different variations and ways that it's really spectacular to watch. If you've ever been here for our baptism services or if you think back on your own conversion, few of us have the same, identical story. So some of us are saved through the intellect. Lydia in Acts 16 was a dealer in the color purple, basically a fashionista. She's got houses all over the ancient world. She reads the Torah. She's trying to get to the bottom of what this is all about. And then Paul shows up, engages her intellect and she is converted and has Paul and the missionaries into her home, which serves as a base camp there in Philippi. So this is a woman who was engaged by the intellect and converted.

Probably my favorite story of the intellect being converted is C.S. Lewis. He is born into a family where his mother is extremely sick. She dies of cancer by the time he's nine. He then goes to World War I and sees such atrocities against mankind that he becomes a pretty staunch atheist. He becomes the professor of Medieval literature at Cambridge and later on at Oxford. He began to be hunted by what he calls the "hound of heaven." He would say in his biography that it's a dangerous thing to be an atheist, because you never know where God is going to come and grab you. So he is studying Medieval literature and all his favorite authors are Christians. Can you imagine how infuriating that is if you're a staunch atheist? "Oh, I hate Christ, but man these guys are awesome." So then God started bringing these friends into his life like G.K. Chesterton. If you don't know who he is, he wrote *The Eternal Man* and *Orthodoxy*, both classic Christian books. And then He brought another guy into his life named J.R.R. Tolkien, who wrote *Lord of the Rings*. Those guys would go to the pub, drink their pints, smoke their pipes and discuss ancient mythology. This is a level of nerdism that is hard to get across. They would sit around and talk about old ancient myths and how they work. It just became a little *Dungeons & Dragons* club. They would just get together and talk about those things, and all the while, God hunted and haunted Lewis. Lewis would write in his biography when he laid down at night, he could hear the hound of heaven scratching at the door. So the story goes that they go out one night, and they're talking about whether or not myths have any truth in them. The discussion had turned to the Bible, and Lewis admitted that the Bible, as much as he wanted to call it myth, didn't read like a myth. There were historical people, there were historical places and there were details that aren't found in myths. So Tolkien pressed on him that the Bible was myth that was true, and that shook Lewis up. Lewis countered that he thought most myths were lies. And Tolkien again pressed him and said that ancient myths are an expression of the great things God has put in all men. So through all cultures, you've got myths that point to a savior figure. So if you think about *Beowulf*, if you think about ancient mythology, Tolkien was pointing out that they all had the same theme. There is a savior who saves from an unwinnable situation. So Lewis, as frustrated as he can be, leaves. A couple days later, he gets in the sidecar of a motorcycle with his brother driving to go to the zoo. He writes to a colleague a few weeks later that when he got on that motorcycle, he didn't believe and when he arrived at the zoo, he did. He called himself the most reluctant convert in London. The hound of heaven ran him down.

He was called through the intellect, but not everybody is called through the intellect. The apostle Paul, who was an intellectual, wasn't called through the intellect. Do you remember the story? His name was Saul, he was on the road to Damascus with sword in hand and papers to imprison and kill believers. This is a man whose heart is so hardened towards the idea of the gospel of Jesus Christ that he has been in hearty approval of the assassination of church leaders. He's on the road to Damascus when Jesus shows up, and He does not reason with him. He's on his horse when a bright

light appears and knocks him off his horse. "Who is that?" "Jesus. You're going to follow Me. You're going to worship Me. You are, for the rest of your life, going to serve Me." Remember Paul's response? "Okay." It wasn't intellectual. God just blew him up.

Now, in the end, God does not force anyone to love Him. That's not what this doctrine teaches. That's not what the Bible teaches. People try to make that argument to not submit to the Word. God doesn't force anybody to love Himself. He simply reveals Himself, and at the revelation of Christ, men love and worship Him. He doesn't force anybody; He just reveals Himself. He revealed Himself to Paul, and Paul followed Him for the rest of his life. I've giggled in my ten years here with some of you. Because some of you have come up to me and gone, "Man, when I first started coming to the Village, I felt like you were talking directly to me." I don't know you. It's not like your friend e-mailed me, "Okay, I'm going to be wearing a black shirt. We're going to be sitting on your right. My buddy has blond hair. Here are his issues. If you could address this and look right at him, that would be great." That's not what's happening. Now some of that has happened in church history with the revival movements and things like that, but that's a dark day and the grace of God covers that. I don't know you. Do you know what's happening? The Lord is wooing. Some of you who are a bit more intellectual have left here thinking I'm a buffoon only to schedule a time with your buddy who brought you to come back. "That cat's an idiot. He doesn't know what he's talking about. He got that wrong, this wrong and that wrong. Hey, I can't come next Saturday, can you come on the Sunday morning services?" Do you know what's happening? God is wooing, God's calling and God is beckoning. I've heard from people who were converted because late at night they turned on their radio or television and just caught a snippet of something that got them thinking. God has rescued some and called some through moments of sheer euphoria and others through sheer terror and pain. He calls. Those whom He foreloved, He predetermined to conform to the image of His Son. He woos, He calls. Some of you even today are in this place, and you think it was some sort of weird chance thing that you're here. That's not true. God is calling, and He does it in a slew of different ways. Some of you were like, "Well if God has foreloved and predetermined, why am I 40 years old and it still hasn't happened?" Well, what we know about the apostle Paul is he was well into his years before God called him, despite the fact that Paul himself would say that he was set apart before birth. So Paul's understanding was, "God knew He was going to save me before I was born, but He chose the road to Damascus to call me to Himself."

And look at what happens next in this text. "And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified. . . ." So let me be very clear in justification. Justification is a two-fold process. Your sins, all of them, past, present and future, were absorbed by Jesus Christ on the cross. I'm speaking to believers. That is not true if you are not a believer. If you become a believer, then yes it is true for you. But when Christ died on the cross, all the wrath of God toward your sin was placed on Jesus and Jesus absorbs it. And then, in a great exchange, He imputes to you His righteousness. So Christ obeys the law completely, never sins, doesn't know sin in any form or fashion and He gives to you His righteousness and takes from you the wrath that was meant for you and you are justified in an instant. And you didn't do anything to do that. "Yes I did, Matt. I went up front, I shook a hand and I prayed a prayer." Can I be straight with you? You were saved before you left your seat. That compulsion that said "go" was your salvation. God gave you the faith in that moment. It's not your faith to believe. God gave you the faith to believe, and so you heard, you responded and you went up front and repeated a prayer. That prayer didn't save you. If repeating a prayer can save you, this isn't Christianity; it's witchcraft. That's an incantation. We don't have incantations. God saved you in your seat, and you made it public by walking up to the front, shaking a guy's hand and repeating after him. He might have framed it, but God had already done it. Those whom He calls He justifies.

And look at the next part. ". . .and those whom he justified he also glorified. . ." Let's talk about this one, because this one will help clear up some of the others. At my conversion, there were three things that were sinful. Drugs and alcohol, chasing girls and cussing. If I could clean up those three, I was going to be the next apostle Paul. All I had to do was trump those three, and I was going to be on my way. But here's what no one told me. No one told me how ruthlessly

Jesus was going to demand and the Spirit was going to pull on every area of my life. Because here's what I learned. Those things were symptoms. Those were like fruit. Those weren't even the tree. Because fruit is easy to pick. Pulling up trees is painful. So Jesus began to do surgery on my heart to uproot things where I had legitimate idols that led to those other things. Do you know why I chased drugs and alcohol? Because I had other issues and they worked themselves out in that pursuit. Do you know why I chased women? Because there were other issues in my heart, other idols in my heart that led to that behavior. And the reason I would fly off into a rage and punch you in the throat if you started it was because I had other issues. So I thought Christ was going to come in an go, "Let's stop throwing hands. Leave those girls alone. Get high on the Spirit." That's what I thought He was going to do. I didn't think He was going to go, "This right here down in your gut, this sense of identity you have in these things, I'm going to rip it out and replace it with Me." And this process of glorification is, from the moment of our conversion on, God making us more and more like His Son. And there is a war that rages in our hearts from the moment of conversion on. We will always be battling the flesh. We will always be battling what the Bible calls the "old man." We will always have chiseling off of us what is not of Him and replacing it with what is. So for those of you who struggle or feel so immature, you're never going to get there on this side of things. If we could all hop in a very large plane and fly out to talk with Billy Graham right now, I guarantee you he could confess sin to us, he could tell us areas where he wishes he was growing, areas of his heart that he needs to fully submit to God. And I don't want this to sound wearisome to you, because sometimes there is joy in the battle. One of the things I've learned is, the longer I follow Jesus, when He exposes an area of my heart, I find myself being so grateful for grace despite that thing that I'm growing in joy, not in lamentation. I still lament over my sin, but lament quickly turns to joy as I see that God has foreloved me and is conforming me to the image of His Son and this revelation of my sinfulness is a part of being conformed more like Jesus, which leads to more joy, which leads to more glory to God.

Now we can go back to the verses that everybody loves. Let's go. Verse 31, "What then shall we say to these things?" What things? The fact that God has set His affections on you before the foundation of the world and has predetermined that He will conform you to the image of His Son and that He will call you, justify you in a moment and then glorify you until all things are set new in heaven and on earth. What then shall we say to these things? "If God is for us, who can be against us?" How "for you" is He? Well, He set His affections on you before anything was. Before the foundation of the earth was laid, God had in His heart affection for you. If God is tha for you, what can be against you? Listen to what he says. "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?" Now there can be charges brought against you, correct? Everyone in this room is a sinner. No one is clean. Even the most upright, uptight, morally righteous one of you, if we took the thoughts of your mind and the intentions of your heart and put them on this screen, you would not want to stay and watch and you would probably never return to this church. You would be filled with shame and self-hate at who you really are. But because you're comparing yourself next to maybe a guy who is a moron and isn't as far along as you are, you can feel pretty holy. But if you compare yourself to the holiness of God, then all of a sudden you'll feel the weight of your depravity. So there are charges to be brought against you. You are not clean. Don't let this foreloving, predetermining, calling act of God give you swagger. You don't have anything to swagger about. This is all an act of mercy. It wasn't like God was like, "My team!" He probably picked you because you're a moron. That's what we see in the Bible. Find me a hero in the Scriptures and I'll show you someone who doesn't quite get it. Welcome to the family.

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? Look at his answer. "It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." Do you hear it? So although you are guilty, although you are unclean before the Lord, you have been justified, not by yourself but by an act of Christ. You have been justified by Christ, and now there is no charge that can be levied against you because it has been paid for. So you have Christ's righteousness and He has taken your sin onto Himself, so there is no charge against God's elect. There is not condemnation for us, which is why this chapter begins with, "There

is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Why? Because Christ fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law and took onto Himself what we could not take on ourselves.

Let's keep going. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" I love the fact that those are possibilities. For those who try to scrub Christianity clean from the sorrow that you can walk in, even in Christ, the Bible refuses to allow it. So in all of this predetermined foreloving, calling, justifying, glorifying work that God is doing, He still goes, "Hey man, even in tribulation, even in famine, even in nakedness, even in danger, even under the sword, you won't be separated from the love of Christ, which is what you really need.

And then he's going to quote Psalm 44. "As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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." Do you see why those verses make sense? The reason we get to rejoice in these, the reason we can be confident in this is the fact that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. The reason I can say we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us, the reason I can say all things work together for the good of those who love him and are called according to His purposes is because of when He called me, how He called me and how He foreloved me before I had done any of it. Because if that's not true, then what if I do this or what if I do that? Now doubt can creep in and I can either excel at the Christian game and walk with a swagger, or I can feel the weight of my failures and refuse to grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ. But if He saved me, if He rescued me, if He called me, then all things work together for my good, regardless of how painful those things are. And I am not naïve of the sorrow of this world. I am not some young kid who has not wept, who has not bled, who has not cried, who has not wondered how God would save in a situation. In my own life with cancer, in the life of this church as a pastor, I will leave immediately following this service and head up to the hospital where one of our covenant members is giving birth to a stillborn child. And we will sit there and we will weep, pray and mourn together as family. So I am not naïve to the reality of the world. It is a broken, maddening place, but one day we'll be in full submission to Jesus Christ. Until then, our hope is in Him.

Now, here's where we've got to go now. When I think back on how God called me, do you know the thing that constantly just creates worship in my heart? Why did I care? Why in the world did I care? The United States government moves my family from California to Texas, so I already have enough reason to be angry. And then just by chance, I end up around Jeff Faircloth. Now I've been around stuff before, but Jeff, in his boldness and in his explanation to me, really started to tug on my heart and I cared. Despite the fact that so much of what I saw was ridiculous, I cared. I was the guy who would leave Wednesday night Jam (which stood for Jesus and Me) and make fun of all that happened but make sure I could come back the next week. Do you know what was happening? God was wooing me. He was calling. He was pulling me into Himself. He was revealing, "You are Mine, and you're not going to outrun Me." Some of you are here today because this process is happening right now. You're being called, you're being wooed. And don't let this doctrine let you go, "Well what's the use? God's going to do what God's going to do." No, you have responsibility here. You have the choice to submit and ask for mercy or to reject and walk in your pride. The offer of salvation goes out to all. It goes out to all. You have been offered the forgiveness of your sins and the divine love of God, regardless of background, regardless of position, but you must submit to it and ask for mercy.

Let's pray. "Father, thank You for these men and women. Thank You for Your gospel. Thank You that You save. You save. We don't save. You save. So for my brother or sister who can't imagine that You would love them because of where they have been, what they have done or what their life is right now, I pray that they would put aside such foolish thoughts and submit to the grace and mercy You have extended to them in Christ. For those who are so proud of themselves that

they're able to look on other people and feel better about themselves than they do other people, God, I pray that You would just destroy their hearts before You and that they would repent of glorying in what only You should glory in. God forbid if we boast in anything other than Your cross. It's for Your beautiful name we pray. Amen."

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