

### **Romans 8:26-39**

Today's epistle takes us to one of the popular but maybe misunderstood verses of Paul's letters. Romans 8:28 was one of the first verses I memorised, but it is only now that I begin to understand the depth and context of its meaning. "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose." What does it mean? That we can sit back and not worry about any situation? That God has got everything under control and it will all work out in the end! Well maybe, but it means a lot more than that, and it means that we have a greater part than sitting back and trusting that God will sort everything out! But let us look at it with a little context.

Throughout Chapter 8 of Romans, Paul has brought us to the climax of the purpose of his letter. The theme of his letter is faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus as being the only grounds for acceptance by God for all people, Jew and Gentile alike. The world is in a broken state and we all stand convicted by God's standards. But God offers free pardon and new life in Jesus, his death and resurrection accomplishing for us what we are unable to achieve in ourselves. We can now make a new start with all the power of God at our disposal. In Chapter 8 it is as if he has taken us to a cliff top and encouraged us to look out. To see a fallen broken creation spread out below us. We are then being invited to take our true place in the order and redemption of all that is waiting, in hope, for the salvation that has been promised by God. And yes! We have a place to take and a part to play. We, God's Spirit filled people, are not just observers of God at work, we are active participants.

The world is not, at present, as God intended. He promised and committed that he would, one day, put all to rights. The human race had been put in charge of creation, but began to worship creation itself rather than God. Punishment ensued, but God would not abandon but wait to eventually bring all back to how he had originally planned. There is a bright future and we are encouraged to live in hope, but also to be part of bringing it about. There is a tension between the wonderful promise and the present reality encapsulated in the fact that the Spirit is at work within us. We have the 'first fruits' of the Spirit's life and the promise of more. N.T. Wright puts it 'Groaning and waiting, eager but patient: that is the characteristic Christian stance.' The whole of creation is waiting for God's new world to be born, and we, The Church, God's spirit filled people are not apart from the pain of the world. We have a prayer to pray. A prayer that is so deep that we may not have words for it, but we join with the spirit in the groaning at the point of pain. That is our calling.

God, the Searcher of Hearts, is searching our inmost beings to find that place where the Spirit is most obviously at work in us, the prayer beyond prayer, inarticulate and unformed yet rooted deep inside. The longing for the culmination of hope as God recognises and works with the Spirit inside. A challenge to us all - are we willing to be caught up in and part of that redeeming work of Father and Spirit? This is where we begin to understand the full meaning of verse 28. God is taking those who the spirit is at work in as his partners. Those who are lamenting, those who are resonating with the pain of the world are in partnership with God as he uses our outpouring to work within his purposes for good, for the larger good, the renewal of his creation. The time when the whole of creation will no longer be held captive by the present decay, but will be celebrating the newly given freedom.

We are part of this wonderful work! What an amazing privilege! Verse 28 is our invitation to dig deep and associate ourselves truly with God's amazing work of redemptive salvation for the whole of creation. We cannot sit back and wait for God to bring this about. We cannot be passive, because at the very time when we are in lament, when we groan from

*our depths with the prayer of the Spirit, God is working, and will somehow use our prayers for the greater good. God doesn't look for automatons. He never created us to be puppets but participators. He works in relationship with us and includes us in his work and in his plans. The question is, do we wish to participate? Why not ponder on Romans 8:28 and listen to what God speaks into your heart. What purpose might God be calling you to?*

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