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**The Unbreakable Chain**

**Romans 8.28-30**

**Series: The Pure Gospel**

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**The Village Church**

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I. Introduction

- A. I've often been know to throw in a picture or two as sermon illustrations
  - 1. Most often I'll throw in grandchild pictures as I did of Andrew and Ethan a couple weeks ago
  - 2. Sometimes it will be a picture of some scenic view from West Virginia
  - 3. I've even been know to throw in a picture of a Calvin and Hobbes cartoon
- B. But I try to be careful what pictures to include
  - 1. Jean, while she doesn't know what I'm going to use as sermon illustrations, is usually concerned with which pictures I use
  - 2. By this time, I pretty much know my limits
- C. There will be no pictures this week
- D. That's because my sermon illustration is really an anti-illustration
  - 1. That is – an illustration which displays the opposite of the point of the sermon
  - 2. And the picture that I would use, if I did use one, would be a picture that Jean would not want to be displayed
  - 3. It would be a picture of my desk
- E. Now she would have no problem having a picture of my office in other respects
  - 1. But, truth be told – my desk is a mess
- F. It doesn't matter which desk
  - 1. It's true in my church office
    - a. Where I think the ladies in the office are afraid of getting too close to it
  - 2. But it's also true in my home office
- G. But it was also true when we were in Morgantown WV
  - 1. It's actually better here in this respect
  - 2. In Morgantown I had, not two, but three offices
    - a. One at the church
    - b. One at home
    - c. And one at the university
  - 3. And they all had the same malady
  - 4. But here, at least I only have two messy desks
- H. Please don't misunderstand this to mean you're not welcome in my office
  - 1. My church office is actually very nice with a lovely sitting area
  - 2. Stop in anytime!

- I. But the reason why I would use my desk as an illustration – an anti-illustration actually – is that the main message one would get in seeing my desks is summarized in one word
  - 1. That word is **Unfinished!**
  - 2. It's just that there are a number of projects in progress, and a bunch of them are unfinished
    - a. And that's why the desks have a lot of stuff on them
    - b. And that's the message that I think you would get if you could see my desk
    - c. Which you will not, at least during this sermon
- J. The reason why the word **Unfinished!** is the anti-illustration for this message is that today's passage teaches that God does the opposite
  - 1. **God always finishes what He starts**
  - 2. In fact, when he starts something, it is essentially finished
- K. Text
  - 1. **Romans 8:28–30 (ESV) —**
    - a. 28 **And we know that for those who love God**
    - b. **all things work together for good,**
    - c. **for those who are called according to his purpose.**
    - d. 29 **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,**
    - e. **in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**
    - f. 30 **And those whom he predestined he also called,**
    - g. **and those whom he called he also justified,**
    - h. **and those whom he justified he also glorified.**
- L. In this text Paul lays out God's process for the redemption of humanity
  - 1. And Paul details that process for all those who would ever believe in Christ
  - 2. He begins by saying that God foreknew them
    - a. And then those He foreknew He predestined
    - b. And those He predestined He called
    - c. And those He called He justified
    - d. And those He justified He glorified.
  - 3. God's foreknowledge occurred in eternity past
    - a. And He speaks as if the entire process from God's perspective is entirely finished
    - b. Because as we collapse the middle elements of that process, those He foreknew He has glorified
    - c. From God's perspective, it is finished!
- M. What Paul describes is a chain of events
  - 1. Events that God Himself has orchestrated, conducted, and executed
  - 2. A chain that is called by theologians **"The Golden Chain of Salvation"**
  - 3. It is a glorious chain, from a glorious text
    - a. How could it be otherwise, since it ends in glory for the saints!

- II. **The Praying Context**
- A. But first let's back up and put the passage in context
    - 1. It's a wonderful text all by itself
      - a. But it's even more important to see it in its context
  - B. It's context is, first of all, a praying context
    - 1. It begins...
    - 2. **Romans 8:28** (ESV) —
      - a. 28 And we know that for those who love God
      - b. all things work together for good,
      - c. for those who are called according to his purpose.
    - 3. And then Paul launches into that glorious golden chain
      - a. Starting with the word "For"...
      - b. Which connects them all together
    - 4. "For those whom he foreknew..."
  - C. But v. 28 begins with "And"
    - 1. Which connects it with the previous verses
      - a. Which are about prayer
  - D. **Romans 8:26–27** (ESV) —
    - 1. 26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.
    - 2. For we do not know what to **pray** for as we ought,
    - 3. but the Spirit himself **intercedes** for us with **groanings** too deep for words.
    - 4. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit,
    - 5. because the Spirit **intercedes** for the saints according to the will of God.
  - E. So, the Spirit of God helps us in our praying
    - 1. By His groanings,
      - a. Which communicate in ways we cannot articulate ourselves,
      - b. Communicate what we need to God
    - 2. And by His intercession on behalf of the saints
  - F. So that,
    - 1. **All things work together for good**
      - a. For those who love God
      - b. And are called according to His purpose
  - G. But even that has a context
    - 1. The Golden Chain flows out of prayer
    - 2. But prayer flows out of Paul's teaching on suffering
      - a. So let's back up a bit farther
  - H. Paul is giving us great assurance in this passage by communicating to us that if we are believers in Jesus, then we belong to the family of God
    - 1. **Romans 8:16–17** (ESV) —
      - a. 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,
      - b. 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,

- c. **provided we suffer with him** in order that we may also be glorified with him.
- I. Then he goes on to say...
  - 1. **Romans 8:18** (ESV) —
    - a. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.
  - 2. And then he talks about the fallen creation groaning
    - a. And he talks about ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groaning
    - b. And how we wait for our adoption as sons, in the redemption of our bodies – the resurrection
    - c. And we wait with patience
- J. And then he says the Spirit helps us pray
  - 1. And because the Spirit helps us pray, we know that, for those who love God,
    - a. **All things work together for good**
  - 2. And why do we know that?
- K. **Romans 8:29–30** (ESV) —
  - 1. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined
  - 2. to be conformed to the image of his Son,
  - 3. in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
  - 4. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called,
  - 5. and those whom he called he also justified,
  - 6. and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- L. From our suffering as members of the family of God
  - 1. To the Spirit’s interceding in prayer for us
  - 2. To the assurance that because we are of the family of God
    - a. And because the Spirit intercedes for us
  - 3. All things work together for good
- M. Because what God started He always finishes

### III. **God’s Perfect Purpose**

- A. The first thing we need to observe from our text is God’s perfect purpose
  - 1. What is His purpose?
  - 2. Well, Paul says it explicitly
    - a. It’s for those who love God,
    - b. For those who are called according to His purpose
    - c. **To be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ**
  - 3. **Romans 8:29** (ESV) —
    - a. 29 For those whom he foreknew
    - b. he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...
- B. Now what could be more perfect than that?
  - 1. The incarnate Son of God
    - a. The “radiance of the glory of God...
    - b. The exact imprint of God’s nature...” (**Hebrews 1.3**)

2. The One “in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell”  
(Colossians 1.19)
3. The One who “in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.” (Hebrews 4.15)
- C. That’s the One to whom we are destined to be conformed!
  1. That’s God’s purpose
  2. And there is no more perfect purpose!
- D. All the suffering
  1. All the groaning
  2. All the praying
  3. All the perseverance
  4. All tend to this same end
    - a. To be conformed to the image of the Son of God
  5. For those who love God
    - a. And are called according to His purpose

#### IV. God’s Perfect Process

- A. And then we launch into God’s perfect process
  1. The Golden Chain
    - a. He foreknew
    - b. He predestined
    - c. He called
    - d. He justified
    - e. And He glorified
  2. It’s a perfect process because there is no loss as the process unfolds
  3. Machines have a process too – but there is always a loss of energy of one sort or another
    - a. As energy is transferred from one form to another, some energy is always lost
    - b. But not in this process
    - c. There is no inefficiency in this process
    - d. There is no loss
    - e. Everyone is accounted for in every step in the process
    - f. There is no “some of those” in this process
    - g. Just “those”
  4. Who, for instance, is predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son?
    - a. Well, those who are foreknown
  5. And who are the called?
    - a. Those who have been predestined
  6. And who are justified?
    - a. Those who are called
  7. And who are glorified?
    - a. Those who are justified
  8. So – who are the glorified?

- a. Those who are foreknown
  - b. Every last one of them!
  - 9. It is a perfect Purpose
    - a. And it is a perfect Process
  - 10. Now let's make some observations about each step in the process
- B. **He foreknew**
- 1. **Romans 8:29** (ESV) —
    - a. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son,
    - b. in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.
  - 2. This first step in the process, the first word in fact, is the most misunderstood and controversial
    - a. Most people presume that when it says that God “foreknew” it means that God, who knows all things, and who knows the end from the beginning and can see down the corridors of time, knows which human beings, given the opportunity to believe in Jesus, will in fact choose Jesus
    - b. And that those are the ones God predestined – those whom God knew will choose Christ
  - 3. But that is not what this text says
    - a. You can read it yourselves
    - b. It says nothing about knowing what certain people will do, or what certain people will believe
    - c. What the text says is that what God foreknew was the people themselves
    - d. “For those whom he foreknew...”
    - e. So God foreknew people
  - 4. It is true that the word “foreknew” can simply mean that God knew something beforehand
    - a. But the thing that God knew beforehand was the people themselves
  - 5. The fundamental idea behind this text is that God knew a particular people on whom He placed His favor by determining that ultimately they would be conformed to the image of His Son and be glorified
  - 6. That's the way the Bible uses that idea throughout scripture
  - 7. **Amos 3:2** (ESV) —
    - a. 2 “You only have I known of all the families of the earth...
  - 8. God speaks of Israel here
    - a. Obviously, God “knew” every member of the human race
    - b. But in the case of Israel, God uses the Hebrew idiom “know” to describe His special relationship with them
    - c. So God's knowledge of Israel is a description of His electing love for Israel
  - 9. Peter uses the word “foreknowledge” as well in speaking about God and Jesus
  - 10. **Acts 2:23** (ESV) —

- a. 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
11. This obviously doesn't mean that God looked down the corridors of time and knew that people would crucify Jesus
- a. God's foreknowledge of Jesus was His choice of Jesus for a particular purpose
12. **Romans 11:2** (ESV) —
- a. 2 God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew...
13. Paul in Romans 9-11 is arguing that the fact that a lot of Jews don't believe in Jesus does not mean that God's promise to save Jews has been broken
- a. God has in fact saved Jews – Paul himself included
  - b. But again, those Jews whom God saves are those who are foreknown
  - c. Those who are the objects of God's special electing love
14. And then there's Peter for the other two occasions when foreknowledge is used in the NT
15. **1 Peter 1:2** (ESV) —
- a. 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood...
16. Who is Peter talking to?
- a. Well, he says it in the first verse
  - b. **1 Peter 1:1** (ESV) — 1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion ...
  - c. Again, it is the people themselves who are foreknown
  - d. And they are the elect exiles
17. And then Peter speaks in the same way about Jesus Himself
18. **1 Peter 1:20** (ESV) —
- a. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you...
19. So God's foreknowledge applies to Jesus – not because God knew what Jesus would do
- a. But that Jesus was God's loving choice to redeem His people through the cross
20. So the other place foreknowledge occurs is in our text
- a. In which God says He has loved a people to such a degree from eternity past
  - b. That He has predestined them to be conformed to the image of His Son
21. You see, it is an intimacy that God has intended for His people
- a. An intimacy that involved a purposeful choice of a people for God's own possession

- b. A people who, through the redemption of the Son of God, who become part of the family of God
  - 22. Those whom God foreknew He fore-loved
- C. **He predestined**
1. Next is predestined
    - a. Those whom He foreknew He predestined
  2. **Romans 8:29** (ESV) —
    - a. 29 For those whom he foreknew
    - b. he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...
  3. Now lots of people struggle over the idea of predestination – and object to it in the strongest terms
    - a. But you need to understand that predestination is a biblical word
    - b. And it is a biblical concept
    - c. And this is not the only place we find it
  4. It applies to Jesus in **Acts 4.28** in His having been predestined to go to the cross and provide redemption for His people
  5. It's also used in Ephesians 1 (**Ephesians 1.5,11**) where it speaks of believers who have been predestined for adoption as sons through Christ
    - a. And having received an inheritance through being predestined according to God purpose
  6. But here in this text we discover something additional
  7. Having been the recipients of God's loving foreknowledge
    - a. The purpose of God's loving choice is unveiled
  8. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son!
    - a. This is the destiny of every believer!
    - b. This is the goal to which we, who are believers, are certain to experience
  9. And there is absolutely nothing controversial about that!
    - a. Every genuine believer wants to be like Jesus
  10. I play a lot of golf
    - a. And I play with a lot of people who are older than I am
    - b. And sometimes those players are really very good
    - c. I joke with them and when they hit a really good shot I say something like, "I want to be like, say, Victor" when I grow up!"
  11. Who do you want to be like when you grow up?
    - a. In golf – I'm joking
    - b. But I really do want to be like Jesus when I grow up!
  12. Do you want to be like Jesus?
    - a. All true believers long to be like Jesus
    - b. To be like Jesus Christ is the destiny of every believer
  13. If you don't have that desire, I would urge you to consider Jesus
    - a. Ask Jesus to come into your life
    - b. Trust in Jesus alone for your salvation
    - c. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved
  14. And you will find that your affections and your desires will be changed

- a. And you will find, more and more, desiring to be conformed to the image of the Son of God
  - b. For that is your destiny
- D. **He called**
1. Next in the process is calling
  2. **Romans 8:30** (ESV) —
    - a. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called...
  3. Now there are two kinds of calling in the Bible
    - a. There is a general call which goes out to everyone
  4. **Matthew 11:28** (ESV) —
    - a. 28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
  5. **John 7:37** (ESV) —
    - a. 37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.”
  6. Those are general, universal, external calls of God
    - a. All are invited to come to Jesus and be saved
  7. But unfortunately, not all come
    - a. In fact, it is the disposition, as we have seen in Romans, for human beings not to come
  8. **John 3:19** (ESV) —
    - a. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.
  9. **Romans 3:11** (ESV) —
    - a. 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God.
  10. That’s why there is another kind of call
    - a. An internal call
    - b. In which the Spirit of God applies His regenerating work and inclines the human heart to respond
    - c. And that’s the kind of call we have in our text
  11. How do we know that this is the kind of call?
    - a. Because of who are called
    - b. Those who are foreknown
    - c. Those who are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ
    - d. Those who will ultimately be justified
    - e. Those who will be glorified
  12. **Romans 1:6–7** (ESV) —
    - a. 6 ... you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, 7 To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints...
  13. **Ephesians 4:1** (ESV) —
    - a. 1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...
  14. These and other texts affirm that the calling mentioned in this text is the internal effectual call

- E. **He justified**
1. Then there is justified
    - a. Those who are foreknown, predestined, and called are those who are justified
  2. And we have seen how significant justification is for salvation
    - a. How by faith in Jesus Christ, we are declared righteous before God
    - b. The righteousness of Christ having been transferred to our account
  3. **Romans 3:21–24** (ESV) —
    - a. 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—
    - b. 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:
    - c. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
    - d. 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...
  4. And who is justified?
    - a. Those who are foreknown
    - b. Those who are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ
    - c. Those who are called
  5. So the Golden Chain continues, without fail, to save all those whom God has so lovingly chosen
- F. **He glorified**
1. And so finally we come to the final link in the chain
    - a. He glorified
    - b. That is, God transformed us finally into the image of Jesus
  2. **1 John 3:2** (ESV) —
    - a. 2 Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared;
    - b. but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.
  3. **John 17:24** (ESV) —
    - a. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am,
    - b. to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.
  4. It’s remarkable in this text that “glorified” is stated in the past tense!
    - a. That’s because – remember – God always finishes what He starts!
  5. Those whom He foreknew – He glorified
    - a. It’s as if it’s already completed – even for you, believer!
  6. What? Does that mean I don’t do anything?
    - a. Of course not!
    - b. Our sanctification – which J.I. Packer calls glorification Part 1 – requires our faith and obedience
    - c. But remember...

7. **Philippians 2:12–13** (ESV) —
  - a. 12 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,
  - b. 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
8. You work because God works in you to will and to work!
  - a. Because you are foreknown
  - b. Because you are predestined
  - c. Because you are called
  - d. Because you are justified
9. And you will be glorified
  - a. And in the mind of God – you are glorified!

V. **Key Observations**

- A. Now let me conclude by making a few salient observations
  1. By stepping back from the details and looking at the process from 30,000 feet
- B. **Eternity's Scope**
  1. First, look at this process from the scope of eternity
  2. The process begins in eternity past
    - a. And continues until it carries the believer into eternity future!
  3. Foreknowledge and predestination occur in the mind of God in eternity past
  4. Calling brings God's motives and choice into the present, into our lives in the here and now
  5. Justification is God's declaration of our righteousness in Christ through faith in Him
  6. And the glorification takes us into eternity to be with Jesus, with God
  7. What a marvelous expanse from eternity, through time, into eternity!
    - a. "Oh the depth of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"
    - b. "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (**Romans 11.33**)
- C. **The Father's Motive**
  1. Then let's look at the Father for a moment
    - a. For this Golden Chain of Salvation is all about the Father
    - b. God foreknew
    - c. God predestined
    - d. God called
    - e. God justified
    - f. God glorified
  2. God is the actor in this passage
    - a. That doesn't minimize our participation in the process
    - b. We must believe
    - c. We must repent

- d. We must work out our salvation in fear and trembling
- e. We must trust God's Spirit to work in us
- 3. But in this passage, God is the actor
  - a. Our assurance is dependent, not on us – for we would always fail
  - b. But our assurance is dependent on God – who never fails
  - c. And always finishes what He starts
- 4. But why does God do it?
  - a. He does it because He is motivated by love
  - b. Remember – foreknowledge is about God's loving choice of a people for Himself
- 5. But here's a parallel passage – listen carefully
- 6. **Ephesians 1:4–6** (ESV) —
  - a. 4 ... even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.
  - b. **In love** 5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,
  - c. 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.
- 7. In this text Paul substitutes “love” for “foreknew”
  - a. “In love he predestined us for adoption...”
- 8. God did it
  - a. And He did it in love
  - b. Because He loves us
  - c. Why does He love us?
  - d. Because He loves us!
- 9. Don't miss the love
- D. **The Son's Preeminence**
  - 1. Then look at this text and see Jess
    - a. See the preeminence of the Son
  - 2. We are predestined – not to be saved from hell; not to escape eternal punishment
  - 3. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son
  - 4. Why?
    - a. So that He might be the firstborn among many brothers
  - 5. God the Father wants to give Son Jesus siblings like unto Himself
  - 6. This whole text is about multiplying the nature and character of Christ
    - a. Not that we would be little Gods
    - b. But that the communicable attributes of Christ would be ours
    - c. His love, His faithfulness, His kindness, His joy, His peace, His patience, His holiness
  - 7. Central to this perfect process is the perfect Son
    - a. Into whom we may be conformed!
  - 8. The Son is preeminent!
- E. **The Spirit's Effect**

1. So we've seen the Father in this text; we've seen the preeminence of the Son
    - a. Let's not leave out the Holy Spirit
    - b. This is a Trinitarian passage!
  2. Where does the Spirit fit in?
    - a. Well, first of all – in our calling
    - b. He's the One who takes the general call which goes out to everyone and applies to the human heart
    - c. He is the One who regenerates – makes us born again
    - d. He is the One who sanctifies us by dwelling in us and working in us to will and to work
    - e. And ultimately He will be the One who will glorify us
  3. That's the Spirit's effect
    - a. Do you see why we believe in the Trinity – the Triune nature of God?
    - b. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
- F. **The Saint's Assurance**
1. Remember – the point of all of this is the assurance of the saints
    - a. Saints who are suffering
    - b. Saints who are wondering how we are going to get through this fallen world which groans as in the pains of childbirth
    - c. Saints who need to help of the Spirit in our praying
  2. This is all about the assurance of the saints
  3. How are we to be assured?
  4. We are assured in the knowledge that in eternity past
    - a. God knew us – loved us
    - b. God choose us (long before we ever dreamed of choosing Him!)
    - c. God called us – by His Spirit; by regenerating us
    - d. God justified – declared us righteous, not on the basis of anything we did, but on the basis of Christ's life, death and resurrection
    - e. And God glorified us – transforming us into the image of Christ
  5. Glorification – an experience that we have to look forward to in hope
    - a. But a fact that as far as God is concerned is already done
    - b. Because whatever God starts – He finishes!
    - c. (God's desk does not look like mine!)

## VI. One final admonition

- A. Ok, so maybe you're still struggling with all of this
  1. Maybe the mere mention of predestination makes the hair stand up on the back of your neck
  2. Maybe the idea that God foreknew you because He loved you – loved you, personally and particularly – has your mind spinning in a thousand directions
- B. Ok – but don't miss the point of all of this
  1. The point, in fact of Chapter 8 – this jewel of Romans

2. And this is the assurance of the saints
- C. I'll be frank – you need to put aside all your objections
  1. Forget them all!
- D. And just let it sink in
  1. **Romans 8:28** (ESV) —
    - a. 28 And we know that for those who love God
    - b. all things work together for good,
    - c. for those who are called according to his purpose.
- E. And just let it sink in what the eternal mind of God has done!
  1. **Romans 8:29–30** (ESV) —
    - a. 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.
    - b. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called,
    - c. and those whom he called he also justified,
    - d. and those whom he justified he also glorified.
- F. Because if you don't let it sink in what God has done in eternity past to bring us into eternal glory, you will have missed the point!
- G. Dear friends, you need to be able to come to the same place as Paul as he contemplated these truths
  1. Which he expresses in the very next verse:
- H. **Romans 8:31** (ESV) —
  1. 31 What then shall we say to these things?
  2. If God is for us,
    - a. who can be against us?