

Good News for the Anxious: Part I

Romans 8:28-30

Introduction

Do you every worry about things in life? Do you ever worry about the future? I know I do. It seems like there can be a lot to worry about at the moment. Don't worry I won't list all those things you can worry about - I know that'll probably make some of us even more anxious! But this morning's talk is called good news for the anxious, and if you're a young person listening, you might want to think through, "what helps us when we're feeling anxious?", this morning as we listen to this talk.

Anxiety is a really common problem across all our country and indeed across our whole world. According to the latest stats, 8.2 million people across the UK are being treated for anxiety as a medical condition. But the number who actually suffer with general over-anxiety is probably much higher. And most of us worry too much at time if we're honest – I often worry about how much I'm worrying. Anxiety UK defines anxiety in this way:

"Anxiety is a normal response to stress or danger and is often called the 'flight or fight' response... The problems arise when this response is out of proportion to the actual danger of the situation, or indeed is generated when there is no danger present."

So in other words anxiety is normal and natural in certain circumstances, the problem comes when we get anxious when there is no danger, when we worry about things we don't have to worry about.

Now if you think there is no God this morning – we're glad that you're with us – but just have a think about what that means for your life. One could argue that you have a lot to worry about. If there's no God, there is no purpose to our lives other than what we attach to them ourselves. There is no grand plan to this universe. If things seem out of control it's because they are. Our existence is at the whim of viruses, politicians and whoever has the most weapons. And as there's no afterlife, this is as good it gets. If you're stuck in lockdown for six months- well that's six months of your precious lifespan wasted.

But I want to encourage you this morning, that if you are trusting in God, if you are trusting in God this morning, in the God of the Bible, we have no need to be anxious.

This morning I want to give you four reasons not to be anxious. Well I wanted to give you four reasons - but we're only going to get through two this morning- I got a bit carried away with point two! So we'll have to look at two of them next week (this is my first ever two-part talk!). But we're just going to look at two of those points this morning.

But what I want to show you is that if we trust in God, we have no need to feel anxious. If all the things we have been talking about in Romans are true, then we are secure in God's love, we are safe wrapped in his almighty arms. Nothing can ultimately hurt us; nothing can ultimately snatch us away. We are safe and secure in Christ in God. Well, how does this passage show us that? Well firstly I have no need to be anxious...

...because ALL THINGS are working for my good (v28)

Have a look at verse 28:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Stop and think about that for a second. What does that mean? We have an all-powerful God, pulling the strings of time, space and history. What is he pulling them for? For me! For my good! God is working all things for my good.

It must be God we're talking about here, when it says "all things work together for good". It's not some sort of "I'm sure things will turn out alright" kind of comment, as though everything in every situation always turns out ok for everyone. People say it don't they "Tell me everything's going to be ok"? As though that's just what always happens.

No, this is talking about God at work here, working all things together for our good. So much so, that some copyists inserted the word "God" in there to make it more clear. That's why some translations include the word, "God" is working all things for good. But whatever your translation, its true isn't it, God is at work, whether it just says "all things" or whether it's God who's behind those all things that are working together.

But what are the 'all things'? Well when it says all things, it literally means "all things". Everything - it could mean "in everything" - but it's definitely all things. In everything that happens to us - God is working for our good, and that includes even our sufferings. And there are two classic examples of this: Joseph and Jesus.

Joseph (who's famous for his amazing technicolour dream-coat), he was sold by his brothers into slavery. Joseph, who was falsely accused of a crime and thrown in prison, who is forgotten for three years by a cupbearer who he helps. And at the end of all that, he can say to his brothers in Genesis 50:20, *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."*

God even used the wicked actions of Joseph's brothers to bring about the good He had purposed to do. His brothers were no mere puppets though, they meant it for evil! They had their own motives there, didn't they? But God was by no means absent from this either - He used it for good. So that was Joseph, that's one example.

The other big example is Jesus. It says this in Acts 2:23, *"this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."* So, think about it from that verse - who planned Jesus crucifixion? Was it the lawless men, the pharisees and teachers of the law, or was it God? Well, the answer is both: but one meant it for evil, and God meant it for good.

God is working for our good in all circumstances. But remember for Joseph that meant going to prison, and for Jesus that meant going to the cross! But the encouragement in those trials is that they are not pointless: God is working for our good in them. He is strengthening our faith; He is fitting us for glory.

Now I should say, it should be obvious in some ways from what we've said, that our good is not the same as our comfort. Some things that are good for us are very uncomfortable and unpleasant. Having immunisation injections are not comfortable, but they're good for us. Exercise (especially with Joe Wicks!) - it's not always comfortable, but it's good for us. Or kale! Who would eat kale if it wasn't good for you?!

No, God knows what's best for us. As I quoted John Newton a few weeks ago: he gives us "a daily portion of comforts and crosses—each one the most suitable to our case". Even this lockdown is for his purposes, this verse is a promise that he will use it for our good. It may seem uncomfortable and unpleasant, but as one of Newton's friends, hymn writer William Cowper wrote:

"Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face."

I'm confident that when we look back over our lives, we will see the good this time has done us, even if it's hard to see now. We are secure because even in our darkest hour, God is working for our good - especially in what follows. Our second point, is I have no need to be anxious...

...because there's an UNBREAKABLE chain leading to my glorification (v29-30)

Have a look at verses 29 and 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.

The second reason we can know we are secure is this unbreakable chain Paul presents us with, a chain that stretches from eternity past into eternity to come. And Paul's point whatever you think of the specific words, is that the chain is unbreakable. Those of us who are called- which he's just told us that we are, in the verse before - those of us who are called, are also justified and those of us who are justified are also glorified.

Our glorification there is so certain that Paul puts it in the past tense, something people call the 'prophetic past'. It is so certain, Paul can write about it as though it's already happened, so certain is the glory that's to come to us in this chain. That God is ultimately working for our good, and this is the 'good' that he is working for, our glorification at the end.

Now, that's basically what these verses mean, but I'd be doing the passage a disservice though if we didn't examine that chain in more detail - so we're going to look at that chain, but we're going to do it in reverse. So the first word that we're going to look at is 'glorified'.

Glorified

From what we've seen so far in Romans, this means that we will share in Christ's glory when God begins His new world. The sons of God will be unveiled and we will be like Jesus - what an incredible thought! What was perishable will become imperishable, what was corrupted will become pure, what was broken will be mended.

In this life we won't have glory. I mean, as a church, we struggle even to get in the Wharfedale Observer! We have about as much glory as Bolton Wanderers! (No offence to any Bolton Fans out there!). But one day we will be glorious! Not because we're secretly amazing, (though I'm sure many of us are!) but because we will share in Jesus' glory. He will share his glory with us! We won't become rivals to God with our own independent gloriousness. But we will share in His glory, we will share in His goodness, we will share in

His new world together. Who are these people who will share in this glory? Well, our next word tells us - those who are...

Justified

We've come across this word a lot in Romans, 'justified'. But for those with short memories or who have joined us recently, to be justified means to be declared "not guilty" by God. God is the judge of the whole world and although we have done things that would merit the guilty verdict, he declares us "Not Guilty".

How? Because the Guilty verdict was given to Jesus. He took the penalty we deserve. He paid the price that we deserved to pay. He faced the wrath of God instead of us. If you want more detail on that have a read of Romans chapter 3 later – that's what that chapter talks about. It means that God can justly justify people. It means that he can remain holy and righteous and just, and yet still rescue a people from judgement and hell.

If God hadn't sent Jesus to take our guilty verdict for us then no-one could be rescued because all of us are guilty before God, all of us have done things that deep down that we know we shouldn't have. We've hurt people, we've betrayed people, we've lied to people. That's even before we get to how we've treated God! If we're being honest, we don't even meet our own standards let alone God's standards - I know that I don't!

But the good news of the gospel is that we can be justified by God, we can be declared 'not guilty'. And those who are justified will be glorified, that's the amazing news here. Those who are justified will be glorified, they will make it to glory. But that begs the question, who gets justified? Well our next word tells us. Those who are...

Called

Those who are called. Now, some find this part a bit confusing. Isn't everyone called to believe the good news? Don't we call on everyone to believe in Jesus and turn from their sins? Well, yes we do! Amen! May it never be otherwise! Just wait until chapter 10 of Romans for that!

But that can't be the calling that it's referring to here. Why? Because everyone who is called is justified. And not everyone who **hears** the Gospel is justified, but only those who **believe** it. This call then must be something more than just hearing the message, right? For this reason, many have found it helpful to think about two 'calls' in the Bible. One that's external and general- that **we** give to everybody. And one that's internal specific to us, one that **God** gives us. God calls us, and when God calls us, it would seem, it works, in a way that the general call doesn't. From our passage that all whom God calls are then justified, that's what we've seen. In other words when God calls, you answer YES! It's a special kind of call that God gives us.

Now, I'm not here saying that you must have some special voice in your head or some strange mystical experience. If God has called you, here's the evidence, in the language of our passage - you love God. That's the evidence. Do you see that back in verse 28? They are the ones who have been called according to his purpose, "who love God". They're the ones who God is working all things for their good. Our love of God is evidence that we have been called by God.

But this love for God that it's talking about is more than just affection towards God. I mean, I love biscuits, but I don't love biscuits in the same way I love my wife! (Hi Sweetie!) Bound up with that idea though, of love, is faith and hope. That's really what it means here when it talks about love of God. It's all three, it's a different kind of love to the way that you love biscuits. Faith, hope and love sort of come as a package deal when it comes to God. That's why in chapter 3 it uses similar language, but it talks about faith instead.

The evidence that we are called by God is that when he calls, we answer with faith, hope and love. When he calls, we trust him for the present, we believe Him for the future, and we love Him above all else. There's no half-hearted love of God. He must be first in our hearts, or he's not really in our heart at all!

Those who are called respond, and if not, they haven't really been called. It means that when we hear the Gospel message, we believe it, we turn from our old ways and trust in God alone. That's the only response to that internal call, that internal summons that God gives us. But that still begs a question. But if all those who are called, respond and are justified and finally glorified, who does God choose to call? Who you gonna' call? Not the Ghostbusters, no, the answer's in our next word. He calls those who are...

Predestined

He calls those who are predestined. God calls those whom he predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son. Predestined there, really just means, chosen beforehand. But here it's more, it's chosen for a purpose - to be conformed to the image of His son. God calls people who he has decided before hand to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

Now, some camps when we look at this, put all the emphasis on the "predestined" bit and they miss the "conformed to the image of his son". And some camps put all the emphasis on the "image of his son" bit and miss the "predestined" bit. But we need to look at both, don't we?

It is true that people are predestined by God, but it is a predestination for a purpose: to become like His son. God's motive in all of this is quite surprising in one way. God's motive is Jesus-centred, not us-centred. His reason for doing this, as we read in that verse there, at the end of verse 29, is that "he might be the firstborn among many brothers". That Jesus might be firstborn, with many around Him. The Father loves the Son so much that he wants a people for him who are just like Him!" He wants a people for Jesus who look like Jesus. And he wants them to be his brothers - after all we learnt a couple of weeks ago, we have been adopted as sons, that makes Jesus our brother. God wants us to be just like Him - we're predestined for a purpose, to be conformed to Jesus.

So if we're not being conformed to the image of Jesus His Son in our lives, if we're not becoming more like Jesus, then we can't really claim to have been predestined, can we? You can't be chosen for something and be it and not be it at the same time - can you? If we're predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, then we must be in the image of His Son, or at least transforming into that image. So there's that conforming to the image of His Son bit.

But it does also say "predestined". Ephesians puts the time for this happening before the beginning of time. There was a decision taken before time that there would be a group of

people who would be chosen for this. Some speak of individual election; others of election in Christ. Our passage does give us some clarity though on what that means, which one of those it is, whether we're chosen individually or just chosen as a group, and that's summed up in our next word.

Foreknew

This is where it starts - in the foreknowledge of God. Believe it or not this is where the big debate really comes to a head. What does it mean for God to foreknow people? Now, I must say, as I've read through things, I wasn't massively impressed with commentaries from either side of the debate here! One side says that Paul is using the word 'know' in the Hebrew sense, and they quote passages such as Genesis 4:1, *Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain*. And they propose therefore we should translate 'know' as 'love'. So it's sort of fore-loved rather than fore-know.

Two problems with that. Firstly, the Hebrew word is used in situations where love is not involved, it's used in violent acts like Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Levite and his concubine in Judges. Know, even in the intimate sense does not equate to love. The second problem is that Paul uses the Greek word in Romans in ways that could not possibly mean 'love'. Talking about why mankind is Guilty before God, he writes in Romans 1:21, *For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him*. Now, he can't mean there that they 'loved' God - that would make zero sense! They loved Him, but they didn't honour Him or thank Him. No, it seems actually it's the other way, really.

But... equally on the other side, they often say that foreknow simply means that God looked through history and foreknew those who would have faith. God did not choose individuals, but chose to choose those who he foresees would put their trust in Him. But this has problems too! Two big ones: We're told in the Bible that faith is a gift of God, Ephesians 2:8, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*. If that's the case, then who does God choose to give faith to? And we're left with the same problem.

Or even if you don't accept that, we're left with the problem of God's actions in history. Does God act in a person's life before they become a believer? Wouldn't that influence whether or not they would believe in God? You see, if certain things happened in their life, if they're born into a certain situation, wouldn't that mean they were more likely to believe? Does God include his own actions in this, his own foresight, does he foresee his own actions? But surely they are his choices? If he does foresee his own choices, then how does he choose who to influence and who not? So think about people like Moses at the burning bush, God intervened there to do something, did he foresee his own intervention or did he choose to do that? And we're back to the same basic problem.

Just examining the text though I would argue, that 'foreknow' means foreknow. We don't need to twist it to say 'forelove', we don't need to expand it say 'foreknew who would believe'. The language is used all the way through scripture when God knows someone, so for example in Exodus 33:17 for Moses, *And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name."*

Now, of course he knows Moses by name - He knows us all by name! But, when God knows someone, it implies a special relationship. There's even foreknowledge there in the Bible. So

Jeremiah 1:5, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."* Again, God knowing somebody implies a special relationship, he was going to be a prophet for God. Even believers, even us, in Jesus' words in John 10:27, *My sheep hear my voice, and I **know** them, and they follow me.* Well, doesn't Jesus know everybody? But to be known by God, in that language in the Bible, is something special. Paul writes in Galatians 4:9,

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?

There are those, known by God – that's what Scripture talks about - and foreknown by God. It's more than just a general group - it's a specific group, as we've seen with those individuals in the old testament. Jeremiah - it was before he was born! Moses was in it- you can see that God acted in his life even from birth! Just think of people like John the Baptist, Isaac, Jacob, Samuel, David. All of whom were in that group, known by God before they were born! And we are in it too, if we know our shepherd's voice, if we follow him.

The important thing, though, with all of this, whatever you think those earlier words in the passage mean, is that those who are called, those who are justified, will be glorified. That's what Paul is trying to tell us. There's an unbreakable chain - that means we can feel secure, we don't need to be anxious. If God has chosen us in whatever way in eternity past, then he will certainly make sure that we make it in the eternity to come. Jesus has a 100% success rate, as you'd expect! As Jesus himself says, John 10:28, *"I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand."*

Jesus will never let us go. There's an unbreakable chain leading to my glorification. So let's preach these truths to ourselves this week when we feel our heart start racing, when anxiety starts to kick in. We need to say to ourselves don't we,

"I do not need to be anxious because ALL THINGS are working for my good",

"I do not need to be anxious because there's an UNBREAKABLE chain leading to my glorification"

God is working for my good! God is not going to abandon me, no matter what my circumstances. And next week it just gets better! So let's fight the temptation to give in to anxiety this week. There is no real danger if the Lord is our God.