

Hopefully, each morning or sometime during the day, you take time to pray for our country and the world situation, especially as we begin a new year and don't know what the next twelve months hold for us. As you watch the daily news with the war in Ukraine, tensions with Russia and China, and the continuous political chaos in our country, you can get depressed and discouraged about the future. Sometimes in my prayers, instead of worrying about these things, I remind myself that God is in control and that He has promised to take care of us. I take comfort in the words of the Apostle Paul in the second chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, verses 1-11.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-11

Did you hear what Paul was saying in the first verse. He didn't come to impress the Corinthians with fancy speeches or the latest philosophy. He deliberately kept his remarks plain and simple; he focused first on Jesus, who He was and what He did for them and us. His focus was on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I truly believe that this should be the focus of the Church always.

When I worked for the Federal government, our agency would have an annual meeting of the heads of each State office. The head of our agency during the Clinton Administration was Rodney Slater, a religious man from Arkansas. Rodney would occasionally quote scripture in his speeches at these meetings. I don't remember all of them, but one particular passage caught my attention and has become one of my favorites. Listen to again 1 Corinthians 2:9:

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."

The *Message* paraphrases this verse as follows: "No one's ever seen or heard anything like this, never so much as imagined anything quite like it – what God has arranged for those who love Him." This passage is very similar to Isaiah 64:4 where it states: "Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God beside you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for him."

At first glance you might think that the promise in this passage is referring to heavenly rewards. However, a closer examination of the second chapter of 1 Corinthians reveals that this is not entirely true. The discussion that precedes this verse relates to the wisdom of us as human beings. In reality, this promise refers to not only to the future but also to the present.

In this passage, Paul is reaffirming the assurance he wrote about in Romans 8:28 – "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Now sometimes we doubt this passage because at times things just don't go right in our life such as our declining health, the diagnosis of cancer, the death of a loved ones, and other problems.

Maybe this illustration will help you understand what Paul is trying to tell us here in Romans 8:28. Have you ever visualized this passage like the mixing of the ingredients for a cake? Some of the ingredients used to make a cake taste good by themselves such as sugar and chocolate. However, other ingredients, such as baking powder or flour are not very tasty. Nevertheless, they are essential for making a delicious cake. In the same way, God can be trusted to take even the bitter experiences in our lives and blend them together to make them work together for our good. God knows which ingredients are needed in our life, and He knows how to mix them just right to produce the desired result.

I don't think many of us would disagree that right now our world appears to be in chaos. A doctor, engineer, and politician were arguing about which of their professions were the oldest, which came first. The doctor said: "Well, Eve was created out of Adam's rib; that was obviously a surgery." "Possibly," replied the engineer, "But don't forget that the world was created out of chaos. That had to be an engineering project." "Hey, wait a minute!" argued the politician, "Who do you think created all the chaos?" Now there's a true statement!

One of the basic truths in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is that God has a plan and He is faithful to it, despite our constant disobedience and reluctance to follow it. However, with all the bad news that we see each day in the newspapers, on TV and the internet, we may wonder if this is really true. But God clearly reaffirms this with His promise in verse 11 of the twenty-ninth chapter of Jeremiah, where it is stated: "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." The *Message* paraphrases this verse as follows: "I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out – plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for."

As I just said, as we look at the condition of our world this morning, we may wonder if God is really in control and if He does indeed have a plan for the future. Maybe this story about a museum guide will help you understand why it is difficult at times for us to fully understand God's plan. This guide would take his tour group into a darkened room, shine a light on a mass of string in apparent chaos, and ask the group: "What do you think of this?" "I don't know or that's a mess," were the usual replies. Then he would say: "Stand over there and watch." As the group moved to the other side of the room, he would turn on a spotlight. It was instantly apparent that the mass of jumbled strings just seen a moment earlier was in fact the back side of a huge, beautiful tapestry.

The completed work had to be seen from a different perspective to fully understand what the artist was trying to create. So, it is with God and His plan. We often look at it and ask questions such as "why" and "how" not because there is no purpose in what God is doing, but because we are on the wrong side of eternity to be able to have the perspective that would enable us to see the order and pattern to God's plan. God is the Master Artist and we are trying to understand His plan from the back side of life.

When he was alive, Billy Graham once said that when he got to heaven, he wanted to sit down with God in front of a huge TV screen with the heavenly remote, and ask Him to explain it all to him. Likewise, when Mother Teresa was once asked what was the first thing she was going to say to Jesus, she replied: "You got a whole lot of explaining to do!" In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the Apostle Paul wrote: "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."

Now some of you may be a pessimist who is always thinking that nothing good is ever going to happen. A pessimist has been defined as someone who complains about the noise when opportunity knocks. Somebody else said that a pessimist is a person who is seasick during the entire voyage of life. I don't know if you remember what we discussed right before Christmas when the angel Gabriel told Mary that she would give birth to the Savior of the world. She asked how this could be since she was a virgin. Gabriel replied that is nothing is impossible for God.

In Matthew 19:26, Jesus looked at His disciples and said: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." In Matthew 17:20, Jesus tells His disciples that if they have faith nothing will be impossible for them. As I have noted before, we tend to limit God to our own abilities, imagination, and creativity. Just because we can't do something, we think God can't. As Christians we should always look for the good in everything, not the negative, because our God can do anything as long as we are willing to follow Him and walk in faith.

In working for the government and now in ministry, I have found that anytime you undertake a project there will be some opposition, some naysayers. I wish I had a dollar for every time I have heard: "It can't be done!" When we started the reconstruction of the Big I in downtown Albuquerque in 2000, we set a goal of completing the project in 2 years. This was unheard of at that time since the reconstruction of an interchange of two major interstate routes usually took at least 3-4 years. At the pre-bid meeting, some of the contractors said that this project could not be completed in the proposed time frame. The Chief Engineer of the Highway Department, Charlie Trujillo, stood up and told them that the Highway Department didn't want anyone bidding on the project if they didn't think it could be done in two years, and that those doubting contractors should leave the meeting right now; no one left! By the way, we finished the project in 23 months and on budget!

The *Common English Bible* translates verse 9 as follows: "God has prepared things for those who love Him that no eye has seen, or ear has heard, or that haven't crossed the mind of any human being." Do you truly believe this promise? That God has great things in store for us. That we haven't seen anything yet. Just take a moment and think about all the amazing things that have happened just in our lifetime that were never conceived of before: man walking on the moon, a space station orbiting the earth, lasers, advancements in heart surgery, treatment of cancer, the internet, smartphones, electric cars, and last, but not least duct tape.

With just those advancements in our lifetime, can you imagine what the future holds? Now I'm not just talking about the potential advances in science, medicine, and technology. I'm thinking about the church? What plans does God have for High Desert? We have come a long way, but I don't think we have even scratched the surface as to what God has planned for this church.

When we moved to this location three years ago, God opened a door of opportunity for us. We have faced some interesting challenges and opportunities since then, and have accomplished a lot. As I look back over these past three years, one of the biggest lessons for me has been to learn to walk in faith. Many mornings during my quiet time after praying and reading the Bible, I often write in my journal: "Walk in faith; trust in the Lord and see what He will do." In 2 Corinthians 5:7 it is written: "For we walk by faith, not sight." The *Message* paraphrases it this way: "It's what we trust in but don't yet see that keeps us going."

A minister once asked a woman to define faith. To which she replied: "Well, I'm not that smart or educated, but to me it is taking God at His word." Not a bad definition. In the classic movie *Miracle on 34th Street*, Santa Claus says: "Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to." The Bible defines faith in Hebrews 11:1 as follows: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." Philip Yaney said that faith means trusting in advance what will only make sense in reverse.

As I have tried to walk in faith, one old gospel song has been a source of encouragement to me. Do you remember Cristy Lane's classic song *One Day at a Time*? She often referred to this song as her philosophy of life. Listen to the words: "Show me the stairway I have to climb. Lord for my sake, teach me to take one day at a time. One day at a time, Sweet Jesus, that's all I'm asking from You. Just give me the strength to do every day what I have to do." That's how you walk in faith, taking one day at a time and trusting that God will surprise you with what He does.

As we as Christians survey the world around us, we must be aware that we do not worship an absentee God. God is in the shadows of history and He has a plan. As Christians we should not be disturbed by the chaos, violence, hatred and corruption that fill the pages of our daily newspapers and our television screens and computers. We know that these things are the consequences of the sins and greed of humanity. No matter how confusing the future seems, we as Christians know the end of the story of history. We are heading to a glorious climax. Every writer of the New Testament believes that "the best is yet to come." Benjamin Franklin said that the longer he lived, the more convinced he was that God governs the affairs of men.

The Bible indicates that the future is in God's hands. If it were in our hands, we would have made a bigger mess of it than we already have. The future is not in the devil's hands, for then he would lead us to destruction. The future is not at the mercy of any government leading us blindly forward. But the future is in the hands of One who is preparing something better than any eye has seen, or ear heard, or has entered into the heart of man to conceive.

As we journey through 2023, let us follow the wisdom in Proverbs 3: 5-6 – “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths.”

God has a plan; He has been working at it since the beginning of time and will continue to work at it until He calls us all home. The question for us this morning is – are we doing our part? Are we willing to walk in faith and see what God has in store for us and this church. God wants you to be part of His plan; don't miss this opportunity! Give God your best each and every day. You haven't seen anything yet; just wait and see what God is going to do in 2023! Amen