

SERMON: 2017/07/30 - BTR

FOCUS: *'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 within a large family.[v] 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.'* (Rom. 8:29-30.)

KIDS' TALK:

In our gospel reading this morning, we heard Jesus speaking of the two *very* different "fates" that await all people following his return to judge the dead [Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 20:12], (which, elsewhere, He calls "Heaven" and "Hell" (and sometimes "Hades")); and, in rapid-fire succession, He used lots of metaphors - or "word-pictures" - to describe these "destinations."

Now, I have (here) a pile of those images (He used), but it's become all jumbled up! And I wonder if you can help me sort them out? Like a test! Or a game.

Who's going to go first? (I need a volunteer.)

...

[When the task is finished]

So, where would you like to spend eternity?

In which of these places would you *choose* to live forever and ever?

Hmm... when I put it like that you see what an important question it is, which is why it is really good to know that, as Saint Paul wrote,

'if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.' [Rom. 10:9]

...saved from suffering that unhappy conclusion. [Wave/gesture to the "Hell" pile.]

Isn't that great now? Ok, off you go.

[When the children have departed]

SERMON:

You know, that verse I quoted just now - about confessing and believing - is such

an important one to me. Those words - or at least an estimation of them gleaned from the New Testament as a whole - changed my life.

They give me comfort. And countless others I know. Maybe you too?

You see, the Apostle's assurance both assuages my anxiety about dying; and, at the same time, fires my passion for telling others about my Savior; gives me tranquility *and* urgency and purpose.

Why, then, wouldn't you do as he recommends: to "roll those dice?"

To gamble and place your bets on the one man who actually has - *already* - beaten the grave; who's been to the "other side" and returned, not only unharmed but better than He had been, glowing with light [Acts 9:3-7]. *Magnificent*.

Of course, having said that, we seem to find here [gesture to "pew-sheet"] in *Romans* 8, verses 29 to 30, that God "foreknew" that I would take my "chances" with His Son, and not only that but "*predestined*" me to do so; intending to ensure - to guarantee - I would also be 'glorified', which means made perfect as Christ is.

Wow.

Really?

That *sounds* like a good thing, but is it?

To be honest, I'm not sure.

Before I had some confidence in my salvific status, because - *before* - I could point to a specific date and time, or at least a "season," when I felt myself proactively taking some "concrete" steps in my journey towards that better posthumous outcome of which words are inadequate, but "pearls" and "treasure" and beautiful song-"birds" symbolise.

But if Paul is saying that *everything* has been *pre*-determined, then it doesn't matter how I *feel* as to the question of whether I will eventually be in bliss or agony.

If he has in mind individuals in this passage, then - you and I - we're reduced to (helpless) pawns on a cosmic chessboard, being pushed around by an aloof deity for his own amusement - and nothing I do or desire is of any consequence.

I'm either "elected" or I'm not.

And if you're not, there's no hope. This is the "flip side." You were doomed - *damned!* - from conception.

And yet maybe that interpretation (of this section [gesture again to the "pew-sheet"]) is flawed? For its construal of us and our Creator flies completely against the overall "thrust" of the Bible, which is that we have a genuine capacity for choice-making, and are capable of a meaningful relationship with Him [point up!], which must involve *real* risk on both sides. A risk of rejection, of disappointment.

To be clear, *He* will always stand by His promises - check out *Jeremiah* 1:12. *Read anything in the Old Testament.*

It is *our* commitment that is fickle.

In fact, without the transformation of our nature by the Holy Spirit, we *will* fail to live out - *fruitfully* - what it means to really confess Jesus as Lord and believe in His resurrection, for those marvellous facts *should* shift your perspective on everything. Consider it:

We pride ourselves on our supposed superiority to other animals, but in comparison to God we are little more sophisticated than the worms in the mud beneath our noisy feet [Job 25:6]. *But He died for us anyway!*

And if we've no true ability (of our own) to respond to such an amazing act of gratuitous vulnerability by the father of the universe, then Calvary becomes a senseless charade. A pretense. A distasteful mockery of what sacrifice is really about: which is paying a price.

I think, therefore, that Paul must have in mind "The Church:" That from the beginning of the world God anticipated how mankind would deviate from what was natural and right and wholesome, and so put in place a "scheme" that would produce saints in *every* generation - from Adam onwards, whose inclination would be "conformity" to Jesus' sublime teaching and example (rather than that of someone else).

My question, then: Is that you?

Will *you* be one of those who sincerely participate in that eternal plan whilst you have breath or until its marvellous climax?

Pray for perseverance. Pray for grace.
Amen.