

“Predestination: God’s Actual Plan for People”

The other day during our Zoom staff meeting we were talking about the different reactions we have heard from people regarding the governor’s mask mandate. Believe it or not, most of us reported that we have heard positive comments about wearing masks. Of course, we all know that masks aren’t that comfortable, especially for long periods of time. They cover our facial expressions—like our smiles or even our frowns. They can be hot, and are definitely inconvenient on many levels. Yes, we wear them because we have to at the moment. But we also wear them to protect those around us, which means we wear these masks as an act of love for our neighbor. But during our discussion, someone brought up the fact that not everyone agrees that masks are a **good** thing. Of course, we all know that, but in this particular case, the comment was made that when it comes to masks, some people seem to be asking the question, “why bother?” If life is all about God’s plan and his timing, does it really matter what we do?

This kind of thinking isn’t necessarily wrong. And it’s certainly bold and attests to the fact that God really *is* in control of everything. But let’s be honest. Most of the time, we don’t live like everything is mapped out and planned by God. We take risks and do our best to change things when we don’t like something. A job we can’t stand? We don’t say “why bother looking for something else because this is God’s plan.” No! We get out there and do our best to make something happen. And it’s like this in most areas of our lives. We choose things, not thinking that every choice we make is preordained by God. So if we choose to eat Cheerios, or oatmeal, or pizza for breakfast, that’s OK because we doubt God cares. We choose what to wear everyday based on our own reason. We choose whether we’re going to exercise or eat right— or sit on the couch and eat ice cream and Doritos. We choose where to live, who we socialize with, and where we go to church.

But like those who say “why bother,” because there’s nothing we can do to change God’s plan, are there aspects of our Christian lives that are

already set up? Are there certain things preordained by God where we don't really make choices? Yes, there are. And no, I'm not talking about whether we should wear masks or not. What I'm talking about is God's actual plan for his people. What I'm talking about is an anchor of our faith. And it's the doctrine of predestination.

In Romans chapter 8, Paul writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son..." Our Lord speaks here and not only gives us a glimpse of the future, but he gives us the assurance that everything really is going to turn out OK. Because all of us know that life in this world can be difficult. Even as those claimed by God as his children, we face each and every day the effects of sin. We get pulled down by the cares and concerns of our lives. COVID certainly isn't helping any of this. We have doubts and worries that leave us feeling paralyzed and helpless. We wonder at times if we're really going to make it through this pandemic. We wonder if God **is** really in control.

But we don't have to wonder. Because God answers us. We—those whom he foreknew have been predestined to be his children through Christ. It's as if each and everyday— despite our own feelings—he speaks his words of encouragement saying, "Because of Jesus, no one can take you away from me. This is my plan. Keep going, no matter how hard it may seem. I am here with you, and everything is under my control because I chose you." That's what Paul means when he writes, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined," But Romans chapter 8 isn't the only place he says this. Ephesians 1:5: "He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." Eph. 1:11, "In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined..." This is what we teach as Lutherans—single predestination—because it's 100% Biblical! And it's based solely on God's grace—we contribute nothing! God predestines individuals who come to saving faith.

Some Christians though, sadly, don't understand it this way. Many from Reformed denominations teach, not single predestination, but double predestination. This means that yes, God predestines his elect to adoption as his children, but he also predestines certain people to hell. This might make rational sense to the human mind—I mean, if he predestines some to eternal glory, he must do the same for some who are bound for eternal damnation. But the Bible never mentions God predestining anyone to hell. It's actually quite the opposite. "God desires that all people be saved and

come to the knowledge of the truth” we read 1 Tim. 2:4. And of course our Lord himself proclaims in Jn 3:16 that God loves *the world* enough to send his Son to save it. God doesn’t want the damnation of sinners. He wants all to be saved.

And this isn’t some weird thing on his divine wish list. He made it all happen in his redemption for all people. Think about this. Jesus didn’t die on the cross just for a select few. His work was for all! And through God’s grace, the benefits of Christ’s work are available for everyone. That’s why we make disciples by baptizing and teaching. Even still, God’s grace can be resisted and rejected. We know that, and it’s really sad. But that doesn’t negate the fact that the gifts remain valid. God has chosen us—in fact he has chosen all Christians to be his children. He predestines us to be his for Christ’s sake.

But still, this is really hard for us to grasp, because our minds start to wander all over the place. We try to make sense of things and speculate. And when we do, we get away from the infallible and dependable word of God, and start to drift into our own version of his reality. Let me tell you something. That was me in my younger years when it came to predestination. I was over the place. And maybe you were too. Maybe you still are wrestling with this. If so, I get it. Because one of things I remember doing was sitting in chapel during my high school days, and going back and forth in my mind with this. On the one hand, I would hear that God saved me. But I wasn’t sure if that was because he chose me or because I chose him (the boarding school I went to was Baptist by the way). But even more concerning for me was that, at times, I would misuse this doctrine as an excuse for a sinful life. Like, “it didn’t matter what I did. If I was predestined to be with God forever, I was going to be saved no matter what.” This attitude, of course, was childish and immature. But you know what I’m talking about here, because we all act like this at times. The reality, though, is that God has called us to be his adopted children by his grace. And those who have a living faith will live in that grace, and not seek to exploit it. Because when we do, then we are rejecting the gift, and reject it enough and we willfully walk away.

So, what does all of this mean for our lives? Is predestination just some strange doctrine that we will struggle to understand until Jesus comes back? Maybe. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Because there is comfort here, my friends.

You see, predestination is God's persistent reassurance that we are his—that we are safely in his care. That he has chosen us—that he has done everything necessary for our salvation, and will fight to keep us in the faith. Yes, it really is one of those things that we can point to in our lives that is *his* plan. And this is good news. Because when we are weak, we look to his strength. When we are burdened, we look to him to carry the weight. When we question if we're good enough, or if we're really predestined for eternity with him we have an answer. First, we look to the cross where **he bore our sins and shed his blood until it killed him**. That's the first place we look to see our God who loved the world so much. And then we look to the empty tomb, where three days later he walked out alive. This is who called us by name at the font. This is who feeds us his grace in his supper and fills our hearts with his Word.

Be confident in the fact that you are part of God's plan. "And those whom he predestined, he also also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

This is not up for debate. This is not our opinion, or wish, or some theological fantasy. This is happening for you and for me. Because it's God's ***actual plan*** for his people. **Amen.**