

The Salvation Train

Romans 8:29-30

May 13, 2018

Introduction:

A few years ago we took a big family vacation out West and instead of flying we decided to do something different and take the train. We boarded an Amtrak train just south of Des Moines late in the afternoon, rode all night through Nebraska, and by the light of morning arrived in Denver. But that's where the real fun began because we continued on through the Rocky Mountains west to Grand Junction, CO, our final destination. Traveling through the snow-covered Rocky Mountains by train was one of the highlights of our trip and is something I would highly recommend doing if you ever get the chance.

Of course, that is if you want to be brave enough to take an Amtrak train. Sadly, it seems that Amtrak has fallen on tough times. It seems at least a couple times a year you hear of some tragic accident where a passenger train derailed. Just last December there was a serious accident where an Amtrak train derailed in Washington state, killing three, when it took a turn too fast on its inaugural run. Mistakes can be made can be made, and trains unfortunately do not always make it to their destination.

But there is a train that's guaranteed to take all those who climb aboard safely to their destination and that's what I'm calling the salvation train. Using a train metaphor, I want us to consider what our passage this morning has to say about how everyone God intends to save will indeed be saved because he insures everyone arrives safely at their destination. These two verses we'll be looking at in Romans 8 are sometimes referred to as the "golden chain of salvation" because the links cannot be broken but I'm going to blaze my own trail today and use a train metaphor to help us understand what the apostle Paul has to teach us about our salvation.

So if you haven't done so already, please open your Bibles to Romans 8, which can be found on pg. 944 of the pew Bibles, should you be using one of those. Today we'll be giving our attention to just two verses, v. 29-30, but they're packed full of theological goodness that we'll need to discuss together. So please follow along as I read v. 29-30 of Romans 8 from the ESV. **"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."**

As you can see, this passage moves along in a progression. It starts with those who God foreknew and then follows down the track with those he predestined, those he called, those he justified, and those he glorified. Each of those are stops along the route, as it were, and so we need to follow the salvation train from it's initial starting point all the way to its final destination. So let's travel the route together and see what we can learn from it about how salvation works in our lives by considering each of these fives stops along the way. So let's begin with the starting point of our salvation, which concerns...

1. Those he foreknew...

What kicks off this whole chain of events is the foreknowledge of God. Paul says in v. 29 that, **“those whom he foreknew has also predestined...”** So then, predestining rests upon the foreknowledge of God. Now what Paul means by this is the crux of the matter when it comes to how we understand what initiates our salvation. What does the word **“foreknew”** mean? Many people take it to mean that God knows who will believe in him in the future and he then predestines them on that basis. In fact, I would imagine quite a few of you here would read this passage through that lens. You might paraphrase this passage to read like this, “Those whom God foreknew would one day in the future believe in Christ Jesus as their Lord and Savior were predestined by God to receive salvation.”

Now I understand the appeal of that particular interpretation because it makes sense of how we would normally understand the word **“foreknow”** and it saves you from the uncomfortable notion of God simply choosing to save some people and not others for no apparent reason. If the reason we’re saved is because God foresaw in us a future faith, then we have only ourselves to blame if we are not saved, since God only chose to save those who first believed. But unfortunately there are some serious problems to such an understanding. First, the other uses of this word don’t imply merely intellectual knowledge but rather it means “to enter into a relationship before” or to “chose or determine before.” (Moo 532). The way the word works is far closer to the OT usage, such as in Jeremiah 1:5 where God foresaw that Jeremiah would be a prophet. The point is not that God merely saw what was one day going to happen in the future but that he actively chose Jeremiah to serve him in that capacity before he was born.

Second, Paul says nothing here about God foreknowing our future faith but rather that he foreknows us personally. One commentator put it like this, “That the verb here contains this [particular] biblical sense of ‘know’ is suggested by the fact that it has a simple personal object. Paul does not say that God knew anything *about* us but that he knew *us...*” (Moo 532).

Third, if God’s predestining us is based upon his knowledge of our future faith, then how can we explain how anyone at all can have faith in the future in light of all that Paul has said about our spiritual condition apart from Christ? If we indeed are spiritually dead, enslaved to sin, given over to our selfish passions and lusts, if no one seeks God, no not one, if we are unable to respond to the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to us, then how is it that anyone would then believe? If it’s up to us to first believe in order for God to foresee our faith in order to then chose us, then no one would be saved because there would be no future faith in anyone to see.

So in light of this, the other option is far better and more in line with how **“foreknew”** is used elsewhere in Scripture and that is God foreknew us by choosing to love us before we were born. The process of salvation began in eternity past where God chose us to be the objects of his love, not because he saw in us any future faith or moral goodness but simply because he wished to extend his lovingkindness to us. As a result of this, we will eventually believe, but that faith comes as a gift given to us as a result of his

loving foreknowledge. Because we've been foreknown by God, we will believe; it is not that we first believe and therefore God foreknows us on that basis.

As I said, this is the crux of the matter when it comes to how we understand salvation. Either it starts because of something in us - our faith which God foresees and then respond to - or it starts with God who chooses to set his saving love upon us apart from anything in us. Or to put it another way, either God chooses us because we believe, or we believe because God chooses us. I think the whole of Scripture as well as what Paul has said about our sin nature throughout Romans thus far and what he will say in Romans 9 about Jacob and Esau point decisively to the fact that God's choice is not contingent upon him foreseeing our future faith. Salvation is by grace where God chooses to set his love on sinners before the foundations of the world apart from anything in them that would merit his favor, including future faith. It is therefore his loving choice that sets into motion the salvation train that will eventually bring those who he foreknew into a saving relationship with him through faith in Christ.

Now I know that's a huge challenge for many of you. I know the way most people think about God's foreknowledge is that we're chosen or not chosen on the basis of our future faith. But I have to state as clearly as I can that such a view doesn't square with the rest of Scripture. God's foreknowledge means he chose us in love before creation to be saved, apart from anything in us. I recognize this becomes particularly difficult because it then seems to imply God's choice of who to save is completely arbitrary. If we're all equally sinners, then why does God choose only some and not all? I feel the weight of that. After my dad died, I had to ask myself, "Why did God save me and not him? It wasn't because of anything in me that made me worthier of God's love. Why did God choose me and not my dad?" I understand that struggle and can only say at this point what Scripture teaches, and that is God's choice of who he saves is not based on anything in us, including foreseeing a future faith. I don't know why God would choose to save me and not someone else, but I do know I contributed nothing to his choice including mustering up faith. God saved who he chose to save and since he was not obligated to save everyone, I can't complain or argue with him about it. My job is only to give him the thanks and praise he deserves for the amazing grace that saved a wretch like me.

So then, the salvation train begins with God foreknowing us in that before we were born, before even creation itself, God chose to set his love on certain sinners. Now for those he foreknew, we need to move on to the second point which is...

2. He also predestined...

Look back in your Bibles now at the whole of v 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."** The same people that God foreknew he also **"predestined"** which means pretty much what the word would indicate: that God set out for us our ultimate destination ahead of time. He pre-determined what was to happen to those he set his saving love upon. And that destination is that we're **"to be conformed to the image of his Son."**

So what does Paul mean by this? I think the idea in part includes moral virtue, such that we'll live a life of holy obedience to God much like Christ did. This is in essence what Paul says in Ephesians 2:10 when after explaining how God saved us by his grace he gives the purpose for our salvation saying, *"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."*

But even greater than this is the final destination of glory that we'll eventually share with Christ. Currently, the image of the Son which Christ possess is to dwell in glory with the Father in heaven and that surely is what Paul is ultimately pointing us to. This is made even more clear by the second half of the verse where he says, **"in order that [Christ] might be the firstborn among many brothers."** Christ's resurrection into a glorified body is elsewhere used in the NT as a way of referring to Christ as being the "first fruits" of what await all who trust in him, so the idea here is God's ultimate goal in choosing to love us before the foundations of the world is so we might be like Christ in that we share in his resurrected glory.

Aren't you glad that God has chosen such a glorious destination for us? God has chosen us with an end in mind and he intends to finish what he started. He wants for us to share in the glory of Christ. God's goal for us has been determined: he will see to it that all those who he has chosen in eternity past will be like Christ in that they will share in the same wondrous glory that Christ now has in the presence of God the Father. When the salvation train arrives at its destination, it will end in glory.

But so far, the salvation train hasn't let anyone on board. These first two stops - that God foreknew us and predestined us - all take place before any of us exist. They are all things God has done in eternity past, long before we were born and before he even created the universe. God knows who exactly is going to board the salvation train and he knows exactly where they will end up, but nobody has yet been saved until they respond to his call and so that then brings our salvation train out of the tunnel of eternity past and into the present created order, into our lives today. So the third stop, where God in effect says, "All aboard" to those he foreknew and predestined, is referring to those...

3. He also called...

The salvation train continues down the tracks in v. 30 where it says, **"And those whom he predestined he also called..."** Now there are two kinds of calling that are referred to in Scripture. The first is the general call of the gospel. For example, at a Billy Graham crusade, near the end of the evening, Billy Graham would explain the gospel and make a call for people to come and repent of their sins and receive Christ in faith. Some people out of that crowd of thousands would then come down to the front of the platform and come to trust in Christ. When Billy Graham or anyone else, including you and I, proclaim the gospel to someone, then that is what is known as the general call of the gospel to repentance and faith. It goes out to all kinds of people who may or may not respond favorably to it. Some believe it, other reject it, but nevertheless the call to turn from sin and trust in Christ is proclaimed.

Now that is *not* what is being referred to here. Rather, what Paul is speaking of in v. 30 is not the general call of the gospel that goes out to everyone that may or may not be received but rather he's referring to the *specific* call of God that actually brings about salvation in the hearts of those who hear it. Sometimes it's also referred to as the *effectual* call of God, because it brings about what it intends to accomplish, that is, it has its effect on those who hear it.

See, when God has chosen and predestined someone to salvation, he sees to it that they will be saved. So when the general call goes out through the proclamation of the gospel, those who God has foreknown and predestined will believe because he opens their spiritually blind eyes to see and ears to hear so that they will respond in faith. This is why Jesus said in John 3 that you have to be born again: that's what God does in the heart of an unbeliever to get them to believe the call of the gospel. If God doesn't do it, then they won't believe; but if God does do it, then they will believe. God guarantees those whom he foreknew and predestined will climb aboard the salvation train and he does it by causing them to be born again so they will respond in faith to the gospel call. It is those sheep Jesus has chosen, as he mentions in John 10, who hear his voice and respond, but only they will respond.

So while the general call of the gospel goes out to everyone, the effectual call of God, being referred to here, is given only to those whom God foreknew and predestined and it makes effectual their salvation such that those who are called believe. The general call of God can be resisted, but the effectual call cannot: it will accomplish its goal which is to bring about faith in the heart of those whom God has chosen in eternity past.

So then, what we have here in v. 30 is the actualizing in time of what God has chosen in eternity past. For example, in my life, the effectual calling of God came on October 27, 1990, when he caused me to be born again so I would believe in Christ and thus be saved, although God had foreknown me and predestined me to salvation long before that time. When exactly the effectual call of God comes to an individual varies with that individual, but if they have been foreknown and predestined by God, then it will come eventually. All who are foreknown are also predestined and are also called - everyone of them. No one misses getting on the salvation train whom God has determined will ride it.

Now the next stop of the salvation train is one that takes place immediately after this one, so moving on now, we want to see that those God called....

4. He also justified...

Look back in your Bibles at v. 30 once again. **“And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified...”** As theologians try to understand the process of salvation, we break down parts of the conversation process into steps that follow in order logically although they can happen virtually simultaneously, and that is certainly the case here when we talk about justification. The process looks like this - imagine you're an unbeliever who's having the gospel proclaimed to you, let's

say by a neighbor. Of course, being dead in your trespasses and sins, you would never believe the gospel if left up to you. The message of the cross of Christ is foolishness to you because you're spiritually dead and unable to hear it in a way that would allow you to respond to it in faith. But because God has foreknown you in eternity past, because he has predestined you to be conformed into the image of his Son, when your neighbor tells you about Christ, God causes you to be born again. He changes your heart through the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit and opens up your ears to hear the gospel message not as foolishness but as good news. God allows you to recognize your sin for what it is and to see Christ as your glorious savior who suffered God's wrath on your behalf on the cross. As a result, you hear the gospel call and instead of rejecting it, you believe. You repent of your sins and trust in the promise that Christ is your spotless Lamb who purchased the pardon of your sin by suffering in your place.

Once that has happened, then God **"justifies"** you by considering your sins to be Christ's sins and Christ's righteousness to be your righteousness. In practicality, the call and justification happen at the same time, but logically (and in light of how Paul lays it out here in v, 30) one must first be called and respond to that call in faith in order for the atoning work of Christ to be considered your own.

Now again I must point out that nobody is left out in this process. All those who are foreknown are predestined, all those who are predestined are called, and all those who are called are justified. There aren't people who are called but who happen to miss out on justification. Thus the call that Paul refers to here is effectual and not the general call of God. If you're called by God to be saved, you will be. God will see to it that you respond to the gospel and that your sins are atoned for. There is no exception to the rule. Nobody misses the train at this stop. Everyone God determines in eternity past to get on board the salvation train will get on board. He calls and justifies everyone whom he foreknew and predestined.

But that then bring us to our ultimate destination and our fifth and final point, which is that those he justified...

5. He also glorified

Look at v. 20 with me once again. **"And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."** Glorification is the final stop of the salvation train. The final destination God is taking us is for us to be resurrected into glorified bodies where we will be with Christ for all eternity. Now it may take some time to get between the point of justification and glorification - so far, it's been over 25 years and counting for me - but the point is, the train will get there.

In fact, so confident is Paul in this that he uses the past tense to describe what is yet in the future. Did you notice that? Look again at the tense of last work of v. 30. It says, **"he also glorified"** not, as one would expect, "he also will glorify." Paul speaks of our future glorification in the past tense, as if it has already happened. That's just how confident Paul is in the salvation train arriving at its final destination. For Paul, our

glorification is as certain as if it has already taken place. There isn't a shred of doubt that those whom God has called and justified will also be glorified. It's as good as done in his mind, and so should it be it ours.

My friends, nothing stops the salvation train. There are no derailments. Nobody gets off too early or misses the train. Paul doesn't say that only some whom God foreknew will be predestined, and only some who are predestined will be called and only a few who are called are justified and just a hand full of lucky ones who were justified will be glorified. All those God foreknew at the beginning will arrive safely at the end. All those whom God sets his love upon by choosing in eternity past will be glorified in eternity future. The salvation train unerringly makes it to its destination and everyone who is meant to get on board will do so. There are no exceptions to the rule. No one misses the train who God has called to ride it.

This is a solid rock upon which we can build our lives upon. God will never let you go. If he has saved you, he will save you. His initial calling is rooted in his foreknowledge that chose you in eternity past and will insure that it results in your future glorification. There is nothing that can stop it from happening, as Paul will wonderfully lay out for us in the passage right after this. No matter what you are facing right now, if you have boarded the salvation train by trusting in Christ as your Lord and Savior, God will see to it that you make it to your final destination. Glorification is a certain promise for you. Death will not have the final word. Sin will not triumph over you. Condemnation will never be reintroduced into the courtroom of your life. The salvation train will reach it final destination, and if you are on that train, you will get there, and nothing will stop it.

Conclusion

So as we close our time together, I can only invite you to stand in the certainty of God's promise to you that nothing will stop the salvation train and if you are on it, you need not fear any derailment. If God has chosen you in eternity past by foreknowing you in love, then he will see to it that you reach your ultimate destination. All those he foreknew in eternity past will be glorified in eternity future. If you are aboard the salvation train through faith in Christ, you have nothing to fear. God's Word gives us the assurance that God will save all those he has chosen to save, without fail. So my brothers and sisters here at Grace Fellowship, stand upon these verses with full confidence and steady assurance that what God has started in you he will most certainly bring to completion when he raises you up into everlasting glory.

Please join me now as we lift up our hearts in praise to our Savior in prayer. Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2018.