

Main Idea: According to Romans 8:28-30, resembling Christ is the certain outcome God has in mind for our lives. This is good news for us and it’s true in two ways.

- I. Resembling Christ is the certain outcome of our suffering (28a).
 - A. We know that suffering is inevitable in this age.
 - B. We know that God is in control of all things.
 1. He is sovereign over what comes into our lives.
 2. He is good in His intent for our lives.
 3. He is wise in the way He orchestrates the details of our lives.
 - C. We know that God is at work in our lives.
 1. Nothing can ultimately harm God's people.
 2. Nothing can hinder God's plan.
- II. Resembling Christ is the certain outcome of our salvation (28b-30).
 - A. God has a people (28).
 1. They are called by God.
 2. They love God.
 - B. God has a purpose (29).
 1. His aim is to exalt His Son.
 2. His aim is to form a people like His Son.
 - C. God has a plan (30).
 1. Our salvation involves a completed past work.
 2. Our salvation involves a completed present work.
 3. Our salvation involves a completed future work.

Make It Personal: What should we do with this wonderful passage?

1. Learn it.
2. Live in light of it, especially when the hard times come.
3. Love God for it.

Christ is the object of it all, as we’ve been reminding ourselves in our summer series. When it comes to life, Christ should be the object of it all. And when He is, it shows, and we’ve been looking at passages that show us how.

We open our hearts to Him and enjoy ongoing personal fellowship with Him, as we saw in Revelation 3. *We find our identity* in Him, as Paul demonstrates in Galatians 2:20. *We follow Him* with a devotion that’s so pervasive that by comparison, we hate our own families and even own lives for Him, as Jesus explained in Luke 14. We make it our primary aim to *know Him*, according to Philippians 3. *We abide in Him*, like a branch does the vine, that we might bear fruit for Him (John 15). *And we suffer with and for Him*, as Paul explains in Colossians 1:24-29, and do it joyfully because He is so worthy.

Yes, Christ is the object of it all, and if it’s true in our lives, this is how we show it.

But what about God? What is the object of it all for Him? “His glory,” you say. And you’re right. God’s objective is to put His glory on display. But how does He do it?

Let me ask the question a different way. What is God the Father’s objective regarding His Son? It’s to glorify Him, right? The object of it all for the Father is to make much of His beloved Son (and for the Spirit too). But how does He do it?

Here’s how. Imitation. It’s been said that imitation is one of the highest forms of flattery. When we are impressed by something or someone, we often imitate it.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the series on Romans 5-8 preached at WBC in 1995, as well as the message in the “Promises to Live By” series on 10/21/12.

Ladies, your friend invites you to her home and prepares a wonderful dessert. And what do you do? After the compliments, you may ask for her recipe. Why? You want to do what she did.

When I played basketball in high school, I remember watching a rival player from Botkins who put it to us my junior year. The guy was a scorer. In the off season, I remember trying to modify my shot to resemble his. Imitation is one of the highest forms of flattery.

Parents, you're challenged by your task of raising those little ones. What do you do? I know what we did. We looked for models, those who were further down the road than us, and watched them, and tried to do what they did. We want to resemble them.

This is today's message. "*Resembling Christ: The Object of It All for God.*" God is forming a people who will (when He's finished working with them) look like His Son. He reveals this breathtaking reality again and again in the pages of His Word.

This is 1 Corinthians 15:49, "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we *shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.*" Who is the man of heaven? God's Son.

Listen to Ephesians 1:4. "He chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be *holy and blameless* before him." Holy and blameless are not abstract qualities. They are attributes of God Himself. God is holy and blameless. And His Son is the prototype of a people God the Father has chosen to form. According to Ephesians 4:24, in Christ we are "created *after the likeness of God* in true righteousness and holiness."

This is God's objective, to save sinners and transform them. That's the word Paul uses in Philippians 3:21, "Who will transform our lowly body." To what end? "To be *like his glorious body*, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."

The apostle John puts it this way in 1 John 3:2, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears *we shall be like him*, because we shall see him as he is."

That's speaking of a future transformation, when we see Him. But God's not waiting on this project, as 2 Corinthians 3:18 explains, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed into the same image.* What image? The image and likeness of the Lord.

This is the object of it all for God Himself, to magnify Himself by forming a people who resemble His Son. Perhaps no text makes this clearer than today's text in Romans 8.

Back in 2012 we did an exposition of this passage in our series, "*Promises to Live By in the Crucible of Suffering.*" This text contains God's amazing promise of a good outcome. This morning we want to go deeper and explore just exactly what this good outcome is, what the object of it all is for God Himself as He works with us.

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:28-30

Several years ago I read a heart-gripping book last week called *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games.* It's the true story of Lopez Lomong and is a powerful illustration of today's passage.

Lopez was only six years old when soldiers invaded a church service and stole him from his parents, who, of course, tried to save him, but were powerless to prevent the men with the guns from taking him, throwing him into the back of a covered truck, and

speeding away. The kidnapers planned on turning him into a child-soldier, but he was too small, so they left him in a hut, essentially to die.

One night three weeks later, three older boys invited him to try and escape with them, promising him they would take him home. And so, while the guards were looking the other way, they fled their hut and ran for their lives. They ran all night long, hid during the day, ran all night long a second night, and then a third. Unfortunately, these Sudanese boys were running in the wrong direction, and were captured, this time by the Kenyan border guards, and placed in Kakuma, a refugee camp in Kenya.

Lopez spent the next ten years in that refugee camp. In his own words, “Kakuma was created as a temporary place where displaced people would be safe until the war in Sudan ended. Today, twenty years later, fifty thousand people not only from Sudan but also from Somalia, Ethiopia, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Uganda, and Rwanda call Kakuma home.”²

In Kakuma, Lopez lived in a tent called “camp section 58” with ten other boys. They ate one meal a day, some grain. “Tuesdays were the high point of our week, the one day we ate well,” says Lopez, “the day we ate garbage.”³

“On Sunday we went to church instead of school. It was my favorite day of the week. Everything was good on Sundays. I didn’t have to think about food or anything else. Instead, I lost myself singing praises to God. I knew He was there with me. I never, ever doubted that fact for a moment.”⁴

One day he was feeling sorry for himself, and a friend in the refugee camp told him, “You cannot sit and wish for something that is never going to happen, or you will lose your mind. No, you must focus on here and now. Do your chores. Go to school. Keep your mind busy. The past is gone. It will not come back. You must live in this day.”⁵

Pretty wise counsel, especially coming from a mere boy in a refugee camp. Lopez heeded that counsel and adopted a new perspective.

“What is the point of such complaining?” he writes. “After all the whining and complaining is over, you still live in a refugee camp. All the complaining in the world will not make your life any better. Instead, you must choose to make the best of whatever the situation in which you find yourself, even in a place like Kakuma.”⁶

The highlight of the day for Lopez and his friends was playing soccer. But since there were so many boys that wanted to play, the older boys made a rule. You have to run around the camp before you can play. That’s 18 miles. And so Lopez ran it, every day, 18 miles, just so he could *then* play soccer.

About this point in the book you might find yourself thinking, “What a terrible thing for a little boy to endure! Being taken from his family in Sudan, running for his life

² Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 35). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

³ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 38). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁴ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 42). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 44). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

⁶ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 39). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

to escape the soldiers only to end up in refugee camp in Kenya, being forced to run just so he could play soccer? What a meaningless string of cruel and haphazard circumstances!”

I say you *might* find yourself thinking that *if*...you didn't know Romans 8:28-30. Actually, there's nothing haphazard at all about the life of Lopez Lomong, nor about your life and mine. I'll tell you what happened to Lopez a little later, but first, I want us to consider carefully this amazing passage.

Dear friends, the Bible we hold teaches us that God is sovereign, that He is in absolute control of everything that happens in His universe. But He's not just in control of everything. He orchestrates everything to accomplish His good plan. According to Romans 8:28-30, *resembling Christ* is the certain outcome God has in mind for our lives. This is good news for us and it affects us in two ways.

I. Resembling Christ is the certain outcome of our suffering (28a).

Verse 28 begins, “And we know.” Stop there. Who is *we*? Paul is writing, and he is speaking in behalf of people he calls “saints” in verse 27, a term that identifies people whom God has set apart and are in a saving relationship with His Son.

The phrase “we know” appears five times in Romans. In verse 26 Paul confessed that sometimes Christians *don't know* what to pray, and that we should pray anyway because the Spirit will help us, and the Father *knows* the mind of the Spirit (27). Now we're told, “We know.”

What do we know? According to verse 28, we can be sure of three realities.

A. We know that suffering is inevitable in this age. The first century Jews viewed history as comprised of two ages: this age, and the coming age. This age is characterized by suffering, while the age to come (which will be inaugurated by the entrance of the Messiah) will be known for glory.

We see this truth developed earlier in Romans 8. For instance, in verse 17 (ESV) Paul contrasts suffering and glory and says, “...we suffer with Him in order that we also may be glorified with Him.” We see the same dual-age-contrast in verse 18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

So we are living in an age of suffering. Our Bibles tell us that, but so do our bodies. We groan and wait like a mother in labor, says Paul in verse 22. We know that suffering is inevitable in this age. We also know this.

B. We know that God is in control of all things. Including our suffering. The One who created us is not a wimpy God. He possesses three attributes that possess incredible staying power when we face the inevitable seasons of suffering. These are His sovereignty, His goodness, and His wisdom.

1. *He is sovereign over what comes into our lives.* No mistakes. No accidents. No out of control situations.

2. *He is good in His intent for our lives.* God is good. Whatever He does is good. His intent for our lives is good. More about His good intent in a moment.

3. *He is wise in the way He orchestrates the details of our lives.* He is like a craftsman weaving a beautiful tapestry. He doesn't just use the bright, beautiful colors, but weaves in the blacks and dark blues and deep grays. He knows the finished

product He's heading for, and in His wisdom He twists into our lives what's needed to bring about the glorious end result.

By the way, when you're in the middle of a dark season of life, you'll find occasion to question those three divine attributes. Is God really sovereign? Is He really good? Is He really wise? But it's then we must by faith affirm what we do not feel and cannot see. Lord God, You are sovereign, You are good, and You are wise.

There's a third reality we know, and it's this one Paul highlights in our text.

C. We know that God is at work in our lives. Our text says (NIV), "And we know that in all things God *works*." God is not just in control. He is at work. And He is not just at work in the big scheme of things in His universe. He is at work *in our lives*.

No verse in the Bible makes this more clear than Romans 8:28. The late Dr. Reuben A. Torrey called this verse "a soft pillow for a tired heart."⁷ A lot of us have put our heads on the pillow of Romans 8:28, haven't we? I remember hearing our dear sister in Christ, Nancy Rae Litteral, a quadripolegic who spent over 50 years in a wheel chair because a drunk driver hit her at the age of 18, refer to Romans 8:28 as the theme verse of her life.

In the ESV, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."⁸ Before delving into what this verse is saying, allow me to point out what it is NOT saying.

Romans 8:28 does not say that all things are good. Evil is not good. When a drunk driver maims a child for life, that is not good. When a stepfather molests a helpless little one, that is not good. Dying of terminal cancer is not good. These are horrible consequences of living in a sin-cursed world.

But know this. Even though these events are not good, Romans 8:28 says that they can work together for good. What does that mean? It means we can make two affirmations.

1. *Nothing can ultimately harm God's people.* Again, Paul says, "WE know." This verse is not speaking to non-Christians, though God is certainly sovereign over the affairs of their lives too. But we who know Christ know something. We know that nothing ultimately can harm us. We know who we are and where we are going. We are God's people. Even death cannot really harm us, for death is merely the door to our eternal glory. That's why when Paul himself was facing possible execution, he could testify, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is GAIN (Phil 1:21)." Since God is in control, nothing can ultimately harm God's people.

This promise also means we can make a second affirmation.

2. *Nothing can hinder God's plan.* Think of it as God's objective. We're going to see Paul explain this objective/plan in verse 29, but again the essence is this. God's objective is to exalt His Son by forming a people that resemble His Son.

That's the plan, the object of it all for God. He wants us to resemble (to look like) Christ. And here's what is staggering about it. He is great enough to use even tragedy to accomplish His plan. He did so for His own Son, and He does so for us.

All things work together for good for the people of God. Joseph discovered that. He lost the prime of his life when his jealous brothers sold him into slavery, and even lost

⁷ McGee, p. 156.

⁸ In the NIV, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

his reputation when he was unjustly framed, and had to serve time in prison. But remember what Joseph later said about his ordeal? Speaking to his guilty brothers, he said in Genesis 50:19-20, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me (the KJV says, “You thought evil against me.” That’s key. Joseph called what they did *evil*), but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

For we know that all things work together for good. Beloved, though we live in an age of suffering, we know that God is in sovereign control of our suffering and intends to use it all to accomplish His good plan.

Let that sink in. Do we have scars in our lives from past hurts? If we do (and many of us do), we have a choice to make. We can be bitter and angry towards the world, towards people, and even towards God. Or we can embrace God’s Romans 8:28 objective, and say, “O Father, I humbly confess that You are in control. You can use my pain to advance Your good plan. By your grace, I choose to trust You today.”

Job lost ten children, just about all of his possessions, and yet while sitting in a pile of ashes with boils all over his body he could say, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him (Job 13:15).” Job chose to *trust* God.

All of us can look back at things in our lives which at the time we thought were disasters, but turned out for our good. And some of us may even have tragedies on our resume that we’ll never fully understand this side of glory.

Yet this we know. The assurance, the guarantee, the promise of Romans 8:28 remains true. There are no accidents, no surprises with God. We can be certain of a good outcome from our suffering, the outcome of a greater, more God-exalting resemblance to Christ.

But that’s not all. Resembling Christ is the certain outcome of our suffering (point one) because resembling Christ is the certain outcome of God’s salvation (point two).

II. Resembling Christ is the certain outcome of our salvation (28b-30).

Unfortunately, though we receive great comfort in knowing that God is sovereign over our suffering, some people are anxious at the notion that God is sovereign in our salvation. So before we look at what these verses actually say about God’s sovereignty in salvation, let’s consider three potential responses.

The first is *pride*. I can still remember seeing how some of my classmates in college responded when they first learned that God is sovereign in salvation. They became smug and haughty, and looked down on others who didn’t know the truth they’d learned. The problem wasn’t with the truth they learned, but with their proud hearts.

A second potential response is *denial*. Some see what the Bible says and think, “I don’t care what the Bible says. I don’t think it’s fair. It doesn’t make sense to me so I refuse to believe in election and predestination.” That’s unfortunate. I believe with the assessment of a radio Bible teacher who’s now in heaven, J. Vernon McGee, who said, “This is not a frightful doctrine; it is a wonderful doctrine.”⁹

That brings us to a third potential response, which is *humble and grateful adoration*. Is God good? I don’t have to figure Him out to know He is. Is His Word good? Certainly, even if my finite mind can’t process it entirely. We must never be

⁹ McGee, p. 161.

afraid of what His Word says. Rather, we must always humbly and gratefully embrace what we read in His Book.

In this passage, we are told that God has a people, a purpose, and a plan.

A. God has a people (28). Notice how Paul describes Christians in verse 28 (NIV), “To them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” We’re given two characteristics of God’s people. One emphasizes God’s sovereignty, the other human responsibility in salvation.

1. *They are called by God.* “Who have been called according to his purpose [KJV ‘who are the called according to his purpose].” The Bible teaches that God extends a general call to all people to be saved, in passages like Matthew 11:28. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” But God also extends a special call, sometimes referred to as an effectual call. And this is what Paul has in mind in Romans 8.

What is a Christian? A Christian is a person who, when dead in sin, was “called” by God. Paul specifies who receives this calling in verse 30, saying, “And those he predestined, he also called.”

Back in Romans 1:6, 7, the apostle used this term to identify the readers of this letter. He began by saying, “And you also are among those who are *called* to belong to Jesus Christ. To all in Rome who are loved by God and *called* to be saints.” They were dead, without God and without hope in this world. But God called them, and said, “You are mine now!”

In 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, we learn that there are three categories of people in the world. Paul says, “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews [category #1], and foolishness to Gentiles [category #2], but to those whom God has *called* [category #3], both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Once again, this *called* refers to God’s special and effectual call.

Just a few verses later in Romans 8:33, Paul calls these undeserving people whom God has called “God’s elect” (NIV “those whom God has chosen”).

Ephesians 1:4 says God “chose us in him before the foundation of the world.” Ephesians 1:5 says He “predestined us for adoption to Himself.”

In John 1:13 we’re told that those whom God has chosen and called are “born from above” into His family. Jesus says we must be “born again” to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3), and “born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). Paul says we were “regenerated” (Titus 3:5).

Called. Chosen. Predestined. Born again. Regenerated. These are all activities accomplished by God alone, on the basis of His sovereign grace alone, apart from any influence outside of Himself.

Yet Paul pinpoints a second characteristic of God’s people in verse 28.

2. *They love God.* “All things work for the good of *those who love him.*” Here we see man’s responsibility. Those whom God calls respond with love and devotion to His gracious call. The essence of the Christian life is loving God, and a true Christian is a person who does just that. He or she *loves God*.

You ask, “So how then is a person saved?” The Bible answers this question from two perspectives, and in this verse we see both. The Bible emphasizes both the sovereign choice of God and the subsequent response of individuals. Christians are people who have both been called by God and in turn love God.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, that great preacher from the past century, was once asked if he could reconcile these two truths to each other. I love his now classic reply. “I wouldn’t try. I never reconcile friends.”¹⁰

Friends? Yes, friends. J. I. Packer, in his helpful book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, explains, “In the Bible, divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not enemies. They are not uneasy neighbours; they are not in an endless state of cold war with each other. They are *friends*, and they work together.”¹¹

So God has a people. But there’s more.

B. God has a purpose (29). Specifically, He has a purpose in mind for the chosen people He calls to Himself. In verse 29 we learn that it’s a twofold purpose.

1. *His aim is to exalt His Son.* Verse 29 begins, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of [NIV “the likeness of”] his Son.” Paul elaborates in Ephesians 1:12, saying, “So that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.” This is God’s purpose, to exalt His Son.

But how has He chosen to exalt His Son?

2. *His aim is to form a people like His Son.* Don’t miss the purpose clause at the end of verse 29, “...in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” There’s God’s objective. It’s why He chose you and me, brothers and sisters. He wants us individually and collectively to look like Jesus. And here’s where the “all things” of Romans 8:28 comes in.

Did Jesus suffer? Indeed He did. Did He experience injustice and pain and hardship? Without a doubt. So if we’re going to resemble Him, it follows that we will experience some of the things He experienced.

Granted, we’ll never face the fullness of what He encountered. He didn’t just suffer. He endured infinite suffering as He took our place on the cross and endured the penalty we deserve to pay for our sins.

We are saved, not by our suffering, but by believing in what He accomplished through His suffering. That’s clear. But so is this. Once saved, once we’ve become a child of God, we can be sure of God’s intent to use all things to transform us into the likeness of His Son, including suffering.

And this brings us to a third concluding statement developed in verse 30.

C. God has a plan (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.”

All the verbs in verse 30 are aorist tense in the Greek, meaning they depict activities that have been accomplished in the past. Brothers and sisters, from God’s perspective our salvation is past tense, and this is true in three ways.

1. *Our salvation involves a completed past work.* Verse 30 again, “And those he predestined, he also called.” In His all-knowing mind, before He ever created the universe, God foreknew and predestined a people that His Son would save and who would then become like His Son. And those He predestined, He called. Nothing can stand in the way of the fulfillment of God’s salvation plan.

Please notice from verse 28 that we are called according to God’s *purpose*, not according to His foreknowledge. Some say that the Bible teaches that God chose His

¹⁰ Taken from J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, 35.

¹¹ Packer, pp. 35-36.

people because He foreknew what they would do. But that's not what this passage says, nor others. Romans 8 doesn't talk about *what* God foreknew, but *whom* He foreknew.

We see the same in 2 Timothy 1:9, where the apostle contemplates this sovereign work of God in salvation, and concludes, "Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but *according to His own purpose and grace*, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

Years ago there was a boy down south that wanted to join a church. The deacons examined him and asked, "How did you get saved?" His answer was, "God did His part, and I did my part." They thought something was wrong with his doctrine so they questioned him further. "What was God's part and what was your part?" His explanation was a good one. "God's part was the saving, and my part was the sinning. I done run from Him as fast as my sinful heart and rebellious legs could take me. He done took out after me till he run me down."¹²

But it's not just a completed past work. There's more.

2. *Our salvation involves a completed present work.* Paul continues in verse 30, "Those He called, He also justified." God *declared righteous* those whom He called. That's justification, which is the theme of Romans 1-5. God justifies a sinner the moment he or she places his or her faith in Christ and His finished work on the cross.

My fellow Christian, you will never be more justified than you were the day God's Spirit regenerated your dead heart. On that day, God declared you to be forever right with Him, not because of the life you lived or even were going to live, but solely on the basis of His Son's life.

Yet there's more. A completed past work. A completed present work. And...

3. *Our salvation involves a completed future work.* We see this at the end of verse 30, "Those he justified, he also glorified." This is beyond understanding for us, yet true. From our perspective, glorification is yet future. It hasn't happened yet. But in the all-knowing mind of God, it has already happened. If we are in Christ, we are as good as glorified. If we have been justified, we are also glorified, for God sees the outcome of the plan He designed.

You say, "Wait a minute. Why isn't sanctification mentioned in this verse?" I don't know. E. F. Harrison offers a solid reason, saying, "It is probably left out deliberately because sanctification is the one area in which human cooperation is essential."¹³

Think carefully. God predestinated. God called. God justified. God glorified. We didn't contribute to any of these activities, for they were God's alone. But when it comes to our sanctification, we're commanded to be engaged, to live out the implications of our position in Christ, to "put off the old man" and "put on the new man" (Ephesians 4:22-24), to "work out our salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12) knowing that it is "God who works in you" (Philippians 2:13).

Let this sink in beloved. God has a people, a purpose for those people, and a plan to bring it all about. This means that if we are in Christ, we can be sure of a good outcome. God doesn't do things half way. What He starts, He finishes. Resembling Christ is the certain outcome of our suffering and salvation.

¹² Story told by McGee, 159.

¹³ Harrison, p. 98.

That, my friend, is a promise to live by, a guarantee to embrace, and particularly when life is hard. And that was precisely the case with Lopez Lemong.

Earlier in this message I left you hanging when I told you that Lopez Lomong was running 18 miles a day around his refugee camp just to earn the right to play soccer. Was that a meaningless cruelty for this young man? Actually, as it turned out, our sovereign, good, and wise God used it to save his life.

One night in the year 2000, Lopez ventured outside the camp to local farmer's house where he saw a black and white television connected to a car battery. The owner told him that for the price of five shillings, he could watch the Olympics. He had no idea what the Olympics were, he said, but he knew it involved running. So he paid the money, the only coin he had, and there on the screen he saw a man named Michael Johnson with the letters USA on his shirt, with thousands of people cheering him on. What first impressed Lopez was that this man had the same skin color. What next impressed him was his speed as he won the 400 meter dash. But what most impressed him was what he did when took the stand to receive his medal.

"Michael Johnson did something African men never do," said Lopez. "He wept openly and without shame. I shook my head in disbelief and leaned closer to the screen. Why was he crying? I wondered. How can a man like this, a man who just won an Olympic gold medal, show such emotion? In my culture, such a display was a sign of weakness. Yet Michael Johnson had just proven his strength and confidence to the world. Why, then, did he cry?"¹⁴

"For a man to react to winning a race in such a manner told me that this had been more than a race. Those letters on his chest and the flag he carried around the track, they had to be the key. Clearly, he was not just running for himself. The gold medal by itself was not enough to bring a real man to tears. No, this man, this man with skin like mine, ran for something bigger than himself. That had to be why he wept."¹⁵

As Lopez walked back to his Kenyan refugee camp that night, he couldn't shake what he had just seen. He says, "Suddenly, an idea hatched in my brain, an idea that should have struck me as ridiculous, but it did not. To me, this idea made perfect sense. In my mind's eye I watched Michael Johnson run his race over and over again and I knew that someday, I, too, would run in the Olympics. I did not know how, but I knew I would. I now had a dream that changed the course of my life: I would be an Olympian. Moreover, I wanted to run with those same three letters across my chest: USA. I wanted to be like Michael Johnson."¹⁶

And then Lopez made this incredible statement, "God Himself had brought me to Kakuma. I always thought He must have had a reason for bringing me here. Now I had it. Now I knew where my destiny lay. Michael Johnson opened a wider world to me. By God's grace, I would get there."¹⁷

¹⁴ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (pp. 55-56). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

¹⁵ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 56). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

¹⁶ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (pp. 56-58). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

¹⁷ Lomong, Lopez (2012-07-17). *Running for My Life: One Lost Boy's Journey from the Killing Fields of Sudan to the Olympic Games* (p. 58). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

You'll have to read the book to find out how it happened, but I will tell you this. Just eight years later in 2008, not only did Lopez run, but he was selected by the rest of the American Olympic team to carry our flag into the Olympic stadium in Beijing.

Make It Personal: What should we do with this wonderful passage?

I urge you to do three things.

1. *Learn it.* Start by putting it on a 3x5 card and reading it every day, and don't stop until it's found a home in your heart. Learn this promise. Hide it in your heart. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

2. *Live in light of it, especially when the hard times come.* When you're in the midst of a challenging time, affirm what God says, regardless how you feel. Affirm His objective in your suffering and in your salvation. It might sound like this.

"Dear Father, right now I affirm that You are working together all things, even painful things, for my ultimate good. You want me to resemble Your beloved Son and my Savior. Indeed, it's Your promise that I and all whom You have chosen will resemble Him forever and ever. Thank You for this wonderful, undeserved privilege."

3. *Love God for it.* Express to Him your thanks and devotion and worship for how He is working out His good plan in your life. We are not worthy, dear friends, but because of His amazing grace, we are forever His, if we have put our trust in His Son. And He is intent on transforming us so we are prepared for the fullest enjoyment of His eternal presence.

We've been talking today about God's objective for those He has saved. Have you experienced His sovereign, gracious, regenerating work? And have you responded by repenting of your sin and putting your total trust in the redemption His Son has provided for you on the cross? If not, why not today?

There are a million reasons why we should love God, and here's yet another. He has made it possible for sinners like us to share the likeness of His Son. Resembling Christ is God's objective for us. Let's live in light of it until we see Him.

*O to be like Thee! blessed Redeemer;
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.*

*O to be like Thee! O to be like Thee!
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.*

Closing Song: #387 "O to Be Like Thee!" (all three verses)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Next three weeks: "Walking in the Steps of Christ" 1 Peter 2:21-25 (Michael)

"Remembering Christ" 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (Matt)

"Loving Christ" John 21:15-19 (Rex)