

## **Foreknown – fore destined - called - justified – glorified**

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Sermon preached on reading: Romans 8: 26-end.

The Natwest Bank in Aylesford is now a sort of beauty shop, called Beauty Bank. Changed from one sort of bank to another! Women go there - quite a lot of them - and they sit by the window and get made beautiful. I'm surprised how many women seem to want their fingernails and toenails painted. I'll come back to that later. Or if you want, you can try to work out what on earth that's got to do with the rest of my sermon!

I'm going to speak about the reading from "Romans". Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome is a dense book, and I'm only going to look at two verses: Romans 8:29,30.

Let's begin with verse 29: "Those whom God had already chosen he also set apart to become like his Son" (Good News version). Actually, instead of "chosen" the original says God "foreknew" us. He knew us beforehand. In "Jeremiah" God says, "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5). And that doesn't mean God was just aware of you, knew you were coming. He was delighting in you, from before you were born. Those of you who are parents will know the thrill of the 9 months of pregnancy. Well, God was thrilled about us from before we were conceived! In fact, in "Ephesians" Paul writes, "God chose us in him before the creation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4); and Paul is not given to flights of fancy!

Back in the passage from "Romans" Paul says next, "Those whom he foreknew, he also fore-ordained to become like him." "Fore-ordained", not quite "set apart", as the Good News says. (Paul is keen to emphasize this "beforehand" point: foreknew, fore-ordained.) God's not just been delighting in us from before we were born; He's been making plans for us from long, long ago; He has a destiny for us. We're often so last minute, aren't we! God's been delightedly making plans for us from before our birth. And, it says, his plan was to make us like his Son, to resemble Jesus. Us like Jesus! That's some plan! So that, yes, as it says, we will be like brothers to Jesus because we'll bear a family resemblance!

And God's plan carries on: "Those whom he set apart/fore-ordained, he also called." From knowing us and planning for us in eternity, now in real time God calls us; calls us to follow Him. We've been born, we've begun to grow up, and that's when He calls us and asks us to answer yes. We are Christians if we've answered that call, just said, "Yes, God," with all that that entails.

And God's plan goes on: "Those he called he put right with himself." Jesus came to take away the barrier between us and God, He came to put us right with God through taking away our sinfulness. That's how we begin to be fashioned by God into Jesus' likeness, how we can begin to look like brothers and sisters of his, through being put right with God. And then God can get to work on us, not making us clones, but

fashioning/crafting us, with all our funny ways, bringing to fruition all those plans He's had for us since before we were born.

And finally Paul writes, "Those whom he put right with himself, he also glorified." God is in the glory business and He wants to share his glory with us. He is making us glorious! "Glory" is a strong word, isn't it. Well, God is glorifying you, little you. In his eyes you are showing glimpses of glory, and He wants to carry on with his work in you. Paul uses the past tense because it's all part of God's plan from long ago for you. Also, because it's definite, as if it's already happened. Sometimes we need other people to notice the changes in us because we don't see them or appreciate them. Other people will notice them, though.

So there it is: all the links in God's plan for you: He foreknew you, He delighted in you. He made wonderful plans for you. He called you, and you answered. You took advantage of Jesus' offer and you were put right with God. And now He's busy fashioning you as you co-operate with Him, making you into a brother/sister of Jesus, glorifying you. It's the five steps of the glory road. If we're on this road, it's no wonder that Paul can say, "We know that in all things God works for good with those whom he has called according to his purpose" (verse 28).

So what's this got to do with the beauty shop down the hill? I suspect from when I've been to the barber that half the pleasure comes from the result - looking good - and half comes from the process: someone working away, fussing over you, to make you look good. You feel special; they talk to you while they're working; they keep consulting you; they're interested in you, and they give you all their attention - or they should do. Well, if we gain so much pleasure from, say, 20 minutes of someone's attention to make us look good, how much more - lasting - pleasure and wonder can we gain from a God who has known us and been making plans for us from before we were born, and who is carrying through those plans for us as we co-operate with Him. Not to make us look good for a few weeks, but to make us resemble Jesus. What a privilege!

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