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GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

This Train is Bound for Glory

By Ron Allen

Only a particular kind of universe is capable of producing complex systems to bring about and sustain human life. This observation has acquired a name: The Anthropic Principle. Many reasonable people believe that the universe has managed, in fifteen billion years, to produce at least one ball of energy and turn it into a place inhabited by scientists, poets, architects, musicians and prophets. And this happened by a series of irrational Anthropic coincidences that do not require an explanation!

It is just as reasonable—perhaps even more so—for other men and women to hold that the series of so-called Anthropic coincidences are evidence of some very fine tuning; expressions of supernatural intelligence and purpose.

In Romans 8:28-30, the Apostle Paul’s thinking roams the infinite reaches of divine purpose. In preceding verses, he acknowledges that human experience is blighted. There is good, but it is contested by evil. There is enjoyment, but there is wretchedness too.

Popular atheist Richard Dawkins gives us his take on this reality:

If the universe were just electrons and selfish genes, meaningless tragedies like the crashing of a bus are exactly what we should expect, along with meaningless good fortune. Such a universe would be neither evil nor good in intention. It would manifest no intentions of any kind. In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, or any justice.

-River out of Eden p. 12.

Dawkins bleak outlook is consistent with his presuppositions. If you are convinced no intention of any kind is active in the cosmic process, you must simply submit to pointlessness. But Paul, aware that the universe is open to the impression that it has no meaning, states that the vexed nature of existence is of relatively small consequence when viewed beside the ‘glory that will be revealed’ (verse 18). And, in verse 28 he returns to this theme with this: “*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.*”

In all things God works. The universe is not indifferent to good and evil. Reality is not a moral vacuum. There is intention. There is decision and motive in play. History has a goal. There is an end in view. God is working. He is working for the good of those who love him. This cannot mean that

God does not work for the good of those who do not love him. Paul is simply addressing believers, and aims to build up their faith.

He describes those who love God as *called according to God’s purpose*. They have said yes to God’s prior interest in them. In order to enlarge on this truth, Paul launches a searching portrayal of the scale and compass of God’s working.

First, he imagines the working of God’s intellect. He designates those called according to God’s purpose as *those he foreknew* (verse 29). Those he knew before they were called and before they loved God.

In its common present-day usage, the verb ‘to know’ means to ‘know about.’ If someone says: “Barak Obama is the first black American President.” And I say, “I know.” I don’t mean that I know Obama. I mean that I know of him.

In the Bible, to know is much more than intellectual apprehension. To know someone is to be involved with that person in a thorough, unqualified way. Passages which speak of God’s knowledge of persons or groups of persons bear the thought of his knowing them interestedly, intently, and caringly. For example, Exodus 2:25 tells how God saw the distress of Israel in Egypt. Older translations say that *he looked and he knew them*. Newer translations say that *he looked and was concerned about them*.

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EDITORIAL . . .

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus” (Acts 13:32).

Acts thirteen contains the lengthiest example of Paul’s speeches. In it is a review of Israel’s history down to the then present. It is a religious history because of God’s intervention in the life of Abraham and his descendants. Paul sketches it with broad brush strokes. He passes quickly over 450 years from Jacob to the Exodus. What follows then is coverage of the period of the Judges and Kings to David. From David, he moves directly to David’s descendant, Jesus of Nazareth.

It is a story of God’s doings. **God** chose our fathers; **God** made Israel prosper in Egypt; **God** led them out of that country (verse 17). **God** overthrew the Canaanite nations; **God** promised the land to Israel (verse 19). **God** gave Israel judges (verse 20). **God** let them have Saul for their king (verse 21). **God** removed Saul and gave them David instead (verse 22).

Paul sees that God cares for humans; he has plans for them. He intends that their society be a particular kind of society. He intervenes in order to establish his rule in it.

God does not have it all his own way. Those to whom he repeatedly reveals himself act in ways that frustrate his design. Paul takes note of this. *God endured their conduct forty years in the desert.* Israel was repeatedly insubordinate with regard to God’s law. God gave them a king, but the fact they even wanted a king—like the other nations—to rule over them amounted to a rejection of God’s rule (1 Samuel 1:8). So God acted again to choose his own man, David. *“He will do everything I want him to do (verse 22).*

But David did not do everything God wanted him to do. As


a result, his once great kingdom was in tatters a generation after his death. So, God acted again. Through his prophets, he promised to restore Israel to its former glory. *“And my servant David will be king over them” (Amos 9:11).*

The Old Testament storyline is that of a people blessed with the advantages of divine enlightenment, patronage and guidance. Yet, for all that, it is a tale of serial fiasco, foolishness and moral weakness, overspread by the recurring gracious intervention of God to salvage the situation and preserve hope.

All this is the backdrop to Paul’s announcement: *“What God has promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us their children by raising up Jesus” (Acts 13:32).* *“Therefore my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you” (verse 38).*

Yes, God has acted again. Repeated divine actions of the past were merciful, but there is something final about what God has done in Jesus. Not this time does God’s action expectantly depend on an obedient and cooperative response on the part of his people. Rather, this is an intervention carried out in and through one man—Jesus. No more warnings, caveats and counsels. No more reiteration of the rules or re-stating of what has already proved insufficient. Just salvation.

No wonder Paul says that Christ—his resurrection from death in particular—is good news. We human beings have fallen short of every noble ideal that was ever put before us. Unless God has something more than these for us, we are undone. But he does, he has—forgiveness, grace more ample than our deficit, more abundant than our fault.

“And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins (Romans 11:27).” 



Pastor Ron Allen

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“What is man that you take knowledge of him,” says Psalm 8:4 KJV. Newer translations capture the sense more accurately: *“What is man that you care for him, that you think so much of him.”* To be foreknown by God is to have had a prior existence in God’s thinking, in God’s regard, his care and his affections. As in Jeremiah 1:5, *“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you.”*

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the

firstborn among many brothers” (Romans 8:29). Predestined. The word belongs to a vocabulary emphasizing God’s will, his plan, his sovereign decision from whence everything flows (compare Ephesians 1:4, 5; Ephesians 3:11; 2 Timothy 1:9). Predestination is God’s gracious intention; an intention with direction and momentum. God intended his people to be in every way like his Son. So, Christ would be the archetypal chieftain of a band of brothers. God is working to bring about a brotherhood of man.

Right now there are individuals and interest groups with →

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Towards the Glory to be Revealed

By David Woodyard

The church, as a futuristic community, follows the lead of the One who is the power of the future. It is not a body of mystics who strive to enjoy God apart from the world; neither is it an enclave for antiquarians who want to relive the past in all of its sacred splendor. It is a people who strive to participate in all that God is doing in the world to make and keep human life human.

To the degree that the church exercises loyalty to hope, it is a suffering people. Bonhoeffer's point about being a Christian can be extended to the community of faith: to be the church is to participate in the suffering of God in the life of the world. To know God is to know him in the pain of his being as he struggles against, and is crucified by, the powers of the world. The church lives its knowledge of God in the world.

What distinguishes the church from other institutions and equips it for the risks in identification, is that it need not be concerned for its own future. It is free from the need for self-preservation. When true to its coming Lord, the church's commitment to the horizon of the future preempts concern with its own future on the horizon. It has a healthy sense of its own provisionality: *"For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come"* (Hebrews 13:14).



To the degree that it lives from and for the future, self-perpetuation is not a concern. It lives for what is coming and can therefore risk everything in the present as it seeks to implement what the future rule of Christ means at the moment. Because of the seriousness with which the church takes the coming kingdom, it can never take itself seriously. When it understands itself as a 'section of humanity, in which Christ

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their sages, propagandists and commanders who achieve a desirable future by setting themselves against anyone who disagrees with their ideology. They condemn, they vilify, and they glorify violence. They discriminate and segregate. Do they create brotherhood? If a person thinks only in terms of chance and necessity, survival of the fittest; if a person believes in a God who has little patience, demanding that the divine plan be fulfilled in his lifetime, then these ways and means may seem reasonable. But, when a person believes in an eternal benevolent intention, then there is lofty end in view—a family of sons and daughters who reflect the values of Jesus.

Having considered the working of God before the world began, now Paul moves into the present day. He passes from love that flourished within the eternal deity, to the translation of that exuberant and large-hearted intention in human experience. This is how he describes it:

"And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified he also glorified" (Romans 8:30).

God's call refers to the point at which the eternal purpose of God engages a person, creating faith in which he/she begins to cooperate with God's working. For example, God spoke to Abraham, telling him to leave his country and his people and go to another place, he knew not where. When Abraham obeyed and went, that was God's call.

Whom God calls, God justifies. That is, God makes them right with himself. How God makes people right with himself is the theme of the book of Romans. It is central act in the salvation drama. It is the high point of God's working. It forms the principle content of the gospel. It is justification by faith. Paul refers to it many times in his letter. It is the 'righteousness' from God in 1:17; the 'righteousness' from God apart from law in 3:21 (see also 3:28; 4:3; 4:5; 5:9, 10).

According to Romans 5:1, righteousness (justification) by faith brings peace with God and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God. The same connection between justification and glory


is repeated in 8:30. *Those he justified he also glorified.* The glorification of God's justified ones completes the process of conformity to God's Son envisaged by God's foreknowing. The beloved Son is joined by the rest of his brothers.

"In bringing many sons to glory.... God made the pioneer of their salvation complete through suffering.... Both the One who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers" (Hebrews 2:10, 11).

Such is the climactic and good fruition of God's working in all things. Paul began (verse 18) this section of Romans 8 with a frank acknowledgement that many things in the world are difficult and painful. Yet, they are not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed. And in Paul's view, the glory to be revealed has already begun in the gift of righteousness by faith in Christ.

The structure of Paul's language in verse 29 and 30 is telling. The word ALSO is used repeatedly. Whom God foreknew he *also* predestined; whom he predestined he *also* called; whom he called he *also* justified; whom he justified he *also* glorified. Each element in the sequence is the inception of the next. Each inaugurates its successor, so that the last step, which awaits final fulfillment, is spoken of as if it has already happened. All are God's working. They are links in an unbroken chain of divine purpose.

If I believe that the universe is random and indifferent as to my hopes, loves, hurts and dreams, then I will probably want to live defensively, watchfully bracing myself against what Bertrand Russell called *'the slow sure doom which falls pitiless and dark.'* Or I might live rebelliously, defiantly 'raging against the dying of the light.'

But if, like Paul, I trust to a generous, gracious reality that is working in all things—even things that are harsh or unfair—I will be able to live free of anxiety about the past, the present or the future. I will live gratefully and compassionately, looking forward to the glory which will be revealed in us. 

Feed the Need

*“For I was hungry and you gave me meat.”
Matthew 25:35*

Saint Matthew’s report of Jesus is stimulating. The Greek word used for hungry is “pi-nah-oh” which translated means *famished* or *hungry*. This hunger is felt in the pit of the stomach.

The homeless man pictured in this article is Victor. As we walked up to his campsite, we announced ourselves “MANNA. We have food.” In a similar fashion to the above mentioned scripture, Victor said, “I am famished.” He lit up and was grateful to MANNA for the simple lunch we were able to provide: Peanut butter and jelly sandwich with bananas, apples, chips, and water.

Victor shared that he had recently been stricken with the flu, and was unable to go get food for himself. Earlier that day his tent had collapsed under the heavy downpour of rain. He had reinforced his structure with a makeshift tarp and stick placement.

Imagine not having a home to live in, a door to close or a heater to turn on in the cold winter months. You’re not alone. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, on any given night there are over half a million people either spending the night in homeless shelters or in some sort of short-term transitional housing. Slightly more than one-third of them live in cars, under bridges or in some other unsheltered situation. The numbers are staggering, and sometimes the fact that so many go hungry is overwhelming and difficult to wrap our minds around; but MANNA Outreach continues to *feed the need*.

There’s a story I heard about a little girl on a beach. There were thousands of starfish washed upon the shore. A man saw the little girl throwing a starfish into the ocean. Intrigued by her action, he watched as she threw one starfish after another back into the water. He approached her and asked, “What are you doing?” She threw another starfish out into the ocean and replied, “Helping the starfish get back home.” The man said, “There’s way too many starfish out here. How can you help them all?” She looked at him with a little smile and threw another one and said, “I helped that one.”

Over the last 10 years, Good News Unlimited has partnered with M.A.N.N.A. Outreach and has served over 24,000 lunches to the homeless, one at a time. In doing so, we’ve been

By Pastor Daniel Robinson

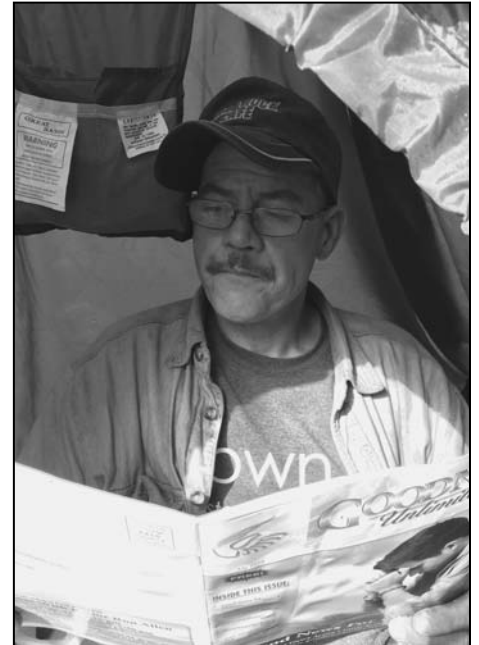
able to build relationships with people and share with them the message of Jesus which gives them hope. After the immediate need is met to fill their hungry bellies, they are willing to hear the good news. We’ve also built relationships with organizations that are willing to take these individuals into their facilities which offer them shelter and life-skills to build a better life. We, in turn, pray that God’s glory will be revealed in these new relationships.

The winter months can be a particularly difficult time for those without shelter. We ask for your continued prayers for the work of this ministry. We covet your prayers that God’s divine appointments will lead others to the gospel in a mighty way that will move unbelievers to accept Jesus into their hearts. If you feel led to send a donation to our homeless outreach, please make checks payable to Good News Unlimited (note on check “for MANNA Outreach”) and mail to:

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P.O. Box 6687
Auburn, CA 95604

We’d like to take this opportunity now to thank you for your ongoing support of Good News Unlimited and M.A.N.N.A. Outreach which has helped to *feed the need* of the homeless—both spiritually and physically— one person at a time. In doing so, you partner with us to speak about the hope of Jesus in both word and deed.

May God bless and keep you always.
Pastor Daniel Robinson



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has really taken form,’ it no longer has to calculate how it is doing as an institution. It lives to die.

The problem of the world in which the church lives is that it has lost its horizon. Its efforts are always directed toward building *to* a future rather than living *from* the future. It is obsessed with its own self-creation, preservation, and realization. This world functions without a sense of the possibilities the future can bring because it anxiously struggles to save itself through skills and organization; it is not free for the future because of its concentration on managing the present.

The church which expects Christ to come must live as if he were coming again. In every moment, it will seek to implement the faith that God is ahead of them, calling a people to leave behind the securities of family and place, and to strike out, not knowing where they are to go. It will gravitate to the centers of pain and work against them in the name of a better hope. It will be strangely free to love, because the future draws one into the lives of others in a way the past forbids. It will be prepared to risk everything because there is nothing in itself that it is obligated to preserve.

-David Woodyard: BEYOND CYNICISM. pp. 85-88.