Romans 8:28-30 28We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, for those who are called according to his purpose, 29because those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers. 30And those he predestined, he also called. Those he called, he also justified. And those he justified, he also glorified.

At the beginning of the explanation to the Third Article you hear these words: “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.” That very “Lutheran” and very Scriptural teaching is so important to grasp.

What that says is exactly the truth. By nature, because of our nature as sinners, sinners because Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, by nature we have a problem. Our problem is that we are spiritually dead. We no longer have the “image of God” that perfection and holiness that Adam and Eve had from God at their creation. God had warned them, “You may freely eat from every tree in the garden, 17but you shall not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day that you eat from it, you will certainly die.” When God spoke of them dying, he was not referencing physical death, but was speaking of the spiritual death that would happen. That they would lose the holiness and perfection they had, and they would lose the wonderful and holy relationship they had with the Lord God.

You can see the damage that sin brought just by looking at what happened to Adam and Eve immediately after they ate of that forbidden fruit. We are told their eyes were opened and they were ashamed, yet shame had never been a part of their life before that. We are told they heard God walking in the garden but because they ate, they run and hide from God with Adam confessing they are now afraid of God, though nothing about God had changed. We witnessed them casting blame everywhere concerning this sin but at their own feet. And if you carefully consider what Adam first says, you would realize that Adam in fact actually blames God for this fall into sin. It is clear, even in the earliest moments of this disobedience to God that man is now different. Man has a sin problem.

That means that by nature we are hostile to God, his enemies, who view Him as a problem and an intrusive force in our lives. We describe this condition in a few very picturesque ways in God’s Word. We say we are “spiritually dead.” Remember, the dead do nothing and are capable of nothing. It is an apt description for us. We are called “spiritually blind.” God is Light, but the blind see no light, can’t grasp light, can’t even perceive of light. It is clear, the blind need an outside intervention to be healed, for no blind man can operate on his own eyes! We are called “slaves to the Devil.” The devil, the Father of lies, the murderer of souls, is now our master. We like his ways, his ideas, his leanings and his darkness, for such is the impact of sin. He rules our lives and works to destroy us and yet because of sin we don’t even grasp the horrid danger he poses to us.

Do you see why we then make this startling and important confession concerning our salvation in the explanation to the Third Article? Listen again. “I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him.” That says it all. We need outside help. We need a Savior. We need the wonder and marvel of Jesus Christ to rescue and save our souls.

Our text today is just the text to consider and rejoice in when it comes to being saved. Sadly, though, it is a text most often misunderstood and maligned because people don’t pay attention to its wonders. It’s a text that points to Jesus, a text to give us total hope and comfort in the salvation that is ours in Jesus. Let’s look at this text and its comforting message under the theme: **PREDESTINED IN JESUS.**

Seriously, until a few years ago I have always wrestled with this awesome teaching of Jesus, wrestled with it because instead of listening to what the Lord has said here, I keyed in on what men and mankind was saying. And though I knew my thinking was not quite right in this teaching of comfort, I didn’t, maybe couldn’t quite get a handle on the wonder of it all. I think that maybe you too, have had this trouble. This trouble comes to all because of that word translated “predestined” and how we think of it and most often erroneously define it.

We think that the word “predestined” means that our life, our plans, our salvation is all something planned out and set in stone. We think we married who we did because it was predestined. (And one of the great lies of that idea is that we need to “find our soul-mate” in order to be happy. But, dear people, there is no such thing as a “soul-mate!”) We think the number of children we have or the place where we live or work is all something that God has predestined. That God has determined it will be this way or that and we think there is nothing we can do about it. Yes, we even think that we are going to heaven or not going to heaven because we are either predestined to salvation or predestined to damnation. But what would you say when I tell you that Scripture never, never, never speaks of or even hints at a “predestination to damnation.” In truth, this teaching done this way by so many different churches is a horrid lie that destroys souls.

What then is predestination? Please note that the word used in the Greek is simply a word that means: “set apart from the beginning.” As far as I know there is no limitations to the word. In other words, don’t argue that God only set apart a few or that God only sets apart this or that. All this word says is that God “set apart” from the beginning. On the basis of this reading, we understand that this “setting apart” was for the purpose of eternal life and salvation. Our text said to us: “because those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son.” In other words, the setting apart is about salvation and eternal life. It deals with nothing else. It speaks to nothing else. It is about your soul and its eternal life and salvation. The other thing to be very much aware of is this. Only God could “set apart” from the beginning! That’s because God, the Almighty, all-knowing, gracious God, is the only one who was at the beginning.

So what then did God do? To go back to the “beginning” is to go back to the Creation of the world. Because of God’s omniscience and omnipotence we do grasp that God created the world from beginning to end. God’s plan included the entirety of the world, yep, from beginning to end. What I can also tell you is that God’s plan was that man, the heart of his creation, the created creature nearest and dearest to his heart, God’s plan for man was eternal life and salvation. In 2 Thessalonians 2 we hear: “God chose you from the beginning for salvation,” That’s why God created mankind holy and perfect. God wanted to spend eternity with his creation. God planned this salvation, this rescue, because God knew that sin would enter into the world because Adam and Eve would disobey him. (Think about this, if God’s plan was that man spend eternity with him and this was “predestined” then how could Adam and Eve have sinned if this means everything was set in stone?)

God’s plan, yes, even with the reality of the sin that would be, God’s plan was still the salvation of mankind. What does 1 Timothy 2:3-4 say to us? “This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” There is something to contemplate. God wants all people to be saved. God planned all people. God knew all people. God wants all people to be saved. Again, only God, from the beginning, could plan for the salvation of all people. Are you getting this? That is what God did! What God did for us!

God planned for the Savior. God planned to send his Son Jesus into the world to live the perfect life we could not. God planned that His Son Jesus would die for our sins. Do you grasp what that means? It means that Jesus paid the price of our eternal damnation. The total and complete punishment of hell Jesus took on for the whole world. Do you know what 1 John 2:2 tells us? Listen: “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world.” Do you see how that fits with what we learn in our verses today?

Fact is, the teaching of predestination is really the wonderful and solid promise that God, from the beginning had a plan for the salvation of mankind, not some of mankind but rather all of mankind. God would send his Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins, yes, to atone for all sins, the sins of the whole world. That was and is God’s plan from the beginning.

What does that mean for us? Well, God has planned to save you. God has planned your spiritual life and sight and you becoming His dear child! Every soul that is and was and will be, Jesus has paid for their sins. All of them. There are no exceptions. You are saved because God planned and sent Jesus to be your Savior, to atone for the whole world. That’s why we teach that salvation is only and always about what Jesus has done, not about us.

Why then are people lost? I am going to explain it this way. You are on an ocean liner. You have fallen off, actually you have jumped off of the ocean liner. If someone doesn’t do something, you are going to drown and be lost. So, the Captain with perfect accuracy, throws you a life ring and with that ring around your chest, hauls you aboard. There is no doubt you are saved. The Captain has done it! Now, keeping this in mind, let’s ask a few questions.

1st. After you are saved, and a reporter comes up to you, puts a mike in your face and asks: “Wow, you have been rescued and saved! How?” I would hope that the rescued person would say, “Hey, the Captain did it all. He saved me. He threw the life ring. He pulled me from certain death. I owe the Captain everything!” Truth is, all of us would probably agree that this is the honest and most truthful response there could be. It was all the captain saving your surely lost soul. All credit, glory and honor goes to the heroic Captain for our salvation!

What would you think of the person who said, “Well, I found this life ring, I grabbed onto it, I held on tight as somebody pulled me in. I want to thank the person, whoever pulled me in, and I want to say that thank goodness I had the strength to hold on and get back on the boat! I mean, I was told to hang on and I obeyed, therefore I am saved.” If you know the real history of what happened, I am going to bet that you would immediately consider this person’s answer a falsehood, a lie, an issue of taking credit where no credit could or should be taken. The saddest part, is this person, while they think they are giving adequate credit to the captain, really considers the captain a minor part of the fact that they are now on the boat. In truth, in their heart, the captain is but a minor character in the fact that they are saved. What would you think of such an answer, again, considering that you know the whole truth of what really happened! And before you ask, I will direct your attention to the parable of the wedding banquet, that one where the guest was found at the banquet with his own clothes on instead of the clothes provided by the wedding host. Remember, person was thrown out! That’s the person we are speaking about here.

I think there might even be people out there who would say, “I don’t know what you are talking about. Sure, I went for a swim. But I was never in danger! I don’t know why everyone is so adamant about who saved me. You people, I just went swimming! Got back on the boat myself!” Again, if you know the whole story, you know what a lie, what a horrid lie this is. This soul is the person actually invited to the wedding banquet but came up with excuse after excuse for not attending.

Then consider scenario number 2. In this case, the person is rescued just as I initially said. Pulled completely to safety and given back their life because of the actions and strength of the Captain. This person who is saved, runs and jumps off of the ship. This person not only jumps off the ship, but works hard at swimming away. The Captain tries to save them again, throws that life ring. But the person just swims away yelling that they don’t need the Captain and his ship, nor his life ring nor anything to do with this ocean liner. They tell you they will swim to shore or find another ship on their own, but this Captain, whom they consider horrid, should just leave them alone. He drowns! Lost! Gone forever! How many of you would blame the Captain? How many of you because that soul was lost would dare to accuse the Captain of failure or of being far from the good and great Captain he is?

You and I have fallen off the ship! Jesus has rescued us just as God planned from the beginning. Jesus did and does it all. Don’t turn your back on Jesus and then blame him for your death. Don’t reject God’s gift of salvation for any reason: “I didn’t like the ship! The Captain’s a bit pushy. The life ring wasn’t my favorite color. I didn’t have a problem anyway!” The only one to blame for your damnation is you. You were given life by Jesus but somewhere along the line you committed spiritual suicide in rejecting Jesus. You were given spiritual sight by Jesus, but somewhere along the line you blinded your new eyes, tore them out, because you like the darkness, the life of sin better that God’s Light and love. You were made a child of God, but you ran away from home, telling all that God was a tyrant, a bad father, a parent without love or compassion!

Dear people, this section of God’s Word declares that God has done everything for your salvation. God in grace and love even promises to take whatever evil and sin brings to your life and make it to serve His purpose of bringing you life and salvation! God does it all. He knows you. He sent Jesus for you (even from the beginning)! He has called you to faith and in that faith he has justified you! You see, you are justified, that means you are declared innocent of any and all sins. This in Jesus. Jesus who came to save you. Jesus who has rescued and done everything necessary to give you life! This is the promise of Jesus. This is the wonder of Jesus. This is the truth of being predestined, that from the beginning God in Jesus made you His. What a joy. What a marvel that we are saved in Jesus! Amen.