

## More than Conquerors

Romans 8:35-39

I don't think I should try to drag out this chapter any further, so we will finish it today. It is my favorite chapter in the Bible, and this is now our seventh sermon on this one single chapter. I like this chapter so much because deals with all the hard realities of this life, and then puts them all into the proper perspective that is so helpful in at least two very obvious ways. First, the perspective that no matter what happens, we are freed from the condemnation of our sin and are, therefore, the blessed and beloved children of a God who loves us rather than a defendant standing before a judge.

But there is this second perspective woven throughout this chapter that finds its climax in our text this morning, the perspective so well summarized by that simple phrase, "we are more than conquerors." We emphasized that same perspective in the last sermon with those words of such triumphant confidence,

v.31 "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Similarly,

v.33 "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect?"

The answer to both questions is, of course, No one! No one can successfully be against us, especially in the realization that no one can bring a charge against one of God's children, one of his elect. No charge will stand. No charge will hold up in a court of law. Because Jesus has died and has risen from the dead. Thus the sermon this morning is really just part 2 of that sermon two weeks ago, a declaration of that triumphant and appropriate confidence that have as the children of God.

Yet, back to reality. Back to the reality of real life. Life is full of trouble. Full of sorrow. Hardship. Distress and stress. Conflict. Division. Just read the headlines from any news source. Read about our national leadership, our Congress. Our president. Read the commentary on the election results this past week. And what do you read? Life is full of trouble.

Read about the horrific tragedy at that awful crowd surge at that Astroworld Festival in Houston Friday night. Eight people killed. Scores hospitalized and injured. Read about the shootings every night in Chicago, or other large cities. Talk to people who suffer grief. And anxiety. That's real life, that's the inescapable reality of life.

And sometimes, maybe often for some, it can seem like God's love is absent. Removed. Or at least silent. Where is God in all this? Where is God's love? That's the feeling. That is the thought. That is the frequent sense of our human existence on earth in this age. And so Paul asks a profound question.

### I. A PROBING QUESTION: SEPARATION FROM THE LOVE OF JESUS?

Can there be such a separation? That is the question Paul addresses. It's a rhetorical question, which means the answer is embedded or at least implied in the actual question. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Yet Paul is not asking that question as if he thinks someone or something actually can separate us. But rather, the question itself emphasizes the obvious, intended answer. And the answer is an unequivocal "no."

There have been three such rhetorical questions in this section of chapter 8, beginning with,  
v.31. "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Then, secondly,

v.33 “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect?”

Finally, here,

v.35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

Who? Clearly, the question gives its own answer. No one. That’s the point. No one can separate us from the love of Christ. For the same reason that no one can bring a charge against God’s elect. Because that election, that choice of God was made before the creation of the world, and that choice was, itself, a choice of love. And that choice to love, God’s choice to love his people, is the greatest of all spiritual blessings we could possibly ever receive.

Eph. 1:3 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

Why did God do that? Why did God choose us, in Christ? Why did he choose us to be adopted as his children? Because he chose to love us. And why did he choose to love us? Was it something in us, something lovable in us that caught his attention? No, of course not. He chose to love us because he chose to love us. It is called grace. Unmerited favor, undeserved blessing. Unearned reward. It’s all of grace, grace alone, as I emphasized in the sermon last week on Reformation Day.

And because God’s love for us is all of grace, we can see and understand,

### **A. The reality of the persistent love of Jesus.**

His love isn’t subject to change, because he doesn’t change. And because his love isn’t grounded in anything in us, nothing we do would bring about a change. He won’t stop loving us because of what might do, because he didn’t choose to love us because of something we might do. Instead, it is all of grace. And, therefore, persistent. Unceasing. Unbreakable. Nothing we might do could cause him to stop loving us, because nothing we did caused him to start loving us.

It is, after all, the love of Christ! Jesus’ own love. And such love, by God’s own definition, never ceases. So who shall separate us from THE LOVE OF JESUS? That is where the emphasis of that rhetorical question lies. Who shall separate us from THE LOVE OF JESUS?

Please understand that question as a declaration of reality, not as something sowing a seed of doubt, as if it were possible to separate yourself from the love of Jesus. It is not possible.

In the midst of the dire warnings of the prophet Jeremiah, warnings resulting from the terrible unfaithfulness and willful disobedience of the people of Israel, we read this,

Jer. 31:3 “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you. 4 Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, And shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice.”

Even Israel would be rebuilt, despite the promised judgment of evil. They would be restored to their previous glory as a nation. Why? Because God loved them with an everlasting love! An eternal love. An unchanging love. A persistent love, one that

endured even through the worst of their sinful rebellion. So who could possibly separate us from such love, THE LOVE OF JESUS?

But back to reality, real world reality. Paul mentions some possible causes why you might think that you have been separated from the love of Jesus.

v.35 “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

The obvious point is,

### **B. The reality of present trouble.**

Paul was speaking of things he knew of first-hand. These were his experiences, his actual, earthly, human experiences. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword. He quotes Psalm 44 with thoughts of his own existence,

v.36

That Psalm describe the plight of Israel under great duress. Speaking to God, the Psalmist declares,

Ps. 44:9 “But You have cast us off and put us to shame, And You do not go out with our armies. 10 You make us turn back from the enemy, And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves. 11 You have given us up like sheep intended for food, And have scattered us among the nations. 12 You sell Your people for next to nothing, And are not enriched by selling them. 13 You make us a reproach to our neighbors, A scorn and a derision to those all around us. 14 You make us a byword among the nations, A shaking of the head among the peoples. 15 My dishonor is continually before me, And the shame of my face has covered me, 16 Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, Because of the enemy and the avenger. 17 All this has

come upon us; But we have not forgotten You, Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant. 18 Our heart has not turned back, Nor have our steps departed from Your way; 19 But You have severely broken us in the place of jackals, And covered us with the shadow of death. 20 If we had forgotten the name of our God, Or stretched out our hands to a foreign god, 21 Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. 22 Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

That passage continues with a bold demand.

Ps. 44:23 “Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast us off forever. 24 Why do You hide Your face, And forget our affliction and our oppression? 25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust; Our body clings to the ground. 26 Arise for our help, And redeem us for Your mercies’ sake.”

It seems that God has forgotten his people. It seems that he has removed his love from them. That is what the Psalmist is implying, and that is what Paul quotes in Romans 8. And Paul knew that himself as well.

1 Cor. 4:9 “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. 10 We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! 11 To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. 12 And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; 13 being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”

Similarly, 2 Cor. 11:24 “From the Jews five times I received

forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.”

The point is that the reality of present trouble is not a contradiction to the reality of the persistent love of Jesus. It is,

## **II. A NON-EXISTENT CONTRADICTION.**

It doesn't exist. In this world, there is suffering. Much suffering at times. But there is still the perfect, persistent everlasting love of God in Jesus. Thus, therefore, the triumphant declaration of verse 37.

### **A. We are not defeated or conquered by present troubles, but triumph in the midst of them.**

More than conquerors.

v.37 “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”

I don't like language that is just bravado, pretentious, or macho. The sort of boasting that some men especially are prone to. I don't like the proverbial chest-thumping declaration of power and superiority that some men do so very often. And I should emphasize that there is none of that here. This is a sober realization, this awareness of trouble. This is reality. Painful reality. And Paul doesn't shy away from that one bit. But he certainly demonstrates that there is no contradiction between his

confidence in God's love and the reality of his own earthly suffering.

And please notice this. He does not simply endure the suffering. He is not simply a victim of oppression, a victim of evil, nor a helpless or hopeless pawn in the chess game of life. He is not bewildered by his own experiences, nor even unsettled by them. And I would propose that as a measure and mark of true, godly maturity.

He not only endures, but he triumphs! In the midst of those troubles. The troubles don't go away. He isn't triumphant in any earthly or physical sense. But God is at work, and as we studied a few weeks ago,

v.28 “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.”

And what is it that God is doing in Paul's life, such that he could proclaim himself “more than conquerors?” Remember what we read in verse 29 about the actual good that God is bringing about,

v.29 “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

So you aren't a victim of troubles. Rather, in the midst of them, God is making you more like Jesus, that you might be his brother or sister, he the firstborn among MANY brethren. That's the triumph. That's the hope. That's the sense of being more than a conqueror. God's love continues to abide even when, through fiery trials, your faith may well be tested. But because God has a purpose, an eternal purpose, according to which he “works all things according to the counsel of His will.” And in that

sovereign purpose and secret will, he brings everything to pass “to the praise of his glory.”

So we are more than victims. And more than conquerors too! Because we are those whom Jesus has loved, whom God has loved!

v.37

### **B. Our triumph is the outworking of Jesus’ love.**

Again, please hear me correctly. I am not speaking about earthly power and dominance. The triumph I am speaking about is not a military triumph. It is a political triumph, or a financial triumph. It is not a medical triumph or any such tangible triumph. Rather, as an outworking of Jesus’ love in our lives, as the demonstration of Jesus’ love in our lives, we are more than conquerors. Because God is working out his plan and his purpose in the lives those whom he loves.

With that confidence and sense of triumph, Paul would write this to the Corinthians,

2 Cor. 4:7 “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.”

We are being delivered over to death, no small thing to be sure. We carry in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus. But still, we read on “that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in

our mortal flesh.” To live is Christ. And, therefore, on that basis, there is this,

### **III. A TRIUMPHANT DECLARATION.**

v.38-39

Paul gives to us,

#### **A. An exhaustive list of the sources of trouble.**

It is a list that includes physical things, earthly things, as well as heavenly things, spiritual things. Beginning with that which is most prominent in terms of our earthly human existence, life and death. Neither can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Not even death, which is, as Paul would write to the Corinthians, the last enemy to be destroyed. Which clearly implies that death is not yet destroyed. It still touches us, every one. For we are mortal and corruptible in our present bodies. We have a natural body, that is, a body governed and controlled by the so-called laws of nature. And those aren’t laws that you can choose to disobey. They are binding upon us in every way. Inescapable. And in our current state,

1 Cor. 15:50. “...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.”

But the references to our troubles in this world aren’t limited to physical things. Paul identifies principalities and powers. Those would be the spiritual powers, supernatural reality, with a particular emphasis here upon spiritual powers for evil. The supernatural is real. Evil power is real, and even that power cannot separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus. Because God himself is greater than all other powers. Just consider these words speaking about Jesus,

1 Peter 3:22 “...who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”

Similarly, Paul's prayer for the Ephesians in Ephesians that they might know,

Eph. 1:19 "...what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."

And then, speaking of Jesus' second coming at the end of the age,

1 Cor. 15:24 "Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

Thus no power, physical or spiritual, natural or supernatural, will be able to separate us from the love of God. Though those things do still exist and do continue to cause us trouble!

Paul goes on in verse 38 to mention "things present nor things to come." The present or the future—nothing even in the future will be able to separate us from the love of God. And that confidence comes, of course, from a proper understanding of God's purpose and plan for the future, that he brings everything to pass according to the counsel of his will. So nothing in the future can separate us from the love of God.

But Satan tries, doesn't he? He tries to stimulate our fear of the future, based upon our own uncertainties. And sometimes our minds are given to those fears. Sometimes they are irrational thoughts, but seemingly beyond our control. And sometimes the

fears are rational, which is to say, what we fear might actually come to pass. But even still, whatever could even be imagined about the future in the worst case, none of it will separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Nothing,

v.39 "...[not] height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

That is the absolute confidence with which Paul concludes this great chapter.

### **B. An absolute confidence.**

Remember where this chapter began.

v.1 "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."

Upon that basis, Paul is able to shift to the reality of our present struggles, and encourage us with his words in,

v.18 "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Because of THAT hope, because of our ability to have an unshakable confidence in that hope of what still remains future and, for now, unseen; knowing also what we studied in,

v.28 "...that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose..."

...let this be your comfort and your encouragement. This promise. This declaration. Let it be your hope, and your faith, you who believe and trust in Jesus. And let it be your supreme comfort in a world filled with all sorts of trouble.

v.38 “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”