Unlocking Risk in a Secure Life

Romans 8:38-39

"The religious life contains things too great for us to be lukewarm."
Jonathan Edwards

Introduction: I never personally got the opportunity to name a son, though I hope to influence the naming of a grandson someday. If I had, there is one name that would be at the top of the list: *Thomas Jackson*. Not only is TJ a great moniker for an athlete, but Thomas Jackson was one of my favorite historical figures, even though he fought for the losing side who held sinful practices.

Thomas Jackson got the nickname "STONEWALL" at the 1st Battle of Manassas (aka Bull Run) early in the Civil War, a battle that was infamous for having spectators travel from Washington D.C believing that they would see a lively, short, and total victory by the Union army, only to be exposed to the horror and gore of war, becoming privy to a Confederate victory instead. As the battle was still in question, Brigadier General Barnard Bee was striving to steady his lines and troops in the midst of heavy fighting, of which most were unaccustomed. Legend and eyewitness accounts attest that Bee stated, "***There stands Jackson like a stone wall! Let us determine to die here, and we will conquer".*** Now, like many things in the War, there is some dispute over the exact wording, and unfortunately Bee died in the battle, unable to confirm what he said, but there is no doubt the point since the nickname stuck. Jackson was branded as a *stonewall*, one who was unfazed by the danger of battle and who stood high in his horse as bullets flew by and enemies surrounded.

When asked about this unflappable stance after the battle, a wounded Jackson said to Captain Imboden:

> *Captain, my religious belief teaches me to feel as safe in battle as in bed. God has fixed the time for my death. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter when it may overtake me. Captain, that is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave.*

This was a man committed to what he believed, that God was sovereign over life and death, "*and just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment*" (Heb. 9:27). He was a man who trusted in God's predestined plan and the security it brought in life and death, which caused him to be the most prepared, disciplined, and trusted soldier in the army. Though not an easily approachable or man that had a lot of buddies, he had the admiration and respect of fellow soldier, enemy, and officer alike. After being shot accidentally by a Confederate soldier, later succumbing to the pneumonia it caused after the Battle of Chancellorsville in 1863, General Robert E. Lee said, "*He has lost his left arm, but I have lost my right".*

This is not fatalism. Fatalism shrugs while faith acts in worship. In other words, knowledge and conviction of security in God's call, love, and work in life unlocks an ability, motivation, and courage to live fully for the glory of God. So let us come back to this last section of Romans 8 and consider some implications and applications of the **indwelling and leading of the Holy Spirit, a life that includes the necessity of suffering, and the security of our salvation locked down in the love of God.**

Romans 8:38-39 "*For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* ***39*** *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

After answering **four rhetorical questions concerning the legal surety of our salvation, Paul turns to an emotional engaging question.** Far from being cold and calculated, God is a God of infinite love, a love that pours from His love within the Trinity down to us. The desire to BE loved is God given, which is why every person possesses it. Love is objective and factual, but also can be felt and experienced. The love we crave is often misplaced, since we CANNOT love perfectly. But true, perfect, and infinite love is the true source of **security in our lives.** Isn't that what we want to give our children? We tell them, demonstrate to them, and remind them of our love **no matter what**, and our love is NOT conditional on their performance or accolades. A child who is loved this way is **confident, and a confident person is willing to live a full life without having to consistently seek approval or security from others.**

Now there are a few things to point out about this text before looking at its parts.

1) **The love mentioned here is Christ's and God the Father's love for us, NOT our love for Him –** Notice that the security from separation is based on His love, not ours. This is huge. If our security in His love was based on our ability or amount of love for Him, our security would bounce up and down, back and forth, based on where we were at in any given state of life. But we will not be separate from His love because we are loved **IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.**

"*Our confidence is not in our love for him, which is frail, fickle, and faltering, but in* ***His love for us****, which steadfast, faithful and persevering."*[1]

2) Notice that the answer to the question of separation is a resounding "NO"! NOTHING can separate us from His love, just like no one can take us out of His hand (John 10:28-30).

3) Paul is making a point more than talking about specific things. In other words, he is going to extremes in writing to show there is **NO BOUNDARY in God's love for His own**, and the security of that love for us. So let's take these section by section to see his point:

- **No persecution in the name and service of Christ, even that leads to death, will separate –** These words put together (*tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword*) all paint a picture of suffering specifically for being a Christian. This is admittedly outside our experience, but NOT by those who claim Christ today around the world, especially in Africa, where thousands are killed each year. But that is NOT to say it will not be our experience, or our children or grandchildren's experience in the future. Clearly, persecution can make us ***feel and think*** that God has abandon us, but it is exactly the opposite.

  Notice that Paul quotes from Psalm 44:22, a Psalm that cries out to God in the midst of suffering *in the midst of living righteously.* If you read all of Psalm 44, you will see that the sons of Korah were asking how long the persecution would last, but they knew it was a result of God's plan, NOT a result of their sin.

[1] John Stott, "*Romans: God's Good News for the World", p. 259.*

- **All of the loss through suffering produces victory in Christ** (37) –
  The word here is "HYPER" conqueror, MEGA victor, SUPER winner. We WILL certainly lose on this earth through suffering, and if we think that somehow we are to conquer this era, we will see losing as a negative. But in the context, all loss in the name of Christ actually is a means of victory, since Christ has already defeated sin and death, and one day He will reign and rule from this earth with us.

- **NOTHING in the seen or unseen world can separate us from Christ's love –**
  Verses 38-39 are designed to leave us with no wiggle room to question any part of God's love for us. Paul uses couplets to accomplish his purpose in areas that ***could possibly*** cause separation:

1) **Death or life –** Why did he start here? Because death is the unfortunate reality of all those who live in this broken world and inherited a sin nature. Death stinks, and causes **separation** between loved ones, which is why it is always heart-wrenching, no matter how old one is. But we have promises that death actually increases or closeness to God (Phil. 1:23; 2 Cor. 5:8), so death merely ushers us into His presence, which is the place of greatest joy (Ps. 16:11).

Death can be the ultimate cause of **fear** for us, which can cause us to avoid anything that would cause it for ourselves or loved ones. In fact, death of loved ones would be one of the hardest things to grapple with and easiest pathway to question the goodness and love of God. But if death is merely a gateway to life with Christ, we can see it as something that God sees as precious (Psalm 116:15) and though we walk through its shadow, we **fear no evil** (Ps. 23:4). This fear is real, no matter our age. I got a call from my mom this week who is caring for my grandma who is 103 and living at home. She got sick over the last few weeks, leaving her weak and needing to get moving again to recover. The PT told her there's nothing wrong with her body (amazingly!) but she is **afraid** to walk because she thinks she'll fall, even though she has two people holding her. If she lives in fear, she will sit and continue to get worse. If she knows she's secure, she will move forward and be able to walk outside again!

2) **Angels, rulers, powers –** We've said that Satan and his demonic host can cause havoc, lie, deceive, and even affect our physical lives. But these were all defeated at the cross (Col. 2:15), Christ put them all under His feet (Eph. 1:21), and we are positionally seated with Christ (Eph. 2:6), so they are utterly powerless against Christ and thus us, relegated to lies alone.

Our enemy cannot take away our salvation, possess us, nor separate us from God's love---- but they certainly can make us THINK they can. Through their *accusations, temptations, and fiery arrows of doubt*, they can cause us to question God's goodness, nearness, and ever-present help. Remember, our enemy wants to **isolate** us from others and the church, **shame** us to think we are not good enough, or **overwhelm** us into thinking we cannot take our present situation anymore! Whenever you find yourself in that headspace, it is not the truth and not born out of the leading of the Spirit.

3) **Time & Space –** As if the other two were not pervasive enough, Paul covered all the basis in time --- and we often can fear the unknown future ---- and space can separate us from the love of God. *Do you get the gist of his argument?* Nothing man made, nothing in the spiritual realm, nothing now or the future, nothing that is done to us or we do can separate us from **the love that God has for us in Christ.** This includes **OURSELVES ---** we can be our own worst enemies, NOT dealing with our sin when we have an ADVOCATE in Jesus, holding onto bad habits or

hiding our sin, rather than coming immediately to the throne of grace. We buy into the lie we tell ourselves that coming to Jesus demands that we are good and moral, instead of by grace alone. This is the classic "*Good Day – Bad Day"* Christian experience that Jerry Bridges laid out in his book "*Disciplines of Grace",* and one that we must fight by faith to avoid.

Now, here, it is important to see some clear implications. God's love for us DOES NOT take us out of suffering or hard circumstances, but it does give us the ability to **bear up under them with joy and hope.** We have assurance that NOTHING will separate us from Him and assures that all what is going on will lead to a greater **victory in the end,** which allows us to live with **confident security in life today, including embracing the risk of obedience to all that God has called us to.**

Look one more time at verse v. 38. Paul uses the word "sure" of this, which is a small English word but a great Greek word. It means "*being convinced" or "persuaded"*, confident, unalterable, and immovable in resolve. It is in the **perfect tense,** meaning "*I have become and remain convinced".* This was the aim of Paul and our aim this morning, that you would be so convinced of God's immeasurable and infinite love for you as a believer that we would live a life embracing the obedience of faith that would elicit persecution. We've talked in the past as a church that at almost every level of life, **faith demands risk --- and we have much to lose in the lives we've created for ourselves.**

Security in God's love should unlock a passion to love Him ---- *we love because He first loved us* (1 John 4:19) ---- and keep us out of the ***miserable middle.*** This is the place where we define our walk with the Lord by what we do NOT DO ---- we are NOT sinning like the world around us and the deeds of the flesh ---- but NOT living in the joy, strength, hope, and passion in the Lord. We are not experiencing intimate knowledge of Him, the pleasure of His presence, the joy of His nearness. Our hearts are not happy in Him, but we rather go through the motions without engaging our emotions or affections. When trials, hardship, suffering, or circumstances sour, we have no foundational ballast in Christ to weather the storm with joy, but endure by gritting our teeth, feeling like a victim, singing "woe is me". But security in **God's love for us and our sure salvation was designed for so much more. Jonathan Edwards,** an American pastor, theologian, and author, wrote on this in his work, *Religious Affections* a masterclass in explaining how the gospel of God's glory ignites our passion, about the miserable middle:

> *"God's purpose for my life was that I have a **passion for God's glory** and that I have a **passion for my joy in that glory**, and that these two are one passion."*

"*God is the **highest good** of the reasonable creature. The **enjoyment of him** is our proper and is the only **happiness** with which our souls can be **satisfied**. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Better than fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of any, or all earthly friends. These are but shadows; but the **enjoyment of God is the substance**. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean*."[2]

If you have wondered why there is no joy in obedience, no excitement in worship, no passion for sharing the gospel, no greater purpose in your day than merely slogging though, and no joy in the midst of suffering, you may be in the miserable middle and have stopped pursuing a joy in God through abiding

[2] *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 17: Sermons and Discourses, 1730-1733

in Christ. When we begin to see and savor Jesus, it unlocks the ability to **risk because of the security we have in our salvation.**

We embrace risk in:

- **Relationships –** When we are secure in Christ, we risk losing relationships for speaking the truth in love, or leaving a caustic and sinful relationship that leads us down a pathway of sin.

This also means we no longer **idolize** good gifts God has given us. When we idolize our children, we stop walking in obedience to train, discipline, and teach them to glorify God and instead try to insulate and keep them safe at all cost. When we **idolize** a perfect marriage, we stop appreciating and thanking God for the spouse God has given us and live in hope that they will change. When we think that our happiness will be in **these** relationships, we put a terrible weight on them that can never satisfy. When Christ is our true happiness and joy, we can prioritize relationships rightly, **risking** loving others who are different than us and **speaking the truth, even when inconvenient or costly.**

- **Finances –** We see our money as a conduit to glorify the Lord, to further the gospel, and to walk by faith, rather than finding our **security** in our accounts.

- **Evangelism -** We open our mouth to those who will think our message foolish and the messenger even more so. We risk reputation, social standing, and credibility in order to share the greatest message of hope in the world.

- **Personal comfort & pain –** We trust the Lord in the midst of the hardest of circumstances, to **obey Him fully and trusting Him implicitly**, when leaving or changing would bring temporal ease. Radical, faith-driven obedience out of our love for Christ allows us to stay out of the "I can't do this anymore" arena. We will continue to bang the drum here in Simi Valley: *the most risk laden decision that many can and will make is to STAY here in California, NOT for the weather or culture, but for the sake of the gospel.*

Pulling all of this together, I will leave you with this quote about risk, victory, and the infinite love of God:

*"On the far side of risk --- even if it results in death --- the **love of God triumphs.** This is the faith that frees us to risk for the cause of God. If is not heroism, or lust for adventure, or courageous self-reliance, or efforts to earn God's favor. It is **childlike faith** in the **triumph of God's love ---** that on the far side of all our risks (*and pain, suffering, and groans), *for the sake of righteousness, God will still be holding us"*
John Piper