

Don't Forget . . .  
Nothing Can Separate Us From the Love of God

Romans 8:31-39

August 9, 2020

By

Rev. Dr. Tom Tewell

San Marino Community Church  
1750 Virginia Road  
San Marino, CA 91108  
(626) 282-4181 • Fax: (626) 282-4185  
*www.smccpby.com • smcc@smccpby.com*

All rights reserved. These sermon manuscripts are intended for personal use only and may not be republished or used in any way without the permission of the author.

To the extent possible, effort has been made to preserve the quality of the spoken word in this written adaptation.

When Dr. Addison Leach was Professor of New Testament Greek and President of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, his dream was to have a stained-glass window in the study of his home. He ordered the window, had it installed, and it was beautiful! Two weeks later, while the neighborhood kids were playing baseball in the vacant lot next door, a kid hit a home run and the ball came crashing through Dr. Leach's "BRAND NEW" stained glass window! Dr. Leach got up from his desk and yelled at the kids...in Greek....as they were scurrying to their homes for safety!

Dr. Leach called the manufacturer who came and installed a new window. In a few days, Dr. Leach let it be known through the underground network of the neighborhood that all was forgiven and that the kids could come back and play in the yard once again! All the kids came back to play ball...except for Billy! Now, it doesn't take a psychotherapist to figure out that Billy didn't come back because he was the kid who hit the baseball . . .and broke the window.

So, when Dr. Leach saw the kids playing ball in the yard, this erudite seminary professor, walked across the street to Billy's home. Billy saw him coming and immediately went and hid in his room! Billy's mother answered the door and said, "Dr. Leach, we know why you are here. We are SO sorry that Billy broke your window! So, if you will tell us what it cost, we will pay for it and we will take it out of Billy's allowance over the years! Dr. Leach replied, "I did not come to ask you to pay for the window! I just saw the kids playing ball.... and I knew how much Billy loves baseball and I thought it was sad that he is sitting at home afraid of me and not able to do the thing that he loves to do! So, I came over to tell you that the window is paid for and I want Billy to come back and play ball with the other kids. Billy's mother said, "That is so nice, but Billy is afraid of you! In fact, he is hiding in his room right now!" Dr. Leach asked, "May I go upstairs and try to persuade him to come with me?"

When Billy's mom gave her approval, Dr. Leach climbed the stairs and spoke to Billy through the keyhole in the door. When Billy heard Dr. Leach's invitation, Billy had to decide if he would stay in his hiding place in fear . . . separated from his friends, OR would he take Dr. Leach's hand and walk with him to play ball with the other kids? Do you see a sermon in this story?

This simple story represents for me the gospel in miniature. You and I broke the stained-glass window of God's heart. But, the cost to repair the window is so great that we can't pay for it. So, we run away and hide from God and other people in our guilt and shame. But God can't live with estrangement and separation. This is where we see the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God that Willow and the Virginia Road Band just sang about. So, God not only pays the debt because he wants to set things right, but God comes right to our hiding place and invites us to come out of hiding and experience the AMAZING GRACE of God in fellowship with other human beings! This is what we call the Good News of the Gospel.

In Romans Chapter 8, the Apostle Paul argues that the ONLY ONE who can make a charge against Billy (to use the analogy of this sermon) is Dr. Leach! But . . . instead of bringing a charge against Billy, Dr. Leach pays the debt for us. In the same way, God does not bring charges against us (although He could) but he sent his son to die on the cross and pay the debt for us, and in so doing God sets things right! And, on top of that, He seeks us out, finds us in our lostness, and calls us out of isolation and into fellowship with other people. God can't live with separation and can't stand for any of us to be estranged from Him!

Here's the truth. When we feel separated or distanced from God . . . guess who moved? God's reckless love always comes after us! In this passage, Paul wants to showcase the spiritual truth that NOTHING can separate us from God's love. The Apostle Paul was a wordsmith; he was a master of logic, oratory and rhetoric. So, in Romans 8, he listed every terrifying thing that could separate us from God! He asks rhetorically, "Shall hardship or distress or persecution of famine or nakedness or peril or sword separate us from God's love?" These things that Paul mentioned were not theoretical. In the first century, Roman Emperors, like Nero, persecuted the Christians. I hate to say this but . . . children were brutally tortured before the eyes of their parents. The parents were tied up with rope and forced to watch the torture and . . . sometimes . . . the death

of their own children! It was the worst form of torture imaginable . . .it was mental torture, emotional torture — much worse than if the parents were physically tortured themselves! Can you imagine what it must have been like to watch your child die?

When William Sloane Coffin was the Pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, his son Alex, in his early 20's, was killed in a tragic automobile crash. On a rainy night in Boston, Alex was going around a slick curve too fast, and lost control of the car on the wet pavement, and his car ran off the road, slid into the Boston Harbor . . .and he drowned! As Coffin tried to make sense of this tragedy, this spiritual truth came to him, and he expressed it in his own words: "When the water covered over Alex . . .and he drowned. God's was the first heart to break." Coffin realized that God was WITH HIM and the presence of God assuaged his grief. In his loss and pain, Coffin internalized the truth that NOTHING, not even the death of his beloved son, could separate him from the love of God. In fact, Coffin realized that God experienced the same kind of loss as Coffin did and that the God who knew suffering . . .was WITH HIM!

If the Apostle Paul was writing to the church at San Marino, he would probably select things that we fear to make the same point. He might choose A words and ask, "Can ALZHEIMERS separate us from the love of God?" Or, "Can ABUSE in any form (sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse) separate us from the love of God?" What about B words like BULLYING or BANKRUPTCY or C words like CANCER or CORONAVIRUS or, D Words like DEPRESSION or DEATH? Can any of these things separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord? Paul's response is NO! In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us! When we face these things, we are more than a conqueror. A conqueror is victorious in a battle, but if we are more than a conqueror, then we come out of the battle with more resources than which we went into the battle. Paul uses his exquisite oratory to remind us that NOTHING that we will ever experience, no matter how bad or evil it is, can separate us from God's love. What an incredible promise!

But here's the question. HOW do we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God? How do we know that we are more than a conqueror? Listen carefully. This is the key to the Christian faith. We know that nothing can separate us from the love of God . . .because God

raised Jesus from the dead! On the cross, Jesus Christ absorbed all the blows that evil and death could give out! And, when God raised Jesus from the dead, God defeated evil and death once and for all time. That is a staggering truth! As the 16th century reformer, Martin Luther, said, “Jesus Christ’s death swallowed death forevermore!”

Years ago, Muhammed Ali fought George Foreman in Zaire, Africa, for the Heavyweight Championship of the World. For seven rounds Ali took the ferocity of the blows that Foreman gave out. Foreman was younger, bigger and stronger than Ali. At several times in the fight, Ali doubled over and forced Foreman to hit him on the shoulders, the forearms and the top of his head . . .but Foreman could not hit Ali on the face or in the stomach area. Although Ali absorbed lots of punishment, Foreman punched himself out! Foreman gave it all he had but he couldn’t hurt Ali! Then, in the decisive eighth round, Ali came out of his corner, stood up and hit Foreman with a right and then a left . . .and a right . . .and a left . . .and he dealt Foreman a Knock -Out Blow and won the fight! Ali regained his title as the Heavyweight Champion of the World! In the same way when God raised Jesus from the dead, God dealt death and the forces of evil a fatal, knock-out blow and death was defeated once and for all!

Now think about this: the Christian faith began in a cemetery! In the very place where the world runs out of gas — that is where our faith begins! Mary Magdalene met the risen Jesus in the cemetery, and she exclaimed, “I have seen the Lord!” She saw Jesus ALIVE . . .in a cemetery! In the very place where our world says that life ends . . .life begins for those who follow Jesus! A cemetery is where our faith begins!

So, I was on a choir retreat in Texas and I was driving members of the choir to the retreat center. I took a wrong turn and got on a one lane road with no other cars on it and then I saw a sign that said, “This road ends in a cemetery!” I pulled off to the side of the road and started writing in my notebook that I keep with me for possible sermon illustrations and observations about life. I wrote in my book, “This road ends in a cemetery.” Then I wrote “All roads lead to a cemetery... except one. And that road goes to the cemetery and through the cemetery and it end in eternal life! That is the road we are on. It is the King’s Highway!” Friends, the Christian faith begins in a cemetery, but it doesn’t end in the cemetery. It ends in the Kingdom of God! We know that

nothing can separate us from the love of God because death could not ultimately defeat Jesus Christ. God raised Jesus from the dead and death was defeated . . .once and for all time!

On a Mausoleum in Red Square in Moscow, there is an inscription that reads, "Here lies the greatest ruler the world has ever seen. He . . .was the Lord of the new humanity. He was the Savior of the world. Of course, the man who is lying there is Nikoli Lenin but Lenin is dead. But did you notice the past tense? He WAS the Lord of the new humanity. He WAS the savior of the world. Lenin is Dead. And, all of us will die. Buddha is dead. Ghandi is Dead. Lao Tse is dead. Mother Teresa is dead. But Jesus Christ said, "I AM the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me though they may die, yet shall they live, but those who live and believe in me shall never die!" (John 11:25)

So, remember that Alzheimers is terrible...but it is not the last word on today....

Abuse is terrible . . .but it is not the last word on today

Bullying is terrible . . .but it is not the last word on today

Bankruptcy is terrible . . .but it is not the last word on today

Cancer is terrible . . .but it is not the last word on today

Coronavirus is terrible . . .but it is not the last word on today

Depression is terrible . . .but it is not the last word on today

Death is terrible . . .but it is not the last word on today

The last word on today is Jesus Christ . . .and God raised Jesus from the dead!

So I can declare to you, my dear San Marino friends, that NOTHING can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That's the TRUTH. Don't EVER forget it!

Amen

August 9, 2020

Don't Forget . . . Nothing Can Separate Us From God

Rev. Dr. Tom Tewell

August 9, 2020

Don't Forget . . . Nothing Can Separate Us From God

Rev. Dr. Tom Tewell