

*All Roads Lead Here: If God Is For Us, Who Could Be Against Us?*

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*Proverbs 21:30-31; Isaiah 54:4-10; Romans 8:31-39*

Our final Scripture reading today is Romans 8:31-39. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy Word. “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all -- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died -- more than that, who was raised to life -- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Sometimes, just a little piece of information changes our opinion of someone’s character. Take the case of Slugworth in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Now most of us know the story of Willy Wonka – several kids, including our hero Charlie, find special golden tickets in their candy bars which give them a tour of Willy Wonka’s factory and a lifetime supply of chocolate. Slugworth is shown to be a dark, devious rival chocolate maker who approaches each winner to get them to reveal Wonka’s secrets to him after their tour. At the end of the film, when Charlie gives up his ability to share the secret of the everlasting gobstopper, it’s revealed that it was all a test. Slugworth was actually one of Wonka’s employees. This mysterious stranger turns out to be the one who proved Charlie’s worthiness to inherit Wonka’s factory.

*Willy Wonka* is a fun fairy tale, but in real life, it’s sometimes harder to get past our preconceived notions. It’s not as simple as someone saying, “Oh, the villain’s actually the hero” or “the hero’s the villain.” We need more evidence. We need more convincing. If someone who once teased us wants to be our friend, we need to make sure they’ve changed. And if someone we’ve loved is accused of betraying us, we want proof. And truth be told, we don’t always trust God. Even if we believe in Him faithfully, we might consider Him harsh or unjust.

That’s what the last section of Romans 8 is about – convincing, convicting, and encouraging us that God is, in fact, on our side. A lot of our experiences make us anxious that He isn’t. But Paul’s words make us realize that the faithful do not need to worry or fear, no matter what happens in our lives. God loves us, God holds us, and God is faithful to us.

Paul sets up a series of rhetorical questions to help us understand that we are under God’s blessing and not His wrath. The first section of Romans that we studied together explained in detail how the world is under God’s judgment, and how everyone deserves God’s condemnation. But here, we see just how differently God treats those whom He has chosen and given the gift of faith in His son Jesus.

We dealt with the first question last week – “if God is for us, who can be against us?” The world is against us, all right, but the world has no power to do anything to those God has chosen. The rest of the passage proves the truth of this statement, so we’re going to move along to the second question.

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all -- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” This is a powerful statement. The Father did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all. (Keep in mind that Paul is speaking to the church, so when he says “us all,” he means all the faithful throughout all of history.) To understand the weight of what this means, we have to look at the history the Bible records for us.

God does not spare His son, yet God constantly spares us. Rather than immediately fulfilling the promised punishment of death on Adam and Eve when they sin, He spares them and gives them nearly a thousand years. God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac – Isaac, the son of the promise, the son Abraham loved – up on the mountain. Yet when the time came, God spared Isaac and stopped Abraham from killing him. Unlike the pagan, demonic gods that would be worshipped in the region, the one true God did not ask for the sacrifice of children. Instead, God said through Psalm 127 that children were a gift from Him.

When God brings about the final plague on Egypt so Pharaoh will let the Hebrew people go free, He has the Israelites mark their doorposts with the blood of a lamb, and their firstborn are spared. God sent judges, prophets, priests, and kings throughout Israel’s history so that His people would be spared the wrath of their neighbors. Even when they finally are sent into captivity in Babylon for their gross disobedience, God spares them as a people – 70 years later, they are back in their homeland, rebuilding the temple and standing firm on God’s promises.

Yet when it came to Jesus, God did not spare Him. There was only one way that we could be spared God’s eternal wrath – that was for Jesus to take on His perfect, sinless self the burden of our sin on the cross. What kind of incredible love does God have for us that He would constantly spare us the consequences of our sin and place them on His own Son? That’s the point. Will God not give us every good and perfect gift we should have, including the gift of His now risen and reigning son, including the gift of His Holy Spirit? God proved His love for us by sparing nothing He had in order that we might be rescued. His gifts will be poured out on us.

Next question: “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.” Satan is the one who brings accusations against God’s people. In the story of Job, it is Satan who accuses Job of being loyal to God merely because God has blessed him. His very name means “adversary.” He incites people to disobey God’s will, then he brings charges against them after they fall. How nasty is that?

But there’s one problem for Satan. He can bring all the charges he wants against God’s chosen people, God’s children, but it’s not going to matter. Why? Because God is the one who justifies us. Through Jesus, God has declared us righteous in His sight.

Imagine going into court for a traffic ticket, and the city attorney is there, the policeman who issued the citation is there, you know by all rights you're going to lose. And then the judge says, "This ticket has already been paid. You don't own anything and you're free to go." It turns out the judge paid your ticket for you. That's how it works with God. Jesus has already paid your ticket. It doesn't matter what the policeman or the attorney say; the penalty has already been taken care of. And if Satan, a very powerful being with great knowledge of our sins, can't bring an accusation against us, how can anybody else?

Other people do accuse us all the time – they might ask, "how can you consider yourself a Christian when you've done X bad thing?" Yet that's the very point. Christianity isn't about being good; it's about being forgiven, about being chosen by God. Do we deny we have done evil things? No. We regret them deeply. But that doesn't make us any less of a Christian. Christians know just how much they've been forgiven and how little they deserve it. We rejoice because no one can accuse us – not because we have no guilt, but because in Jesus, we have a Savior that has paid every penalty for our sins. In Jesus, we have one who justifies us. No one can accuse us because the sentence of "not guilty" has already been proclaimed over us.

But just in case we aren't sure, Paul goes on and asks another question: "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died -- more than that, who was raised to life -- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." Christ is the one with the right to condemn. He took on humanity; He is fully human; He can be truly just. And through several different parables, Jesus warned all those who would not turn to Him that He would be their judge at the end of time.

Yet is He going to condemn those who have been chosen, who trust Him and follow Him? Absolutely not! Jesus died for us. Jesus was raised to life because, in His perfection, death could not hold Him and God the Father could righteously bring Him back. The whole point of His time on earth was to save us. What's more, Jesus is reigning over us, and He intercedes for us even now. He talks to the Father on our behalf. Why would He condemn those the Father has given Him to be His brothers and sisters throughout eternity? When we think about it that way, it's absurd that He would condemn those of us who follow Him now.

And yet we have to say it because we fear condemnation. We know what we've done deserves it. But the judge died for you. He gave His very life so you could be free. Would He go back on that now? Of course not! If you have true, abiding faith in Christ, it's because that faith was given to you by God, and He wants you. He has chosen you. He is not going to condemn you after all He has done for you. And when we realize this, it moves us to live in ways that God celebrates. We are not under the wrath of God, so let's act in our freedom to serve God. We are forgiven; thus we forgive. We are shown grace; thus we show grace to others.

So we know God will not condemn us after claiming us. But we still worry about being safely in His hands. We worry that things we go through mean He isn't in control. The trials we go through make us concerned that our faith isn't real, that our election isn't sure, that somehow we will not end up by God's side when this world is over.

So Paul moves on to the next question: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” Paul even gives this possibility some weight by quoting Psalm 44:22, which laments the troubles that Israel and her people have gone through. “As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.””

This one, Paul answers directly, saying, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” Here’s the thing: “more than conquerors” in the Greek is a single word, *hupernikomen*. It’s a unique word that appears nowhere else in Scripture. Paul is using a kind of hyperbole here by smashing two words together – *huper* which means “above” or “super” or “beyond” or “total,” and *nikomen* which means “to conquer” or “those who conquer.” In our modern world, do you know what might be the best, most relatable word that could translate this term? It’s superhero.

Because what does a superhero do? A superhero conquers enemies impossible for the average person to face off against. Who else can stop Lex Luther but Superman, the Joker but Batman, the Green Goblin but Spiderman? Our culture is inundated with stories of fictional superheroes that take on the world’s problems because we desperately want them to exist, and we know they don’t. We indulge in the fantasy and then walk out of the movie theater and go back to the real world where we aren’t sure we’ll have enough money to pay the bills and enough courage to deal with work on Monday and enough strength to face all the problems we have.

But you know what? We are superheroes because we’re followers of the true Superhero. What do modern superheroes do? They level cities. They zap bad guys with X-ray vision. They swing between buildings. They cause as much destruction as they stop. But Jesus? He’s a real superhero. He healed entire cities worth of people. He fed thousands of hungry people. He taught people the truth. And when the time came, he died to save billions of people from eternal death. He returned to life after His mission was complete. Now that’s a superhero worth more than a movie ticket!

And you know what? John 14:12 records some of Jesus’ last words to His disciples, and He told them at the Last Supper, “Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.” Because we have been given the Holy Spirit, we can do incredible things – potentially even greater works than Jesus did! You might not feed the thousands, but teaching the thousands? Baptizing them in Jesus’ name? Absolutely we do that!

Have you ever thought of yourself as God’s superhero? Probably not. I don’t think that way. But maybe it’s because we haven’t been taught it. Maybe we haven’t recognized it. Because in ourselves, we’re incredibly weak. But we are superheroes, we are more than conquerors, through Him who loved us. Our power comes through Jesus alone. He is the source of every strength we have. But that strength is more than enough.

And because we're God's superheroes, what can separate us from the love of Christ? NOTHING. His love is permanently, forever, eternally ours. So let's make this really personal. We've all known each other for years. When we hear these things, I want us to say "no." Let's hear it for ourselves, even practice once. Brace yourself, but here's the truth.

Can Tracy's headaches separate her from the love of Christ? No. Can Annetta's tremors separate her from the love of Christ? No. Can Pam's knees and my knees separate us from the love of Christ? No. Can autism or scoliosis or ADD or learning disabilities separate our kids from the love of Christ? No. Can an empty bank account or an unfaithful spouse or getting fired from our job separate us from the love of Christ? No. Do anything of these things mean that God doesn't love us or is punishing us? No. We are hyper-conquerors, we are superheroes, all because of Jesus.

And you know what? That list is barely scratching the surface. Because Paul sums it all up in my own personal favorite verse from the whole Bible: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Does Paul leave anything out? No, nothing. A close look at the Greek gives us even greater depth. The "demons" that Paul references are powers and principalities with any sort of spiritual standing. This not only includes any powers of darkness like demons, but it also includes the nations and their rulers, kings, presidents, dictators. The boundaries of space and time itself hold no power to keep us from God.

Death will be the last enemy destroyed, we read in 1 Corinthians 15. Yet it can't do a thing to keep us away from the love of God. Sometimes we think that life itself keeps us from God; we wish that we could be done with this life so we could be closer to our Savior. But you know what? In this life, we still can know the love of God. We won't be separated from it. I think of dear Andrew Brunson who we pray for every week, imprisoned over a year now for his faith. Those prison bars can't keep God's love away from him.

Friends, what does this mean for us? We should leave here today with a spring in our step and a smile on our faces and a hug for the lonely and a gift for the hungry and a hope for the hopeless. Because we are LOVED. We are accepted. We are redeemed. And nothing is going to change that. We got the first small dose of it last week, but now we know it full force. If this promise can't get you thankful and living in gratitude towards God, I don't know what will. Because if you believe in Jesus, if you trust in Him with all your heart, there is nothing more secure than your salvation and nothing more pure and true than God's love for you. Leave here today knowing it, celebrating it, and sharing it.