

The Conquering Power of Christ

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[0:00] If you have a copy of the Scriptures with you, then I'd like you to open your Bibles up to Romans chapter 8.

! If you're using one of the Bibles that we have scattered around in the chairs, and you're welcome to simply turn to page 945. We have been in Romans chapter 8 now for three months, and so we are coming to the conclusion of chapter 8 before we move ahead into chapter 9.

But Romans chapter 8 ends on a high note. We began to sing that note last week, and now we're going to finish this week with seeing Paul's eruption of praise here at the end of Romans chapter 8. And so we're going to jump in in verse 35, read down to the end in verse 39, and I'd love you guys if you would stand with me in honor of God's Word. Paul writes, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long.

[1:18] We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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.

We are thankful, Father, for these great words. We are thankful that You have not left us with an empty hope, but You have left us with a great, high hope in the love that You have for us displayed through the work of Your Son.

So help us now to more greatly appreciate all that You've done for us in Christ. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat.

I know a lot of you, probably as kids, read the book Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. I used to love that book when I was a kid.

[2:30] In fact, they made a movie that I'll say was somewhat loosely based on the book a couple of years ago because I don't know how you can't otherwise turn that kind of a book into an entire two-hour movie.

So it has to be fairly loose. But the book itself was really funny. And I don't know how many times I read that book when I was a little kid, but it's simply the story of a kid named Alexander who has just a terrible day all the way around.

Just one thing after another tends to happen to him. And throughout the day, he's just despondent. Everything's going wrong. It begins because he wakes up with gum in his hair.

And from there, it just gets worse. I mean, he has to go to the dentist. He has a bad day at the dentist. He opens up his lunch at school. There's no dessert in his lunch. It's just all of these little things compiled together to just sort of ruin his day.

Now, he's not really the best example for a kid on how to respond to those things because he's mad throughout most of the book. He's just angry the whole time. When he opens up his lunch and there's no dessert, he blames it on his mom and he's mad at his mom.

[3:32] So he's not exactly a good example for any kids to follow as they encounter these things. But the point of the book is to say, kind of at the end of the book is, everybody has bad days. Everybody experiences these things.

Sometimes there's something small, like not having dessert in your lunch or getting something stuck in your hair. Sometimes it's something massive and huge. But a part of being a human being in the world in which we live, which we know has fallen, is just the simple fact that bad things are going to happen to us.

Unfortunate events are going to befall us. And we have seen that reality shown to us over and over again as we have walked through the latter half of Romans chapter 8.

We know that that's a reality. We know that it is true that there will be people, there will be events, there will be forces arrayed against us, that if they could, they would cause us to despair entirely and give up completely on life and the things that we are trying to accomplish.

Paul never hides that reality from us. He helps us to see, in fact, more clearly that that reality exists because there are those of us who live most of our lives sort of contained within a safety bubble, in a bit of a cocoon.

[4:48] And occasionally trouble will intrude upon our safety zone. But for most of the part, our lives are lived in relative isolation from the real deep pain that others feel.

But then there will inevitably come the day when suddenly the bubble bursts, when the cocoon is broken open and you are exposed to a painful world. And Paul wants us to not only know how to deal with that kind of a world, but he wants us to know why we can deal with that kind of a world. He wants us to know why we should not fear that those things that befall us might ultimately triumph over us. And so last week, one of the things we saw as we began this sort of journey toward the end of chapter 8, we saw Paul ask three who questions.

And he asks more than three questions, but he asks three who questions. He asks who can be against us or who can stand against us. He asks who can successfully bring any charge against us if we belong to the elect.

Then he asks us who can condemn us. And of course, the answer to all three of those questions as we saw last week was no one. No one and nothing can ultimately successfully stand against us.

[6:02] No one and nothing, if we belong to Christ, can bring a charge against us that will stick in God's court. No one can ultimately condemn us if we have been declared righteous by God himself.

All three of those questions, those who questions last week, were sort of located in the courtroom. That was the setting that we were to picture as we asked and answered those questions and as we pondered Paul's answers to those questions.

We imagined ourselves to be in sort of the divine courtroom asking, in this place, can anyone successfully stand against us?

No. In this place, in God's tribunal, can anyone bring against us a charge? Can they level a charge against us that will stick? No, they cannot.

In this courtroom, can anyone bring condemnation upon us? No. No. No, they cannot if we belong to Christ and His righteousness has been credited to our account.

[7:03] All of that is legal courtroom type language. Good language. Language that we should rejoice over. Language that we should celebrate in. And in fact, I think that Paul is celebrating in that type of language.

But now, this morning, we're going to see him ask a fourth and final who question. But he leaves the courtroom scene. No longer are we discussing legal matters of our standing before God.

But now he turns things toward the relational. And he asks the question, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

He rewords that in some ways at the end of our passage, where he speaks of us being separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. But those are really two ways of saying the exact same thing.

Who will be able to tear us asunder from God's love? Now before we consider the ways in which Paul elaborates on his answer to that question, because the answer again is a resounding no one and nothing.

[8:09] These are all rhetorical questions that Paul doesn't have to give a clear, straight answer to, because the answer is clear in the question itself. The answer to all of them is no one, nothing, no one can separate us from the love of God.

But before we ponder Paul's elaboration on that answer, I want us to first consider the question itself. Consider what we may sort of think to be obvious, and that is, what does he mean when he speaks of the love of Christ, or the love of God for us in Christ Jesus?

What love is he speaking of there? Because I think if we don't pay careful attention to the context of this passage, to the context of Romans chapter 8, or even of Romans as a whole, we might miss the point here.

The point here is not that God will not cease to have feelings of love toward us, in the sense that he has feelings of love toward all of those that he has created. We know there is a sense in which God loves the whole world, for God so loved the world, we're told by John in the most famous verse in the Bible.

We know that, but what Paul is speaking of here in Romans chapter 8 is a more specific type of love, a directed love. This is the saving love of God, directed toward those that he calls later in our text, or earlier in our text, the elect.

[9 : 31] This is God's love that saves us and rescues us and delivers us from our sins. This is not sort of a vague sense of love that God has, that we might imagine God having for the whole world.

This is specific. This is God's targeted love toward those that belong to him, that he has called out for himself. And so the question is, can anything separate us, tear us asunder from that kind of love?

The answer, of course, is no. But why? The more we come to ponder and understand the nature of this love, the more we see why the answer is such a clear, unequivocal no.

The love of God displayed for us in Christ. One of the things that is surprising as you work your way through Romans, if you begin to do word searches on things, and that's something that everybody can do today with the internet.

Anybody can go in and click on a given word, and you can recall up every instance in which that word, in the original language, occurs in the text. If you know the right websites to go to, it's not complicated, it's not difficult.

[10 : 41] One of the things that you might find surprising, if you do something like that, is how infrequently in the book of Romans, Paul actually mentions the love of God for people.

How infrequently he uses that terminology. Now the concept permeates the book of Romans. All of Romans is predicated on the fact that God loves sinners and has sent His Son to die in the place of sinners.

He has done things to make us right with Him. So the concept permeates Romans, but the language itself is curiously absent from most of the chapters of this book.

But one place where it's very clear is in chapter 5. So I want you to turn back a page or two in your Bibles to Romans chapter 5, verse 8. God shows or demonstrates His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So here it is. Here's the love of God on display for us. God is showing us His love. And how does He do it? He does it by sending His Son to die in the place of unworthy sinners like you and like me.

[11 : 52] But move up a few verses. And you'll see the love of God again in Romans 5, verse 5. Paul says, Hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

So objectively, the love of God is known by us because Christ died in our place. That's a display of love. You can see in history an event that took place in which Christ bore your sins, proof of His love.

But subjectively, we come to experience and know that love because the Spirit of God has been poured into our hearts. And He makes that reality, the love behind that demonstration, real to us. We know it and we feel it and we experience it because of the Spirit's work. So Jesus in His death demonstrates the love of God for us, but the Spirit in His indwelling makes us to know it personally, fully, finally, in a real, tangible way for us.

And so when Paul says that nobody can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ, he has in mind this love of God that saves us, that we know because of Christ's death, and that we experience because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

[13 : 10] Now that's not a digression because I'm bringing these two things together of the work of Christ, the work of the Spirit, to help us sense and know what Christ has accomplished because though the language of love per se doesn't occur earlier in chapter 8, the work of the Son and the Spirit in terms similar to Romans chapter 5 is found earlier in chapter 8.

This I think will clue us in on what Paul has in mind by the love of God in Christ. Move up in Romans chapter 8 to a passage we've had opportunity to return to on a few occasions here.

Verse 15. Paul says, You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

So now the Spirit is doing a work in which He makes known to us the fatherhood of God over us. Now, we've said and we've seen in the past as we covered these verses that the fatherhood of God here is not sort of a universal fatherhood over mankind.

No. God becomes our father when we become spiritual brothers of Jesus through faith in Christ. Then Christ's father becomes our father.

[14 : 30] And Paul says that the Holy Spirit helps us to sense and know and feel and cry out to God as father. So the work of Christ on our behalf makes it possible for God to become our father.

But the Spirit bears witness to the fatherhood of God over us because of our union with Jesus. You see how Romans 5 is so similar to Romans 8 here. So when Paul asks the question, Who can separate us?

Who can tear us asunder from God's love or from Christ's love or God's love in Christ? And the answer comes back as a resounding no.

What we are to really hear in all of this is, Who can sever the relationship that we now have with God by virtue of our faith in Jesus? Who can tear us away from our Heavenly Father?

Who can now revoke our adoption into His family? Now the answer comes back. Nothing, no one in all of creation can revoke our status as God's children now.

[15 : 40] That's the love of God displayed. Yes, displayed in the cross of Christ as He bears our sins, but displayed in our adoption because Jesus has made a way for us to become children of His Father.

And nothing can sever that new relationship. Nothing can take someone who is a child of God and place them in another category where they are no longer related to God as Father.

Nothing can. And Paul is comprehensive in this nothing. Notice how he begins to describe the things that might come against you, that you might be tempted to think, Oh, that could be a barrier. That could be a dividing point. Notice the things that he says back to Romans chapter 8. He elaborates on his question. Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Now these are all overwhelmingly negative images. Some of them are broad in their scope like tribulation, like distress, like danger.

[16 : 48] Some of them are more specific like famine, persecution, the sword, nakedness. These are things, though, that for Paul, they're not concepts that exist out there.

Things that might happen to us. Things that could befall the truly unfortunate follower of Christ. No, these are things that Paul has himself personally experienced in his life.

He knows about these things. Hold your place in Romans 8 and turn over to 2 Corinthians chapter 11. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11, verse 24, Paul recounts some of the very things that he mentions in chapter 8.

But not as mere possibilities, but as real experiences that he has had in his life. Verse 24, Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.

Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea.

[17 : 52] On frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

All these things Paul really experienced. So when he says, can any of these things separate us? And he comes back with the answer, no. He knows that by experience he has borne persecution. He has gone through famine personally. He has been beaten himself. He has faced the sword and he will once again face the sword when his head is removed from his body at the end of his life. He knows. These are not potentialities. These are not possibilities. These are things that he has been through. And his own real personal testimony at the end of all this is not of one of these things.

It can separate God's children from him. Not one of these things can sever your relationship with the Father. Not one of these things can remove his saving love from you.

[19 : 09] And then, of course, he elaborates again. If you move down further in our passage to verse 38, he elaborates again. Because in case you read through that list and you think, oh man, I've never dealt with any of those things.

Thank goodness I don't have the experience of Paul. And he becomes even more broad later in the passage. Verse 38, I'm sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers 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.

In other words, if you think, well, my burdens that I bear look nothing like the Apostle Paul's. They don't come in the form of a sword. They don't come in the form of direct, overt persecution.

I haven't been stoned. I haven't been beaten with rods. I've never been without clothing. I've never been in the midst of a famine and without food. I don't connect to the ways in which Paul elaborates on this.

These aren't the struggles that I'm facing. I'm struggling with other things. I'm struggling with family problems. I'm struggling with emotional turmoil because my children are wavered, because my children have rejected the Lord, or because my grandchildren are living lives that I know aren't in accord with the Word of God, and that creates a kind of turmoil inside of me.

[20 : 29] Or I'm dealing with cancer and chemo treatments and radiation. Those are the things that affect me. Those don't seem to be in Paul's view here when he mentions his sufferings, and yet everything is included when he says neither death nor life.

Not angels or rulers. Not things happening now in the present. Not anything that might happen in the future. There are no powers that exist in the whole created world that could successfully separate us from God's love.

Nothing. There's nowhere, no height, no depth. There's no place where there is something found that could separate us from His love. And in case you still doubt, not anything else in all of creation. It's comprehensive. There is nothing that can sever the relationship that we now have with God because He is our Father. Nothing in all creation.

Now, the only question that really remains, I think, for us this morning is, why? In light of the fact that there is incredible suffering in the world, and in light of the fact that some of us will at some point endure things that seem to be beyond our capacity to bear, why would Paul say that it's not possible for any of these things?

[21 : 58] And if God so loves us, why are these things even happening to us? Why would the saving love of God on my behalf not save me from these things and not just from His wrath?

A lot of why questions here. And Paul doesn't leave those questions unanswered. He deals with those in the middle of our passage. There are a lot of commentators, as I read this week, that believe that verse 36 is almost just kind of an aside.

Just put it in parentheses. It really has nothing to do with the main point. Paul just wanted to throw an Old Testament passage in there to give some weight to his argument. But I don't think that's the case. Look at verse 36 carefully.

He says, after asking the question, as it is written, for your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

Now that is a quotation from Psalm 44. And so I really want you to see this in its original context. So I'd like you to hold your place in Romans 8 and turn all the way back to Psalm 44, which if you're using one of our Bibles in the chairs, it's on page 470.

[23 : 04] But in Psalm 44, the psalmist cries out to God for help and for deliverance in the midst of incredible suffering. And if you don't read through the whole psalm, or if you don't read the psalm carefully, you could assume that perhaps the suffering is due to just the circumstances of life.

It just kind of happened. It wasn't a plan. It wasn't anything. It just sort of happened. Or you might be tempted to think, well, maybe the suffering happens in Psalm 44 because the psalmist deserved it, or Israel, of whom the psalmist speaks.

Maybe this was in the cycle of rebellion that Israel experienced, and so suffering is brought in to cause them to repent. But that's not the case in either situation.

First of all, Psalm 44 shows us that the suffering that is experienced by Israel and then by believers now in Romans 8, as Paul cites it, is a suffering that is brought by the hand of God.

Notice verse 11 in Psalm 44. Therefore, you, speaking to God, you have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations.

[24 : 15] You, Lord, have done this. You have made us sheep. So when he says later on that we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered, that's because God so regards them. You made us like sheep to be slaughtered, God.

Verse 19. Yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death. So the suffering that comes in Psalm 44 and in Romans chapter 8 is not a suffering that just happens.

It is a suffering that comes by the hand of God. God is sovereignly involved in all of these things that Paul mentions. He's not distant. He's not a cosmic janitor who comes up behind the mess to clean it up and make something good out of it.

No. He's on the front end. But not only that, but we see here in Psalm 44 that the suffering spoken of is not punishment for some sin that Israel has committed.

I say that because of verse 17. The psalmist says, all this has come upon us. He's listed all these sufferings. Though we have not forgotten you and we have not been false to your covenant, our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way.

[25 : 29] So all these things, Lord, you have brought into our lives and yet you've not done it because we've wandered away. We haven't violated the covenant. We haven't forgotten you and your promises. We are being faithful to you and yet you've brought into our lives these great sufferings.

It's the cry of the psalmist. Psalm ends with a prayer of the psalmist where he says in verse 26, rise up, come to our help, redeem us, now mark this, redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. Or maybe better translated, redeem us for the sake of your covenant love, your covenant commitment to us. Paul doesn't simply cite verse 22 in Romans chapter 8 because he wants to throw an Old Testament reference into the midst of his argument.

He cites verse 22 of Psalm 44 because he wants us to recognize in the midst of all of this suffering that we experience, that while some of our suffering at times does come because we wander away in sin and the book of Hebrews tells us that God disciplines His children, that is true.

Still, he wants us to recognize and be aware that we don't immediately have to conclude every time we suffer, oh, where do I need to repent? What have I done wrong? That can be the case.

[26 : 57] We might need to repent of something. God might be disciplining us, but that's not always the case. So many times, our initial reaction to suffering is just to begin to confess anything that we can imagine that we might have possibly done to bring this upon ourselves.

But Psalm 44 says that Israel had done nothing at this point in our history to bring this suffering and yet God has brought it. And Paul is saying you may have done nothing and yet God has brought the suffering into your life.

The suffering that happens to you is not just happenstance. It comes from the hand of God, but that doesn't necessarily mean that God is punishing you in this moment.

So what is He doing? Why would Paul cite this passage? Why would he use such graphic language of the slaughtered sheep? Throat slit, blood spilled.

Why use this language? Why draw our attention to that psalm? Why in the midst of this beautiful passage about the love of God would he bring in this terrible, terrible language about slaughtered sheep?

[28 : 02] Why? Because it's crucial to us understanding verse 37. Verse 37 helps us to see why all of our sufferings ultimately cannot separate us from the love of God.

And the reason is because in them, in the midst of our sufferings, we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us, through Him who loved us. In other words, in the midst of our suffering, God does such a work that we come out of it victorious.

This phrase, that's really one word in Greek translated more than conquerors, is not an easy word to translate because it simply means that we've won.

We are the victors. And yet there's this prefix attached to the front of it that means something like super. We're the super winners. We're the super victors. We're more than just winners.

We've conquered. We've made it through and come out on the other side with the trophy. We've won against this suffering. So Paul says, you can't be separated from the love of God even by all these things because you will be victorious over these things.

[29 : 13] But the quote of Psalm 44 helps us to see how all of that happens. How do we become victorious? How? Because these sufferings are brought into our lives by the sovereign hand of God so that they might confirm our union with Jesus and thereby confirm our adoption into God's family and His love toward us.

Where do I come up with that? I come up with it from chapter 8 verse 17 where he says that if we are children then we are heirs. Heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ now highlight this portion. Provided that we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him. Provided that we suffer with Him. In other words, you're finally fully being confirmed as an heir is contingent upon your suffering with Christ.

Does the suffering make you an heir? No, but the suffering demonstrates that you are an heir. And so God sovereignly brings suffering into our life which confirms our being co-heirs with Christ.

It confirms that God is indeed our Father because in our union with Christ we experience the same kinds of things that He experienced in His earthly life. We are really and truly His spiritual brothers suffering with Him and alongside Him in our own sufferings.

[30 : 49] So that the picture that Paul paints here at the end of Romans chapter 8 is you can have great hope. You can have the love of God as a sure and firm and steadfast rock beneath your feet and not merely some feel-good saying but it can be a rock beneath your feet because God confirms you in His saving love by allowing you indeed sovereignly sending you to suffer with Jesus.

Jesus. And you know in the middle of that He is my brother. His Father is my Father.

And no matter what comes against me all those things they don't tear me away from Him. They further confirm that I am in fact with Him and in Him.

Suffering is not a thing to be feared for the follower of Jesus. It's not a thing to be run away from whether it be something small and you're just having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

Or whether it be something immense and life-changing. It is not something to be feared not something to be run away from. It is the sovereign goodness of God on display in a fallen world to confirm our union with Jesus and ought to be rejoiced in.

[32 : 15] That's what James says. James says, Count it all joy, my brothers, when you endure various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. In other words, all these things confirm your union with Jesus.

All of them. Let's pray.