

Romans 8:35-39

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither 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.”

Dear children of God who know Christ's love. Amen

And the winner is...! We wait for the envelope, it is opened, and we are told the winner of some great and important prize. Or this week the Olympics have started, and we see those who win the gold and the bronze and the silver. They are considered to be the best of the best in the entire world. We wonder if we can ever match up. We wonder to ourselves if we ever are going to be winners or champions or victorious.

Because of our Christian faith we live lives that are humble lives, not grabbing for the gold as it were. At times we might not consider ourselves as winners, as champions. Yet, this morning the Lord reminds us that we are more than that.

Sermon Theme: We Are More Than Conquerors!

- 1. In the face of trials**
- 2. By the victory of Jesus**

1. In the face of trials

Our text today begins with a question, a question that is easily answered. Paul writes in verse 35: **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”** Now Paul knew in his heart and believed because of faith that no one could separate him from the love of Christ. When we look at Paul's life, we note his persecuted life. Paul had been put into prison. Paul had been stoned and left for dead. In the midst of all that those who oppose Christ could not separate the love of Christ from him. Paul says no one can.

Then he describes a list that says that nothing can sever Christ's love from the believer. We heard this list and as you listen to it again, you will note that it gets progressively worse: **“Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”** Shall these separate us from God's love? Paul starts with **"trouble,"** the run-of-the-mill, daily troubles, troubles that affect every believer such as stress and worry. As trouble goes on, it can increase in intensity and leads to **"hardship."** This hardship might come about because people are so worried and so stressful that they begin to not function properly.

The list goes on to the next one that says, **"persecution."** In our day and age we probably don't suffer as much persecution physically as these believers did. In the early church we know that from time to time the government stood opposed to Christianity; and from time to time the believers were driven out of their

homes and out of their countries. Their possessions were taken. Shall such severe persecution separate us from the love of Christ? The next listing is "**famine or nakedness.**" When these believers had to leave everything behind because of persecution, they will be hungry, famine. They can't take their food or clothing with them, naked. Shall that separate us from the love of Christ?

Then Paul says "**danger.**" Even that word strikes fear in the hearts of men. Then he adds "**sword.**" The sword was the most lethal street weapon during the time of Jesus. So when he says "sword," he meant death. Can all of these things separate us? Of all of these trials that these believers would face and Paul also faced, believers could and would still love God and God still loved him. They could not change that fact.

Another reality is when Paul quotes Psalm 44: "**As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."** Paul says persecution and famine and hardship and troubles would be part of the way of a Christian's life. Paul says just like sheep we face death all day long. We are ready to be slaughtered for the sake of Christ. There he laid it out for these believers. We have to remember that when Paul wrote to these believers in Rome, they were new believers. They now embraced Christ, and Christ love for them. Some now thought their life was going to be a path of ease and luxury. Paul said to them, "No, not necessarily; but you are more than conquerors because Christ loves you.

That is the point God wants us to remember today. In our day-to-day living and in the years of our living and decades and generations of our living, we are going to face different difficulties in our lives. We may even face persecution. We may even face great danger, but the love of Christ overcomes all of those problems. We have to remind ourselves that we are not exempt. We dare not to think, "Well, we are believers, and now the Lord smiles on us so graciously and abundantly that life is just a bed of roses." It is not. Instead, he says, we are like sheep ready to be slaughtered.

Why is that? On this side of heaven we live in a world that is filled with sin and sin affects all of us. The result of sin is something we live with day after day and year after year, generation after generation until the very end of time. We cannot escape sin and its effects can't escape us. There are people who do not love God and do not love those who love God. Because of that, there is always a struggle between believers and unbelievers, between what is right and what is wrong. Therefore we are going to face trials. We are going to run into difficulties, because we take a stand on what is right--what God says is right and not what we say is right. What happens? Paul describes it in Corinthians: "**We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:8,9).** He says we face all of these trials, and we are perplexed, crushed, persecuted; but we are more than conquerors.

We are not destroyed. God is on the side of what is right and good. We are more than conquerors even though we will face trials. The Lord now tells us as believers a very hard thing. The Lord says these trials come and go, and we need not lament them. But instead, we should realize they are to our good. Listen to James: "**Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance" (James 1:2,3).** Probably there are not many of us, if any of us, would think that the trials that we face, the many heartaches, sorrows and many of the difficulties in life bring us great joy. Yet, the Lord says to consider it joy when we face difficulties and hardships, because then your faith is strengthened. Your faith provides perseverance in other words, patience.

In the face of trials we learn that we can't put our confidence in ourselves, but instead in God. The

apostle Paul had a thorn in his side and asked the Lord to take it away from him. But the Lord said, "**My grace is sufficient for you.**" The Lord says that to us today. We are more than conquerors when we face all trials because God's grace is sufficient for each of us. Believers are more than conquerors in the face of all trials because of and by and through the victory of Jesus Christ our Savior.

2. By the Victory of Jesus

Paul had asked the question, "Who is going to separate us from God's love?" Then he makes the list of things that cannot. Then he comes to the middle of our text, which is our theme, and he says: "**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**" Paul realized that as he made his missionary journeys and as he was met with opposition and persecution, as he was kicked out of the synagogues, as he was driven out of the cities, that still God loved him. Paul was still to proclaim God's message. Paul says, "We are more than conquerors."

Our text contains another list, a longer list: "**For I am convinced...**" Paul uses the strong word of conviction -- he didn't just think or hope or imagine concerning God's power and love. "**...that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons...**" Paul is talking about the things which can't separate him from God's love whether Paul is in the midst of life or death. Paul mentions neither good angels nor bad angels (demons) are greater than God's love.

"**...neither the present nor the future....**" There are no dimension of time that are going to separate Paul from God's love. "**...nor any powers...**" Miracles or powers that angels or demons use cannot separate a believer from God's love. Even though in the last days they try to deceive the elect, if that were possible. "**neither height nor depth...**" There are no dimensions of space going to separate Paul from God's great love. "**...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" Is there anything in creation that can separate a believer from God's love? God created all things and is in control of all things. God's love is eternal.

Truly there is one thing that can separate man from God's love. That one thing is man himself. Whenever a person rejects God and his Word -- when a person hardens his heart saying, "Enough is enough. I am not going to believe:" then he cuts himself off from God's love. When this person hardens his heart often enough and long enough, finally, God is left with no choice but to separate him from love.

Paul writes: "**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.**" Paul now connects God's love together with his Son, Jesus. Paul reminds these believers by the power of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they are connected with God himself. There is nothing that is able to separate the believer from God's love through Christ.

This is not a new message. It was a message that Paul needed to emphasize to these new believers. As new believers, they did not know all of the Old Testament of Scripture. They did not know all of the Old Testament promises that were made to a Jewish nation. We have studied the Old Testament. We have seen the promises of God. Listen to this from Isaiah: "**So this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will**

never be dismayed'" (Isaiah 28:16). Isaiah is saying what Paul is saying. We are more than conquerors because of the victory of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Cornerstone of the Christian church. Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our church, and we build on the foundation of the Apostles and the Prophets of Scripture and Scripture alone. When we build on this foundation and when we do it faithfully; and we begin to see bit-by-bit God's great love for us. We begin to understand little by little, yes, we are more than conquerors.

We are more than conquerors through the love of God shown through his Son Jesus Christ to each one of us in the forgiveness of sins. How do we come to this great revelation and this understanding of God's free grace? Sin is in this world and infects mankind. Therefore this world is not such a pleasant place to live in. In this midst of all this we, like Paul, are convinced that we are more than conquerors. We know, believe and are convinced of this powerful truth by faith. Convinced by faith that comes to us by grace. John writes: **"Everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).** Today, we thank God and praise the Lord that He has given us faith. In each one of us God has planted that seed of the Word of God until it has sprung up and bore abundant fruit – faith. All of this by God's free grace, so we can say boldly and confidently with the Apostle Paul: "I am convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love!"

We are more than conquerors, not just champions. We are more than conquerors in the midst of life and even at the end of life. In the resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 says: **"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:56,57).** Yes, there is sadness at death. This sadness is the sting of death and the power of the law. But there is also victory even in the midst of sadness. This victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ. Eternal life is God's free gift to every believer. We are more than conquerors.

The winner is _____ you and I and every believer! We are the winners. We are victorious. As you hear the news in the next few weeks, you will hear about the Olympic champions. The news will be about those who have received the gold medals, the silver and the bronze. Yet, all of those medals tarnish and fade away. All those who collect their awards at ceremonies as winners also fade away. But we have a crown that does not fade away, a crown that lasts forever. We are more than conquerors, not by our own effort or desire, but by God's great choice upon us. Oh yes, we are going to face trials and some may be severe and difficult; but we are more than conquerors through the victory of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Jesus encouraged his disciples and today us, Jesus' modern-day disciples: **"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).** The Lord guarantees that we are more than conquerors. We are going to have trouble in this world, but Jesus as the Savior has over-come the world. Because of Jesus' victory, we are victorious. We are more than conquerors able to face all of our trials knowing that Jesus is victorious. Since Jesus is victorious, we are victorious. We are even more than victorious, more than champions. We are more than conquerors over sin, over the devil and finally death itself. We are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen