

28th July 2020

A Secured Future

Bible Reading: Romans 8:26-39

Thank you for your prayers for our church family as we navigate our way through this lockdown period. How is it going working through the directory? Please remember to make a phone call or two each week to keep in touch with each other.

We have a grandson who celebrates his 21st birthday this week. Our planned visit to a restaurant for the celebration has been put on hold! His grandfather will drop in a cake, and a montage of photos representing his 21 years compiled by Nola. The family will meet on zoom on Tuesday evening.

Things are certainly different, aren't they?

Nola had some good news about her eye during the week. The calcified bleed in the left eye that she was told was permanent and untreatable has significantly reduced. Praise the Lord! Thank you so much for your faithful prayers.

Our reading from Romans today includes some of the most familiar and comforting words we have from the apostle Paul. Nearly every sentence is a new way of stating the promise that God has not abandoned "us" and is in fact working – across the past, present, and future – on our behalf.

Some have called this final section of Romans 8 the "crescendo" of the book of Romans. One author describes it as "*the apostle soaring to sublime heights unequaled elsewhere in the New Testament.*" In these verses Paul is summing up much of what he has asserted in the earlier chapters of this letter:

- that God's love is most definitively displayed on the cross (5:8, 8:32),
- that the love of God has been poured into our hearts through the gift of the Holy Spirit (5:5)
- God invites us to receive a spirit of adoption pronouncing us children of God (8:16),
- that God's love promises ultimately to redeem us, body and soul (8:11, 23),
- and offers us the opportunity to share in the glory to come (8:18).

During a time of tremendous persecution, these affirmations of faith and words of assurance offered hope initially to the believers in Rome, and now to all followers of Jesus.

1. Our help for our Weaknesses - The Holy Spirit: v26 & 27

The Holy Spirit strengthens us in our weakness. That's the first thing that we can learn today. My goodness, how wonderful is that? We all have weaknesses, we know that. I have weaknesses. You have weaknesses. Is there anybody reading this today that doesn't have any weaknesses? We all have weaknesses, and the enemy would like us to believe that because of those weaknesses, we are unable to do certain things. But the Bible clearly teaches us that God strengthens us in our weaknesses, and it's through the Holy Spirit who is with us all the time.

When Jesus left the earth and ascended on high, he said, You're really better off that I go away because I'm going to send you another helper, a comforter, to be with you and in you all the time. Then these verses begin to talk about prayer. And we all agree that prayer is really important, at least it should be, because prayer is actually one of the most powerful privileges that we have from God.

It's a privilege to be able to pray. It's not something we have to do. We don't get brownie points with God when we do. It's a privilege. And when you think about that you can go to your Heavenly Father and ask him for absolutely anything, who wouldn't want to pray? But I think here again the enemy tries to convince us that we're not praying right, we're not praying long enough, we're not saying the right thing, maybe we're not in the right position.

Have any of you ever, even thought you're committed to prayer, then had the enemy tell you those lies that, "Well, that wasn't right. You didn't...God is not interested in that..." you know what I mean? I've been through that at times. But these scriptures kind of debunk that whole theory because it says that, *"the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans"*.

I'd really like to stop right there just a minute because I think that many times, God puts things in our heart that he wants us to be bold enough to ask for, and yet the enemy comes right behind and says, "Well, you don't deserve that. You're not worthy of that help. I mean, look at how bad you acted just yesterday. Who do you think you are to pray"?

So, we need to really focus on this, and hold on to the fact that the Holy Spirit helps us offer our prayers worthily. Not that we're worthy in ourselves, but through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, we can learn that when we come to God, we need to come boldly to the throne in the name of Jesus. We don't pray in our own name, but we pray in the name of Jesus.

I think that if we're really trusting that the Holy Spirit prays through us, that he knows the perfect will of God, and that we're depending on him to strengthen us in our weaknesses, I think even if I'm walking around, and I'm feeling, like, overwhelmed, and I go, "Ugh"! I think even that, according to what I'm reading, an uttering, a groaning, something I don't even really understand, still the Holy Spirit knows what's behind that, what my need is. I don't have to put it into a perfect little rhyming, eloquent prayer that sounds very religious. I can just go, "Ugh"! Some us are groaning all day long, but we're groaning in the wrong way. God wants us to do a holy groan, not an unholy groan where we think that, we just need to say, "God, this is what I want, and I want it now!

And then he goes on in v27, *"And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God"*. So, every time we start to pray, we need to say, "Now, Father, in Jesus' name I come to you through the Holy Spirit. I'm trusting that the Holy Spirit is aiding me and helping me. And I know that I can't pray a perfect prayer, but I believe the Holy Spirit is going to take my prayer and he's going to fix it all up before it gets to you. And when you hear it, you're going to give me the exact right thing that I need".

2. Our Purpose – Conformed to the Image of Jesus: v28-30

Romans 8:28. It can be translated several different ways. I like our NIV translation which says: *"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* I like this translation because it reminds us of three important things:

- a) God works! God is with us in all the messiness of our lives. Picture a God who stoops down, in overalls, boots, and bandana to plow a field or plant a garden. Genesis tells us that God worked hard those 6 days of creation, so hard that on the 7th day God needed to rest – setting aside one day each week as Sabbath, for rest and worship. When you stop to remember that the word "work" and the word "worship" are from the same root word, you realize that our work should be one of the ways we worship God and our worship should overflow into our work. There should be a symbiotic relationship between the two.
- b) The second thing to notice in this verse is that God is at work for our "good" in the world. So often we take this for granted. And sadly, we often call natural disasters "acts of God." A better way to think of it is that God is working for good during times of trial or tragedy, often through the people who are bringing good out of a bad situation, offering medical aid, food, and shelter. Much of what we know of God is a mystery, but one thing we can take confidence in is that God is at work for good in the world.

- c) Lastly, Romans 8:28 reminds us that there is a cooperative relationship between God and humans, that God works with those who have been “called according to his purpose.” God does not inflict things on us and remain distant; God’s desire is to work with us to bring about the good. That means there is responsibility on our part – not only to be God’s hands and feet in the world but to live as consistently as possible in accordance with God’s purposes. And we know from the final verse of chapter 8 that God’s greatest purpose is love. So, we are called to love God first and foremost, and as a result, we will then love our neighbour as ourselves.

Now, v29 *“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters”*. You know, Jesus didn’t want to be the only one that lived a resurrection life. When he was raised from the dead, he wanted to be the firstborn among many other who would believe in him and also live out that resurrection life in their everyday life.

One author put it this way: *“you know, we were predestined, foreordained. And predestined doesn’t mean that it’s automatically going to happen. It basically means that that’s God’s will from the very beginning, and if we will cooperate with that then we’ll see that happen in our lives. So, in eternity past, he already made his mind up the kind of life he wanted us to live, and then he called us into that life. He’s already made a decision that he’s justifying us and making us just as if we had never sinned so we can live that kind of righteous, peaceful, joyful life”!*

And he has also already, in eternity future, glorified us, which means that we are going to manifest all the excellencies of God if we stick with God. We have got nothing in front of us but an amazingly, wonderful, awesome life and opportunity, and it’s all by the grace, and the mercy, and the goodness of God. And we have been destined not to be a mess of all of our lives. We have been destined not to have more problems than we can count. But we have been destined to be molded, or transformed, or changed into the very image of Jesus Christ. Awesome!

3. Our Confidence – God is for us: v31-39

As Paul builds toward the climax of this chapter, he raises five questions about God’s sovereignty and love. Each question builds upon the ones before it, leading to the final question which sums them all up: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”* v35

Paul offers up a sample list of adversities and adversaries (hardship, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril or sword) that range from pressures of a hostile world to martyrdom. These symbolize the kinds of oppression that might cause a deep enough chasm between humanity and God that God’s love might be overwhelmed by them. But no. By all means *“we are more than conquerors through him who loved us”*, Paul strongly asserts. Then he shifts to the first person pronoun and the perfect tense: *“For I am convinced...”* Writing in this way he is saying *“I have become convinced and I will remain convinced”* that **nothing** in **all** creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” v38-39.

Then, just in case we hadn’t found the list above to be exhaustive enough, he sets forth ten more things that he is convinced will never separate us from God’s love. These ten things relate to cosmic forces, natural and superhuman, that stretch our minds in varieties of directions toward the expanse of space and time, on the one hand, and toward rulers, powers, and principalities, on the other. Paul is asserting boldly that everything in creation is ultimately under the control and lordship of God the Creator – and that this promise is based, not on our faltering, frail love of God, but on God’s steadfast, undying love for us.

There’s no more powerful tool to break down the defensiveness in our lives than the great truth of v 31. *“If God is for us, who can be against us.”* I don’t need to constantly defend myself because I

now know that God doesn't condemn me. Say what you will about me, and much of it will probably be true. But God has accepted me in a huge way in the Gospel.

Not only does He not condemn us, but He prays for us constantly. And the good news resounds in our hearts over and over again. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And there will never be any separation from the love of God. No matter what life throws at us, it can never separate us from Christ's infinite love.

We face so many separations in this life. It's unbearable to have to constantly say goodbye to loved ones. The gut-wrenching pain of the grave is something we can all relate to. But, the great theme of these verses is that no matter what happens good or bad in my life, nothing can separate me from the incredible love that I have been enveloped into. Here's the foundation for this incredible truth found in v32. "*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*"

That's encouraging for us to learn how to pray about every little thing in our lives and to be expectant that God will continue to show us new mercies and provide for us in unexpected ways. Of course, we are called to pray Kingdom prayers that focus on God's interests and heartbeat. But we are also able to boldly approach him for little things because He delights in our prayers. I often tease Nola when she declares confidently that she prays for a parking space, and sure enough God provides. I say God has more important things on His mind than to find you a parking spot, e.g. wars, disease, hunger, pandemics etc. However, I also know that He wants to be intimately involved in things that delight us and so we can involve Him in the little things of our lives. Again, 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?

The promise of these verses pushes us to stop relying on circumstances for our joy. It doesn't matter how bad things get in our lives in terms of us knowing the incredible love of Jesus. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. Not loneliness, singleness, unemployment, moral failure, even a pandemic, or any other calamity. We no longer have to be victims of our circumstances. We are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Now the truth is, we don't feel like conquerors most of the time. Most of us have just enough trouble putting one leg in front of the other in getting through the next day. But we are no longer victims but victorious conquerors because of the victory of Jesus.

So, whenever the days become difficult, you and I are called to remember that the very one who conquered death and rose from the grave is living inside of us making us much more than a conqueror. And that's more than enough to get us through the next day and into a glorious future.

In this amazing 8th chapter of Romans, the work of Father, Son and Spirit are put on display in a kaleidoscopic vision of the coming turn of the ages. Jesus holds in himself the destiny of humanity and the cosmos as a whole, a purpose envisioned by God, and one that began through the Spirit, who not only raised Jesus, but will also raise us up through his power. This is the story of God's love. It is the story into which we are written as daughters and sons of God.

As the hymn writer Isaac Watts puts it;
*Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all*

Prayer: