

Nothing Can Separate Us

Romans 8:30-39

Key Verse: 8:38-39

“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 anybody here know the future? Who knows who is going to win the Super Bowl next week? 49er's? Ravens? How about lottery numbers? Anybody know what those are going to be? If you know the numbers, then it's not gambling, right? Ok, here is an easy one. What's going to happen at 2 o'clock? It's not that far into the future, so you should be able to know it, not guess it, but know it, right? You might think that I am a little crazy right now, but when you think about it, there is a lot that we really don't know. Do things have color when there is no light? If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around, does it make a sound? What's the sound of one hand clapping? What is the square root of the inverse of pi? And the greatest question of all, why does there seem to be an inverse correlation between the amount of hair on the head to the amount of hair on the body? There are some guys that are a bald as a cue ball, but look like Chewbacca on the rest of their body. How is that possible? I am not certain about any of those things and those are lighthearted examples. When we look at our lives, there is so much uncertainty. There are so many things that we do not know. This is a new year, 2013, and what does this new year hold for us? At the end of 2012 there were some unpredictable events. Hurricane Sandy merged with a blizzard around the New York area to create an unholy Snowicane Sandy. It is possibly the costliest natural disaster to hit the United States. On December 14, a gunman killed 27 people, mostly children at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. It is easy to ask, “What is this world coming to?” In our own lives, we struggle with the thoughts of what to do and where do we go from here? Some have been looking for a job for a while; others have been struggling with meaning and purpose; and still more spend endless time wondering if there is more to life than work, rot, stress, pain, suffering, and death. But no matter what, there is something that is certain and that is God's love for you, and that love is greater, stronger and more powerful than anything else that exists.

Last week's passage ended with these words, “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. 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. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” (Romans 8:28-30) Those are powerful sentences. We know that God works for the good of those who love him. All things in your life as a Christian are for your good. All the muck that we find ourselves in, all the pain that we feel, all the joy that fills our souls is for our benefit and the advancement of God's kingdom – all things. God chose his people to call them to justify them to glorify them. It is an amazing thought. Our sufferings, struggles, failures and victories purify us and prepare us for glory. Last week, Bob gave an example from Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph had a hard number of years. His brothers hated him, stripped him, threw him into a pit, and sold him as a slave; he was wrongly accused of trying to get with his master's wife, thrown into prison and forgotten by those he helped. He languished for years in a foreign nation, but God was preparing him to become the second most powerful man in the world. He was being purified of his pride and taught the skills that he would need to save the known world from a terrible famine. He had untold riches and more than that, his name is renown even today and he is glorified with God right now. I'm not saying that each of our sufferings will lead us to being the

second most powerful person on the planet, but we will be second in glory only to Jesus and that puts our lives into perspective.

In this passage, we extend that perspective with a few questions that Paul brings up, “What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (31) That’s a strong question. If God is for us, who can be against us? It actually reminds of something from last summer. Who’s seen the movie *The Avengers*? It’s a superhero team-up movie, where Iron Man, Thor, Captain America and the Hulk get together and fight some bad guys and save the world. The chief bad guy is Loki, who is Thor’s adopted brother. Loki has an army of aliens and is preparing to invade the world. Right at the invasion, Loki is in a building with Iron Man, who is trying to buy some time. Iron Man is talking about Loki just making every superhero mad and that that was a bad idea. In response, Loki says he has an army and Iron Man shoots right back, “We have a Hulk.” Hulk was the strongest person to exist and the angrier he got the stronger he got. You couldn’t kill him. If you shoot him in the mouth, he would spit out the bullet, drop him from the sky and he would just get right up.

We have something better than a Hulk. The creator of all things is on our side. As the song *Our God* from Chris Tomlin starts, “Water you turned into wine, opened the eyes of the blind there’s no one like you, none like You!” God spoke and creation sprung into being. He told the water how far it could go. God took dust and created life. At his voice mountains bow, with his footsteps the earth shakes, and with his breath the oceans are parted. He put the stars in the sky and set the planets into motion. The Higgs boson may be what creates mass, but God created the Higgs boson, a subatomic particle that we will never physically see. That is our God and as the song’s refrain says, “And if our God is for us, then who could ever stop us. And if our God is with us, then what could stand against.” Now that is perspective.

If that God is for us, what do you think that he will do to help us? Is there some limit to his love? Verse 32 says, “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?” God, in his great love, did not spare anything for us. He even gave up his own Son so that we can have life. It wasn’t something that we deserved, but purely by grace God sacrificed his Son Jesus on the cross to give us our salvation. He gave everything so that we could be reunited with him. That is what the definition of life is. The Bible says that having real life means knowing God because he is the source of all life. (John 17:3, John 11:25) God doesn’t want our money or our prayers or for us to follow a set of rules. God wants us and he gave up everything to be with us. I can’t even fathom what it would take to give up a child for someone else. I would do anything to protect my daughter and keep her from harm. I could never sacrifice her for something else. It would rend my heart and boil my blood to see anything happen to her. I know that God would be no different, but he is more. Out of his love, power, and sovereignty, God gave up what was so close to him to bring brigands, thieves and liars into his heart. If God did that for us, then what limits are there to his love?

Paul continues in verses 33 and 34, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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.” God gave up his Son for us to have a new life with him. All of our evil, selfish deeds of the past have been forgiven. You know all those mistakes you have made, the ones that you hope that no one ever finds out about? All those people that you have hurt because you were doing something for yourself or because you were hurt? Remember the lines

you crossed so that you could feel loved? They bear down on you like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. You feel dirty and you can't look certain people in the eyes. You don't even want to face God, because you think that he disapproves of you. Remember, though that you were chosen by God to be his, and God forgives and justifies you. No charge will be brought against you because God has already justified you through Jesus. Take a closer look at the end of verse 33. It doesn't say that you are justified; it says, "it is God who justifies." The focus is not on our justification, but that God justifies.

If God justifies, then is there anyone who can condemn? If you remember back a couple of weeks ago, the beginning of this chapter says, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) Remember that: there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Unfortunately, there are still many times that we have that gnawing voice that wants to condemn us for what we have done. We still carry the guilt of our actions. Satan loves to use that against us. He likes to whisper in our ears, "I know what you have done and there is no forgiveness for that." Satan is the accuser, but verse 34 also says that there is no one to condemn us. There is no one to condemn us because of what Jesus has done. So, who then can condemn us? The Bible answers the question simply, "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." (34)

Let's unpack that answer a little bit. "Christ Jesus who died": Jesus died on the cross for our sins. He paid the price for our sins and his death wiped our record clean. Because of Jesus' death, none of our sins can be held against us. More than that though, Jesus rose from the dead. Death could not keep its hold on Jesus and the power of sin, which is death, was broken. Because of Jesus' resurrection, death has no more power over us. If we dig further, the verse says that Jesus is at the right hand of God. The right hand is considered the position of power – second in command. This Jesus who died for us and conquered the power of death is the same Jesus who rules creation with the full authority of God. The last piece of the verse says that Jesus is interceding for us. Jesus died, was raised to life and sits at the right hand of God to serve as a living witness for the ground of our salvation. He serves as irrefutable proof that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

Because of the irrefutable evidence of our salvation, some questions arise. "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.'" (35-36) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Jesus died for us; Jesus rose to life for us; and Jesus sits at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. Is there anything in all creation that can separate us from that love? Paul brings up trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword. Paul was no stranger to having a hard life. He experienced each of those things in his own life, but none of those things can separate us from Jesus' love.

When Paul wrote this letter, the Roman Christians were experiencing sufferings. (Romans 8:18) He knew that their lives were danger and he sought to encourage them. It is important to note that being a Christian doesn't make us exempt from hardships and suffering. Sometimes, it feels like our faith compounds the hardships that we see. It's ingrained in our minds that good things happen to good people and bad things happen to bad people, but bad things happen to both good and bad people. The case in point is Jesus. No one would argue that Jesus was not a good person, but he faced the worst of circumstances in being crucified although he was completely innocent and did nothing to deserve death.

In this country, we are sheltered from the hardship that Paul talks about. We can be ridiculed and labeled as a bigot, who holds narrow-minded values, but we won't face danger, nakedness and the sword. That's not true in other parts of the world. In some places, Christians are rounded up and told to renounce Jesus or face death. Saeed Abedini is an American pastor who was born in Iran as a Muslim who converted to Christianity. He was a part of the underground church in Iran, and he and his family moved to the US in 2005 after facing persecution. Saeed became a pastor in 2008 and an American citizen in 2010. While visiting Iran last year, Saeed was arrested and just last week was supposed to face trial for his conversion and face the death penalty. The Iranian government seeks to separate Saeed from Jesus, either by getting him to denounce his faith or by killing him. But Pastor Saeed serves the Almighty God and who can stand against him. Nothing can separate him or us from the love that Jesus has for us. Sometimes, it just feels like, as Paul quotes from Psalm 44, "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

When faced with such hardship and danger, we can feel like we want to fight back. We need to conquer those who want to do us harm. We think that we should fight back with protests or pray to God that these people will die. We want to beat those who persecute us mercilessly just to show them how it feels. We think that it is our right as Christians and that we have been empowered to do so. But that is not our calling. "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." (37) When we face problems, we think about how we can get through them. We think about how we can get justice for being persecuted. We want to survive and thrive, but that is such a narrow view of life. We don't exist to merely survive. We were not called by God to merely survive, but to transcend and be more than conquerors. Jesus gave us life so that we could be heirs of God, inheritors of his great kingdom.

Look at verses 35, 37, 38 and 39. I am going to read them. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 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." Basically, I read verses 35-39, but removed 36 to make it flow a little better. In short form, these verses say, "What can separate us from God's love? A horde of hardship and suffering? No, in these things we are more than conquerors because I am convinced that there is nothing that can separate us from God's love." Think about that. Look at verses 38 and 39 and let that soak in for a moment. "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." (38-39) Let's look at those verses a little closer.

Paul writes that he is convinced. What Paul is writing is not something that he thinks is theoretical or exists in the realm of theology. He is convinced, he is certain that it is true. With all the uncertainty that exists, how can he be certain of the depth and power of God's love? I mean that we can be more trouble than we are worth, right? Paul knows God and knows his nature. Paul already wrote that God even gave up his own Son to bring us to him, and if God is for us, then who could be against us? Which pot can tell the potter anything? By knowing who God is and what he has already done for us, we can be certain that as Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:28)

Look further into those verses. Paul uses this dichotomy to show us how far-reaching and powerful God's love is. Neither death nor life can separate us. Even if we were to be killed, that would not separate us from God again. Demons have no power to remove us from God's love. We can laugh in their faces. What we go through now and in the future cannot keep us from God's love. There is no power, no depth or height, there is absolutely nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus. God is not distant. With the Holy Spirit, God resides in us and we in God. We are intertwined and there is nothing that can rip us out. We don't have to have doubt. We don't have to have to live with uncertainty because the great and almighty God stands with you and no one and no thing will ever be able to pry you from him, because there is nothing more powerful than our God.

Hold on to that because many times we Christians seem weak and product of our circumstances. We never seem to have any control over anything. Even we have the best intentions, we make mistakes and people are hurt. Relationships are damaged and it is just hard to keep going forward. I am a brash person and I know my words have hurt people. I keep doing it and it brings me down and makes me feel like I have no hope. It's the same thing over and over again. I don't have any control over my tone and it just bears down on me. Yet, even my stupidity and callousness cannot separate me from God's love. What I don't have control over is not powerful enough to remove me from God's love and that is so encouraging. I don't have to worry about making mistakes, because those mistakes can't remove God's love. I don't have to worry about pain and suffering and hardship, because those things can't overpower the mighty love that God has. No matter what you are going through, right now, whether it is something that you have done or is being done to you, God is greater. "Higher than the mountains that I face Stronger than the power of the grave Constant in the trial and the change This one thing remains This one thing remains Your love never fails It never gives up It never runs out on me"