

Sermon for August 24, 2014 - 11th Sunday after Pentecost

Romans 8:33-39 (AAT)

Theme: Nothing Can Ever Separate Us From God's Love

- 1) No Accusers
- 2) No Persecutors
- 3) No Powers of any Kind.

³³ *Who will accuse those whom God has chosen? It is God Who declares us righteous.* ³⁴ *Who will condemn? Christ died, more than that, He rose, He is at the right hand of God, and He prays for us.* ³⁵ *Who will separate us from God's love? Will sorrow, hardship or persecution, hunger or nakedness, danger or a sword?* ³⁶ *So it is written: "For You we are being killed all day long. We are considered sheep to be slaughtered."* ³⁷ *But in all this He Who loved us helps us win an overwhelming victory.* ³⁸ *I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, nothing now nor in the future, no powers,* ³⁹ *nothing above or below, nor any other creature can ever separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

My neighbor in Milwaukee - a former Airborne Ranger and veteran of the first Iraq war - once told me: "Pastor, I don't think I can ever go to heaven. The Bible is clear: "Thou shalt not kill," and I have killed people. I don't think there is anyway God can forgive me." He really felt guilty for some of the things he did during the war. He felt like God could never love someone like him.

So what did I tell him? The truth. "Joe, when God says: "Thou shalt not kill" he is clearly forbidding "murder," and not the killing a soldier does in defense of his country. The Scriptures are clear on that point. But even if you were guilty of murder, know this: Jesus died on the cross for every sin you have ever committed. He paid for them all in full. Nothing can ever change that fact. Trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of all your sins and be a peace. Nothing you or anyone else does will ever keep God from desiring your salvation."

There are times in our lives when we are also tempted to wonder whether or not God loves us. For some of us, it's the heavy weight of guilt for sins that we feel are unforgivable. For others of us it's some problem, pain, disaster or crime that has us wondering, "If God loves me, why would He allow me to go through something like this?"

With St. Paul as our guide, let us consider God's promise to the believer: **Nothing Can Ever Separate Us From God's Love.** *1) No Accusers 2) No Persecutors 3) No Powers of any Kind.*

Part One: No accusers can separate us from God's love

In the latter part of Romans 8, the apostle Paul deals with the problem of Christian suffering. He points out that, even though suffering is inevitable on this earth, it still does not compare with the glory that will be revealed in us. God will help us endure - working in all things for our eternal good.

And this leads the Apostle Paul to ask: *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31, AAT)

There are many who are against us: the devil and his angels, the entire wicked world and even our sinful flesh. But even though these many enemies stand against us, what harm can they really do if the almighty God is on our side?

But how do we know that God is really on our side? St. Paul tells us: *"He didn't spare His own Son but gave Him up for all of us — He will certainly with Him give us everything."* (Romans 8:32, AAT) God sending Jesus to be our Savior is proof beyond any shadow of a doubt that God loves us and that we can trust Him.

This is why Paul asks: *"Who will accuse those whom God has chosen?"*

The devil most certainly accuses us - as does the world and our sinful flesh. They constantly remind us of our sins for which God could never love us. And the world? Oh, it loves to parade our faults in front of everybody.

But the truth is that, no matter how much the devil, world and our own sinful flesh bombard us with the feelings of being unforgivable, they have no say in the matter whatsoever.

Our text continues: *"It is God Who declares us righteous."* The devil, world and our flesh can rant and rave as much as they want. They can accuse us of all sorts of horrible thoughts, words and deeds; but none of it matters in the end, since it is God himself who declares us righteous for Christ sake.

And if God himself declares us righteous (which He does through faith in His Son), then *"Who will condemn" us?*

There is only one Judge who can send a soul to hell, and Judge is Jesus. On the last day He will show this authority by condemning the devil, his evil angels and every unbeliever to eternal death. Yes, Jesus is the only one with the authority to condemn us, but will He?

You see: *"Christ died, more than that, He rose, He is at the right hand of God, and He prays for us."*

Consider this: the one who has actual authority to accuse and condemn is the same person who stopped at nothing to die for our sins. He rose from the dead - showing that every past, present and future sin of ours has been paid in full. Whenever the devil accuses you before God the Father, Jesus intercedes on your behalf – pointing to His sacrifice as the reason God needs to forgive you, as the Scriptures say: *If anyone sins, we have One to plead for us with the Father — Jesus Christ, Who is righteous. He is the payment for our sins, and not for ours only but for the whole world.* (1 John 2:1,2)

No matter how sinful you are, when you turn to Jesus in repentance and faith you can be absolutely certain that your sins are fully forgiven. You are at peace with God and loved by Him. The Scriptures promise it. Never doubt it.

So, *Who will separate us from God's love?* No accuser can. Our sins are forgiven in Christ - nothing can change this fact. Only our own impenitence and unbelief can prevent us from receiving the salvation God freely offers us, but even these can't keep God from loving you in Christ Jesus and freely offering you His forgiveness.

Part Two: No persecutor can separate us from God's love

Well, if the almighty God loves us so dearly, it stands to reason that we should have a relatively trouble free life, right? Wrong. You see, God never promises us such a life on this earth. He actually warns: *"In the world you have trouble."* (John 16:33, AAT)

And that's why Paul writes: *Who will separate us from God's love? Will sorrow, hardship or persecution, hunger or nakedness, danger or a sword?*

We face all sorts of problems in life that really test our faith. "Why did God take away my spouse or child? Doesn't He know that I need him? Why did God take my health away? I can't be as productive as I once was. Why did God allow me to be a victim of this horrible crime? Why wasn't He watching over me?" The list can go on and on regarding the afflictions God allows. If God loves us, then why?

Paul continues: *So it is written: "For You we are being killed all day long. We are considered sheep to be slaughtered."*

When I read this verse, I can't help but think of those Christians who are being brutally persecuted by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. They literally are being killed all day long - as heartlessly and systematically as sheep in a slaughter house. For Christ's sake they are suffering cruel injustices and horrible crimes - all the while their persecutors parade around - claiming great victories for their Allah.

But look at the remarkable thing Paul says next: *"But in all this He Who loved us helps us win an overwhelming victory."*

No matter how many Christian bodies ISIS dances over, they are not the victors. The killed Christians are. How so? Because the Bible says: *"Precious to the LORD is the death of His holy ones."* (Psalm 116:15, AAT)

No matter what we experience in life, we are more than conquerors through Christ Jesus. How so? Because, as Christians, we realize that this world is temporary. Our true home is with God in heaven. And no matter what the world takes from us: our health, our relationships, our dignity or even our life, the one thing it cannot take from us is the love God has for us in Christ Jesus. No matter what we suffer, believers remain God's dearly loved children - holy and precious in His sight.

God promises to work in all things for our eternal good. There may be times when we don't feel or perceive it, but it is nevertheless true. Christ will keep his promise and deliver us to his eternal kingdom. Hold on to him in faith, and (on the Last Day) you will see exactly how victorious we actually are.

Jesus once said: *"In the world you have trouble. But have courage; I have conquered the world."* (John 16:33, ATT). Even in suffering we find that God has not removed his love from us. Even in suffering, we are assured that we are victorious - all because of the sacrifice He made for us on the cross.

Part Three: No powers of any kind can separate us from God's love

Paul continues: *I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, nothing now nor in the future, no powers, nothing above or below, nor any other creature can ever separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Paul was convinced of God's love for us - and so should we. There is no power, ruler, time, creature, force, spiritual being . . . there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus our LORD.

But if this is true, then why do we suffer all sorts of trials and troubles? We suffer because God, in his loving wisdom allows it. We don't know why, but we trust that it is for our good. You see, the love God has for us is not human love that simply likes giving good things. The love God has for us in Christ Jesus is a divine love that will work in all things to deliver us to heaven - even if we have to get a little hurt in the process.

Let me explain what I mean with a little illustration. My wife loves her family, and this is why she feeds us healthy food. Now, she knows that there are other foods that the kids and I like (like potato chips, French fries, soda, cake, and donuts) but she rarely buys that kind of food for us. She even regularly feeds the kids food they don't enjoy (like oatmeal and sweet potatoes). Why does she do this? Because she loves us and wants us to live long, healthy lives.

God loves us. Proof of this fact is found in Jesus' cross and empty tomb. He loves us so much that He doesn't give us everything we want, but what we need. He loves us so much that He might even allow suffering and hardship to come our way for some reason we can't even begin to understand. But know this: *nothing in all creation can separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.* We can separate ourselves from our salvation by not believing in Jesus. But nothing either we or anyone else does can make God stop loving us.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: if you feel oppressive guilt over your sins, or cry out under affliction, pain, or sorrow; look at the cross and empty tomb to find the assurance of God's love for you. Remember the Bible's promise that nothing, in all creation, can ever separate you from the love God has for you in Christ Jesus your Lord." Amen.