

Romans 8:31-39
More than Conquerors

There once was a woman who was in her third trimester riding a very crowded bus. Driving through a rainstorm, the bus slipped off the roadway into a ravine. Everyone on board died...except for her. There was an emergency surgery, and the baby, a little boy, was saved.

As that boy grew it became apparent that he was very strong willed. As a result, his father kicked him out of the house at age 14. He left home, got an education, turned out to be brilliant and grew to be a natural leader.

Now it's at this point in a story like this that I'd tell you the man's name, and you'd recognize it because he's famous. Maybe a king or a US Senator or an astronaut or famous athlete. But he's none of those things. His name is Emmanuel and he's Nigerian. And the reason he's where he is and what he is is (which I'll come back to a little later) is because he's a Christian. That's the reason he was kicked out his home at 14 by his Father. He had disgraced the family and refused to give us his confession of Christ. So his Father kicked him out.

That's probably pretty hard for many of us to imagine. Kicked out of your home as a teenager because of your faith. How could a guy like Emmanuel handle that? And if we can't imagine a challenge to our faith quite that extreme, there are plenty of others we endure on a daily basis. How are we supposed to handle them? Well, the apostle Paul has the answer for us this morning in these oft used, familiar, comforting words from Romans 8.

Now given the sort of issues the Apostle Paul raises for our consideration today in Romans chapter 8, Paul's declaration about your life might seem too fanciful or just downright untrue because what Paul tells us this morning is that in the face of every threat, danger and challenge to faith in this life, you are a victorious conqueror. **In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** You are more than conquerors. Literally that says you are victorious above and beyond. In other words, you're super conquerors. You're overwhelmingly victorious in all these things. In what things exactly? Well, in **trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword.** Paul says you're more than conquerors! How can that be?

Now I know the world's not ACTUALLY any worse than it's ever been, but boy sometimes you just take a look at what's going on it just seems like the world is careening out of control. Our social media feeds are filled with videos of people spewing hate at one another, convinced the other deserves...**DESERVES**... pain and even death? We get all the news reports about attacks and murders and disasters...on what seems like a nightly basis. I know it's not ACTUALLY worse than it's ever been, but it's hard not to feel like the world is falling apart.

But those problems and threats Paul listed aren't only played out for you on the news, in distant cities across the country and across the globe. They're in your life and in your homes. Paul began with some generic terms: **trouble and distress**. Each of those words carry the picture of pressure...the things that press down upon us and burden us...and the things that press us in from side to side trapping us with no escape. Are you pressed down in life? Are you hemmed in? Are you cornered in your trouble and your distress? Are you dealing with a form of **persecution**...some affliction brought into your life because you're a child of Christ? Maybe not as extreme as Emmanuel but tension between family members because of faith? Pressure from friends who don't share your spiritual outlook? Are you afflicted by **famine or nakedness**...not JUST the lack of food or clothing but lacking an essential good you need for your welfare? Struggling to pay the bills. Worried about how the finances are going to get you through. Is there **danger or sword**? Some physical affliction from without or within. A body struggling to do what it used to...struggling through treatment...threatening to give up the struggle. Are you feeling pressed in on every side?

If so, be on alert. Because in all of it, Satan's strategy is to get you to doubt. That's really what Paul is talking about in these verses. He's talking about the spiritual battle Satan is waging against your very soul. And in that battle he'll use whatever he can...spiritual crisis, physical crisis, emotional crisis...anything to make you question whether God is really there for you...whether he really loves you. To try, as Paul says, to separate you...to drive a wedge between you and the love your God has for you in Christ Jesus your Lord.

Because after all, Satan, will reason with us, what else are we left to think? If God is always right and always fair, then this affliction must be because you did something wrong. It's my past failures, my sins that brought this trouble. And God's love is brought into doubt. Or if it suits him Satan will appeal to our pride and he'll reason, you don't deserve this. What kind of

God would let this happen? And the result is the same. God's love is brought into doubt.

But Paul reminds us this morning, it's actually something else. Psalm 44, which Paul quotes here in Romans 8, wrestles with these same issues...God allowing bad things to happen to his faithful people. The turning point of the psalm is the verse Paul quotes, **For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.** What the Psalmist finally understood and what Paul is telling us is that we suffer...not because we're being punished...and not because God is cruel...but because of who we ARE. We are strangers in this world...living with sinful hearts and among sinful people who consider us nothing more than sheep to be slaughtered. Like a Nigerian father kicking banishing his 14 year old son because he followed Christ. And it's precisely because we are who we are, that Paul can say the next verse. Because if we are God's people, that means nothing has changed who our Savior is and what he's done for us. And so Paul says **In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.**

You see, when Satan comes with his whispers of doubt, the battle isn't even close. Because God holds before our eyes the cross of Jesus where the victory was won in resounding fashion. On that cross God placed himself under the sufferings of this world. He experienced a pressing danger, a persecution, a nakedness, a sword like we have never even comprehended. And he faced it for you, in your place, so that through his suffering...through his love...you might be restored to God and stand steadfast in the comforting truth that God's love is enduring and abiding for you and with you...forever.

³¹What then will we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him? Having given his Son how could we ever again doubt his love? Come death, come angels or demons! Let the past haunt me and the present scare me and the future terrify me! It is all nothing; the love of God in Christ leaves me at peace and secure. Lent proves that love as nothing else could. The repentance that is *always* profound sorrow over sin has its counterpart in an equal measure of confidence in the love of God for sinners. Indeed sorrow filled repentance is a joy when I know what God's response to it will be!
³³Who will bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies! ³⁴Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus, who died and, more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us!

So when Satan points to the persecutions and says, 'how could God let that happen?... God points us to the cross and says, 'look at my love. You have no reason to doubt. Bear your cross patiently and wait for my deliverance.' When Satan points to what we lack, our personal famines and nakedness and says, 'how could God let that happen?'... God points us to the cross and says, 'look at my love. You have no reason to doubt. Bear your cross patiently and wait for my deliverance.' When Satan points to the dangers and swords we face and says, 'how could God let that happen?'... God points us to the cross and says, 'look at my love. You have no reason to doubt. Bear your cross patiently and wait for my deliverance.'

You see, with the cross of Christ before our eyes nothing threatens to separate us from him. Not the threat of death (for you or one you love) nor the prospect of a life of suffering. Not the forces of evil angels banded against us nor the powerful rulers of this earth. Not a single moment from my past, nor a worry in my future. Not the greatest distance high or low. Not anything in all of creation **will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

In all these things, we are more than conquerors...not because we are free of the troubles...but because we have God's love for us in Christ and nothing can take that away. And so with eyes focused on Christ...with his victory and love cemented in our hearts, our lives transcend every trial and tribulation and we more than conquerors.

I don't know a lot of the details of Emmanuel's life other than the ones I shared at the beginning. I don't know what kind of temptations Satan threw at him when he was kicked out of home as a teen. But I do know he was a victorious conqueror through Christ. Because he remained steadfast through Christ and now dedicates his life in service in Christ's name. He's a doctor who serves in Christian medical mission treating disabled children with spina bifida who wouldn't otherwise receive care. A free service given in the name of Christ.

You too are more than conquerors through Christ. May he keep you in faith as he fixes your eyes on him and his love. Amen.