

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Romans – Jesus’ Gospel Sets You Free!

#### **Life in Jesus - and the Love of God**

(Romans 8:31-39)

Study #15

#### Introduction: Coming attractions...

I haven’t seen it yet, but I will. And I’m not waiting for it to come out on Blue Ray, either. I’m gonna see this one before it leaves the theatres.

See, I’ve read and re-read J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Hobbit more times than I’d care to publicly admit to. So I’m going to see the movie. (And yes, I do know that this one is just part 1 of 3... ☺ )

When the lights go low and the movie begins, I’ll recognize every character. Gandalf and Bilbo Baggins, Thorin and Balin, Frodo, Elrond, and Galadriel are old friends.

Except for the fun of seeing Tolkien’s words turned into Peter Jackson’s pictures, I’m not expecting too many surprises. But that won’t make the movie any less enjoyable.

Familiar stories are worth entering. Of course it’s true that familiarity *can* breed contempt. But familiar things can also refresh and delight, reinforce convictions, remind us of easily forgotten truths, and take us back to the basics.

That’s why we observe the Lord’s Supper on a regular basis here. Every time we take the bread and the cup you likely don’t get a new understanding or a fresh insight. But it is still refreshing.

Christmas is like that. After a couple of passes through Luke 2, we know the story. But year after year we rehearse the scenes surrounding the birth of Jesus to remind ourselves of something important.

We won’t likely come to December next year and think to ourselves, “*Well, we know all of that*” and forego the stories. The stories of Jesus’ birth and what that birth represents are worth telling over and over again.

Nor do we come to the last paragraph of Romans 8, see familiar verses, and decide to jump on ahead to chapter 9. “*We’ve read those verses before*” doesn’t mean we don’t want to and need to hear those verses again.

The final nine verses before us this morning are to Romans 8 what the Return of the King is to the Lord of the Rings and what the third movie will be to The Hobbit and what the Deathly Hallows is to Harry Potter. They are the high point of the chapter and of the book of Romans, maybe even (according to J.I. Packer) the pinnacle of the New Testament.

So, if you were familiar with what Paul has to say here prior to this morning, listen as if for the first time. And if this is the first time, you’re in for a treat.

Last Sunday, we noted the power of hope as we made our way through Romans 8:18-30.

There, he reminded us that the sufferings we experience *now* are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us *then*.

And we were also assured that hope for real transformation now is not a pipe dream because God is causing “*all things to work together for good*” for us, using these “*all things*” to conform us to the image of His Son.

More than most books in the New Testament, Romans offers readers some tremendous challenges to interpretation.

And we have wrestled with several of the thornier passages already.

Working our way through Paul's teaching about the sinfulness of humanity (chapters 1-3) and the imputation of Adam's sin to our whole race (Chapter 5) was tough. We struggled with how to put together the ideas that we are "**dead to sin**" (chapter 6) AND that we are to "**put to death the deeds of the body**" (chapter 8). And there was some head-scratching associated with his description of a raging internal battle against sin (chapter 7).

In many places in Romans, interpretation has been difficult. This morning, interpretation is a snap.

This passage is not complicated. It's not hard to understand Paul's main point. Today could be the world's shortest sermon, boiled down to a few sentences.

And no, I'm not going to do that... Instead, we'll take our time savoring the feast Paul's prepared for us.

As an appetizer, he wants you and me to be thinking about all that he has just been talking about.

### **The Good Gifts of God to Us (vv. 31-34)**

#### **Good Gifts to Come (vv. 31-32)**

*God is on our side - what else matters? (v. 31)*

**[31] When then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us?**

These "**these things**" include the Holy Spirit's presence and power in our lives. They include the Spirit's intercessory ministry in prayer. They include the great gift of hope for future glory and hope for transformation in this life.

"**These things**" prove that "**God is for us.**" And "**God is for us**" is shorthand for the Gospel.

In my version (New American Standard Bible), Paul also says "**IF God is for us....**" But "**if**" doesn't suggest that He might not be for us, as in, "*If it rains today, then...*"

Rather, "**if**" means "**since.**"<sup>1</sup> There is no question. God IS for us!<sup>2</sup>

It can be tempting to wonder if God is for you when life throws you a curve. The Bible says that the curve doesn't mean that God is against you.

Life may throw its worst at us, but God will see to it that the evil, in the end, morphs into our good. He uses "**all things**" to make us like Jesus.

There can be no doubt about it - God is for us. So, who could possibly be against us?

Well, there could be lots of people against us! The question doesn't imply that, for the Christian, there are no adversaries. We certainly may have enemies who are against us and may seek our ruin.

As I speak, you may be thinking of enemies, those who have hurt you deeply in the past or who are out to get you now.

We might be tempted to think that we shouldn't have enemies. That would be a mistake. We need to develop a theology that is big enough and robust enough to include enemies.

Jesus had enemies. The Bible actually assumes that we will have enemies and tells us that we are to love and pray for and do good to them. There's no use pretending that everyone is or will be on our side.

From time to time, in your life and in mine, some will be against us, sometimes just because of our faith or for the way we practice our faith.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The grammatical construction in Greek is called the First Class Conditional. This construction assumes the truth of the condition.

<sup>2</sup> Christian counselor Larry Crabb is of the opinion that the root of rebellion against God is a commitment to question whether God is all that good - and especially if He is all that good to me.

<sup>3</sup> In many places in the world today, to be a practicing Christian is to invite hostility and enmity from others. See [www.persecution.com](http://www.persecution.com).

But, “*since*” God is for us, we need not fear anyone who is against us. God is our salvation. So, question: Who can *prevail* against us? Answer: NOBODY.

And what is the proof that God is for us? Jesus.

*God gave His Son for us all (v. 32a)*

***[32a] He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all...***

The Father’s sons and daughters; The Father’s SON

Never forget that because of your faith in Jesus, God has brought you into His forever family. You are I are sons and daughters of God via adoption. And we are eternally grateful to be His children.

But there should be no confusion between who we are as adopted sons and daughters of God, and Jesus, the ONE Only-Begotten Son of God.

God the Father and God the Son ( along with God the Holy Spirit) existed from eternity past, enjoyed each others’ company, and completely fulfilled and satisfied each others’ need for relationship’. They had perfect fellowship and intimacy.

And what did the Father do with His only begotten Son, this Son who was so precious to Him? He did not spare Him.

- Coach Popovich spares Tim Duncan’s knees when he puts him on the bench in the third quarter.
- Judges “spare” criminals when they stop short of pronouncing a sentence in line with their crime.
- God allowed Abraham to spare his son on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22) and did not require him to sacrifice Isaac.

BUT, GOD DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON.

This is the most conclusive proof of God’s love for you: He “***did not spare His own Son.***”

Rather than spare Him, God the Father delivered His Son over for us all.

God delivered His Son up for us all

That is an amazing claim. In fact, it puts a whole new “spin” on the story of Jesus’ betrayal and suffering and death by crucifixion.

Read through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and you will see that Judas Iscariot delivered Jesus over to the Romans and that the Romans delivered Jesus over to the Jews for trial.

The Jews then delivered Jesus back to the Romans for sentencing and then Pilate delivered Jesus over to the torturers who scourged Him.

They then delivered Him back to Pilate, who delivered Him over to the crowds, who delivered Him back to Pilate for death, who delivered Him to the executioners who nailed Him to the cross.

That’s one way to tell the story. The Apostle Peter - who knew the story of what had happened to Jesus quite well - told the story differently to the large crowd that gathered on the Day of Pentecost.

He said that Jesus was ***[Acts 2:23] delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God.***

So, let’s be clear here. Who was it who delivered Jesus over to die?

Ultimately, it was not Judas or Pilate or Caiaphas or the crowds or the soldiers. It was God the Father who delivered up His own Son. And He did it because of His love for you and me.

In Isaiah 53:10, we read these words: “***It pleased the Lord to CRUSH Him***” - “***Him***” meaning Christ. It pleased the Father to crush the Son.

Can any dad or mom here today imagine being pleased to deliver up our sons or daughters to hardship?

Can we imagine being pleased to deliver them up to torture and death - for the sake of kids who have been breaking windows in our houses and slashing the tires on our cars? Me neither.

But that is what God did. On the cross, at the Father's direction, Jesus willingly bore the judgment that was due us. All that and more, is behind the brief comment, "***He delivered Him over for us all.***"

And Paul's point in reminding us of all that was involved in Jesus' death is to say that since God did THAT...

*God will surely give us all things through Him. (v. 32b)*

***[32b]...how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?***

Since God has done the ultimate and incomparable thing, we can be confident that He will do whatever else we need along the way.

If you take your girlfriend to a very expensive restaurant, where everything costs an arm and a leg, you are not going to get upset if she tells the waiter that yes, she would like a cup of coffee when the meal is finished. You bought her steak - of course, you're glad to get her coffee.

If it is time to get your child a bicycle, and you get her one, you are not going to tell her. "*OK, here's your bike. Now, it's up to you to learn how to ride it.*" No. Your commitment to buy her a bike guarantees you'll teach her to ride.

Paul says that we can be certain that God will give us all things we need to grow as Christians now and all things we need to reach final glory because He has already given us His Son.<sup>4</sup>

Our hope for good gifts to come from God is grounded in an understanding of the GREAT thing we have already received: God gave us Jesus!

So, we have a great future in store for us. As Paul continues we reflect on something wonderful that has happened to us in the past.

### **Good Gifts in the Past (vv. 33-34a)**

***[33] Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; [34a] who is the one who condemns?***

There is a beautiful illustration of what is going on here recorded in one of the Old Testament prophecies, the book of Zechariah.

In Zechariah chapter 3, there is a scene in which a high priest named Joshua is standing before the Lord. Satan, the adversary, is standing by, accusing this Joshua of sin. While Satan is pointing a finger at Joshua, God steps up to declare Joshua innocent - and Satan has to be quiet.

When you place your faith in Jesus for eternal life God Himself - the Judge - declares you innocent. Can anyone really call that judgment into question? Of course not!

God is the only One who has the right to condemn. But, so far from condemning you, He has justified you. You can rest easy. The Judge says you're not guilty because of your faith in Jesus.

So, we are confident that great things are in store for us in the future because God has already given us His Son. We received a wonderful gift from God in the past when we placed our trust in Christ: justification.

And, as Paul goes on to say, we are presently receiving a great gift from the Lord. Right now.

### **Good Gifts Right Now (v. 34b)**

***[34b]...Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.***

Earlier in Romans 8 we learned that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as we pray because we don't know how to pray as we should. He takes what we falteringly pray and tells the Father what we would have prayed if we saw things the way He sees them.

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<sup>4</sup> John Murray: "All things" should probably be taken as referring to "all things necessary to effecting our salvation, and all things needed for our spiritual health."

Now we discover that the Jesus who died and was literally raised from the dead, the Jesus who is now seated at God's right hand, also intercedes for us.<sup>5</sup>

My understanding is that Jesus' intercession is different from that of the Holy Spirit. Christ's intercessory ministry is directly related to the accusations of anyone who would bring a condemning charge against us.

When Satan accuses you and questions if your salvation, Jesus comes to the Father and says, "That one is Mine. Her soul is safe because of My sacrifice on the cross."

This intercession assures us of His unchanging love. And it also speaks of that which is the theme for the rest of Romans 8: our security.

Paul is passionate to tell us that no matter who might try and wrench us out of God's grasp, it simply won't happen.

### **The Forces Arrayed Against Us (vv. 35-36)**

#### **Enemies to Separate Us from Christ's Love (v. 35a)**

##### *[35a] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?*

Who is strong enough to force Jesus to stop loving us? Who is persuasive enough to convince Jesus to quit loving us?

Implied here is that there are those who would try to separate us from the love of Christ. Those in view might be human - someone else or you yourself, human or demonic.

But, even in the way the question is framed it is clear that Paul knew it was impossible to be cut loose from the embrace of Christ's love.

By merely mentioning it, the idea of any WHOs separating us from the love of Christ is dismissed.

Next we look at WHATs - experiences (notably, most all of them experiences Paul had actually had!<sup>6</sup>) which might have the same effect.

#### **Experiences to Separate Us from Christ's Love (vv. 35b-36)**

*[35b]...Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? [36] Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED.*

Tough stuff came Paul's way - just as it does for you. The tough stuff didn't destroy Paul's faith and it need not destroy yours, either. He wasn't convinced by life's hardships that God was out to get him and he didn't become bitter. No, through the tough stuff he found his faith, not destroyed, but enlarged.

On the surface, experiences like those that marked Paul's life might seem to negate the love of Christ, as if we, God's sons and daughters, should expect better things from life than THIS.

But God didn't promise us roses without thorns. In fact, we are promised the thorns AND the dark valleys - with the assurance that He will walk with us through the darkest valley and the most severe storm.

And we can have confidence that while life may still throw us its worst, God is always giving us His best.

### **The Love of God for Us (vv. 37-39)**

#### **Overwhelming Conquerors through Christ (v. 37)**

*[37] But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer<sup>7</sup> through Him who loved us.<sup>8</sup>*

<sup>5</sup> The Lord Jesus is presently highly exalted. The phrase, "the right hand of God" indicates the sovereignty and dominion with which He is vested, the glory with which He is crowned. See also Hebrews 7:25, John 14:16, 1 John 2:1 for other references to the intercessory ministry of Jesus for us.

<sup>6</sup> For a catalogue of some of Paul's more spectacular sufferings and hardships, see 2 Cor. 11:23-33.

<sup>7</sup> A good translation of the phrase would be, "We are super-conquerors."

We may view ourselves as having just barely escaped a trial with a victory. Or we may be left wondering, at times, what truck just hit us. Maybe after some adversity we feel fortunate to come away with a tie.

Paul corrects us. No, in each of these circumstances we win - and we win BIG!

Even if we don't see the victory now, we will one day see how this or that loss advanced God's Kingdom. We will see how God orchestrated the outcome of that hard thing so that we could shine for Jesus.

We sometimes see NOW and we will definitely see THEN that we conquer through Christ. And we don't win because of our hold on Him. We win because of His hold on us.

***“All things”*** that come our way - including tax audits and job layoffs and car repair bills and a disappointing grade on an exam and a crabby neighbor and a scary Dr.'s report and a 2am phone call from your kid and fights with good friends and devastating losses and debilitating pain - God lovingly uses to fulfill the promise of Romans 8:28-29.

He is all about the business of fitting us for heaven and making us like His Son.

So far from any of these things being able to separate us from Christ's love, it is while in these trials that we prove the love of God for us!

How many of us would say that in times of greatest trial and testing we have experienced the greatest measure of Christ's love?

I wish I had a dime for every time I've heard someone say, *“Yes, this is a tough time, but the Lord is with me, and I know He loves me.”*

And then so often I will hear someone go on to say, *“As difficult as it's been, I wouldn't trade this (whatever THIS might be) for anything because I've grown in my faith.”* That is what Romans 8:37 is all about.

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<sup>8</sup> The past tense (aorist, in Greek) ***“loved”*** has reference to the act of love of Calvary's cross.

Now, as Paul prepares to wrap up, he switches from the first person plural, ***“we”***, to the first person singular, ***“I”***. And there is a reason for the switch. He is speaking here of a personal conviction.

We all hold varying of degrees of certainty and confidence about issues we face on a day to day basis.

We may have a *hunch* about the direction the stock market is going, or a *guess* as to whether it is going to rain today.

We may have an *opinion* about the wisdom of starting Manu Ginobili or sitting Tim Duncan in the next Spurs game.

We may have a *preference* as to how the Fiscal Cliff issues get worked out or about taxes.

But, a *conviction* is something else. As Paul uses the word here, a conviction is something we are willing to die for.

Most of us have a pretty short list of this type of conviction. Here, in the last two verses of Romans 8, Paul gives us one of his own most deeply held personal convictions.

Here is a conviction from a very convinced man. His conviction is that the love of God for him is irrevocable.

He lists ten items, everything and everyone he can think of who might have some power to separate him from the love of God. The list doesn't seem to follow any clear order of arrangement.

He simply begins with “death” and moves forward from there.

### **We Are Secure in the Love of God (vv. 38-39)**

***[38] For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, [39] nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

You and I once had every reason to fear death as the one thing that would separate us, finally, from God. Now that we are in Christ, though, we understand that death is what brings us into God's presence. Death certainly doesn't separate the Christian from God.

What about life? Paul has just told us (vv. 35-37) nothing in this life can ever separate us from God's love.

OK, then, what about demonic forces. They are powerful. Might they separate us from God's love? That is the thought of the phrase that reads, "*nor angels nor principalities.*"<sup>9</sup> There is no spiritual power in the universe capable of separating us from God's love in Christ.

What about time? What if we looked down the long timeline into eternity? Would we find something down the road that might stop God from loving us? Sure, we were forgiven for past sins when we trusted Christ. What about future sins?

No need to fear. Neither "*things present nor things to come*" will ever cause God's love for us to waver. Nothing in or out of time, nothing you have ever done and nothing you will ever do will separate you, a child of God, from the love of God.

Neither "*height nor depth*" will separate you from God's love. Hell can't consume you and Heaven won't spew you out.

So, has Paul forgotten something? Is there anything else that might separate us from God's love?

We can see him sitting there, quill in hand, wondering, "*Did I leave anything out? Did I forget anything?*" To make sure he has covered all his bases he finishes up with, "*Nor any other created thing...*"

No loopholes! No "gotchas!" Nobody can say, "*Oh, but you forgot to mention 'X'*" - because "X" is assumed under "*nor any other created thing.*"

The list is all-embracing and comprehensive. Some people and some things may threaten to separate us from God's love. But it will never happen.

By this list Paul means to say, "**NOTHING** can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

### Conclusion:

You know, it truly is beginning to look a lot like Christmas. Of course, this is San Antonio, so there is no snow on the ground, but we are nine days out - and counting.

And if Christmas is all about giving, this morning we have walked through one of the best Christmas texts in the entire Bible.

Romans 8 is all about the great gift God gave to you and me: Jesus. He gave us Jesus. For our sakes, He did not spare Jesus.

And now, having opened the most wonderful gift you could ever receive (Jesus' gift of eternal life!), you rejoice. With a heart filled with gratitude, you worship. You serve.

And one more thing...

You who have received this great gift know someone who has not. So this Christmas season, give the Gift that gives eternally. Share the Jesus who means everything to you with those who mean so much to you.

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<sup>9</sup> "Powers" is probably another reference to angelic personages, or possibly even to miracles or mighty works [Murray], which cannot be successful in separating us from the love of Christ.