

Romans 8:31-39 - God is for us

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[0:00] Good morning all. We are reading from Romans chapter 8 verse 31 to 39 and you will find that on your Bibles on page 1135.

What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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?

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. It is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

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 shall face death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.

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.

[1:20] That's the word of the Lord today. Thank you for reading for us, Marina. Let's bow our heads and pray as we come to God's word. Let's pray. Gracious God and loving Heavenly Father, we want to ask you this morning to be gracious to us and to speak to us from your word.

We want to come just confessing that we're easily distracted and put off. We think about many other things which are less significant or important than your word.

And so we ask, please, that by your spirit you might speak to us this morning. Please may I speak faithfully and clearly. And may you be at work for your glory's sake, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Well, we've been in Romans chapter 8 for a few weeks now. And I think undoubtedly Romans 8 is one of the great passages of the Bible.

In fact, it is such a significant chapter that Jamal and Nathan have spent, I think, almost a year trying to memorize it. How's it going? Jamal? Yeah.

[2:33] So you can ask Jamal later. You can test him, you know, just pick a verse from Romans 8, ask him, and he will tell you which verse it is and what it is. Yeah, there you go. But listen, if memorizing it seems a little too big a task for you, then fear not, because actually in verse 31, you'll see that Paul actually summarizes the whole of Romans 8 in just four words.

Take a look at verse 31 with me. What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Now just notice how the sentence works, right? Paul is responding to what he calls these things. What then shall we say in response to these things?

So these things is a reference backwards to verses 1 to 30, what we've been thinking about for the last few weeks. God's comfort in suffering or the work of the Spirit in bringing power for the fight with sin.

What shall we say in response to those things? And then really the response to those things is at the end of verse 31, which is, well, who can be against us?

[3:39] To which the assumed answer is nobody, right? Or no one of any significance or nothing of any significance. And in the middle of that is

Paul's four-word summary of everything that he's saying here, which is God is for us.

And that's the message that he wants us to hear this morning. God is for us. Perhaps we can illustrate the intention here with a story from the Bible. And I know I've used this as an illustration before, but I think it captures well what Paul is hoping will be our experience as we look together at Romans chapter 8 this morning.

You might know the Old Testament story of Elisha, the prophet, being trapped in a city called Dothan. It's in 2 Kings chapter 6. You don't need to turn to it.

And if you don't know the story, don't worry. I'm going to tell it to you. The nation of Israel at the time in 2 Kings 6 is at war with the people of Aram. And despite all the best efforts of the king of Aram, still he never seems to be getting a foothold with the Israelites.

They always seem one step ahead. And it keeps happening. So much so that the king of Aram concludes, listen, there must be a spy in our camp. Because every time I plan something, the Israelites seem to know it ahead of time.

[4:55] But there's no spy, he's told. Instead, what's going on is that the God of Israel keeps telling Elisha, the prophet, what Aram's plans are. And then he tells the king and they respond.

The king of Aram is told by one of his advisors that even the very words spoken in your bedroom are not safe, he says. So the king of Aram realizes, OK, if I'm going to win this war, what I'm going to have to do is put all of my efforts into killing Elisha.

Because no Elisha, then that will be fine. We'll be able to win. So he sends his army to Dothan to capture Elisha and kill him. And they arrive overnight at the city and they surround it.

Horses, chariots, fighting men, the best of his fighting men, a force that's easily going to conquer the city. And they surround the city overnight. And the next morning, Elisha's servant wakes up and he discovers that the city is surrounded by this vast army.

And he's panic stricken and he runs to Elisha and he says, oh, no, what are we going to do? We are surrounded by the king of Aram and his armies.

[6:03] And Elisha answers like this. Let me just read to you a couple of verses from 2 Kings 6. He says this. Now, on the surface, that is utterly ridiculous, isn't it?

There is a vast army outside of the city. There is not a chance, right, that the few able-bodied men and women who are in the city of Dothan could overwhelm this vast army that's on the fringes of the city.

And yet Elisha is saying, no, listen, those who are with us are more than those with them. So who is Elisha talking about? Who is with them? Well, he continues, verse 17.

Elisha prayed, oh, Lord, open his eyes so that he may see. Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes and he looked and he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

Really, that is the servant's sort of Romans 8, 31 moment, isn't it? He realizes and he sees, oh, God is for us.

[7:15] God is for us. And that's, I think, a story that captures what Romans 8 is supposed to do for us this morning. You and I, we are like Elisha's servant. We've perhaps run here with a great sense of the trouble in our lives.

The enemy forces on the hills around the city. And Paul here is like Elisha and he is praying and saying, Lord, open their eyes that they may see that God is for them.

I wonder if it's perhaps just even worth pausing here. We've been looking through the book of Romans since, I think, September. And we've seen lots of different things.

Maybe this is kind of preaching that you're not really used to. We've been in some deep stuff, haven't we? We've been thinking about some big words. But really, this is the conclusion of this.

That if you're a Christian this morning, if you've heard God's call to put your trust in Christ, if you have a new heart by the Spirit that loves Christ and is united to him by faith, then what you need to hear simply is this.

God is for you. He's for you. Even if you're under siege from declining health or uncertain work or difficult relationships or family troubles or financial woes or past trauma, still because the gospel is true, because Jesus died and rose, because we can see with new spiritual sight and eyes that

above everything, overshadowing all of those things is the God who is for us.

[8:43] And that doesn't necessarily mean that those troubles will magically disappear. We'll think about that in a moment. But ultimately, it means that those things will not destroy you or finally defeat you, because the God who is for you is greater than whatever is against you.

Now, really, that is the whole point, okay? If you're the kind of person who can listen for the first five minutes of the sermon, well done, because you've learned everything that there is to know. God is for you. God is greater.

Do not fear. But our passage this morning works it out in two specific ways. One in regards to condemnation and the other in regards to love. So let's take the first one first and then we'll deal with the second one.

Firstly, no one can condemn us. Verses 32 to 34. Here at the beginning of our section, Paul effectively sort of takes us back to the courts of God's justice, if you like, and he reminds us of what's happened there.

He points out in verse 32 that God the Father did not spare the Son when it came to clearing us of guilt. So the Son, notice verse 32, was given up for us all.

[9:47] Not to mean that the Son was given up for everyone without exception. Paul isn't saying that everyone benefits from the cross, whether they believe in it or not. No, rather he is saying those in view are those who have their faith in Christ, those whom God has chosen according to verse 33.

For them the Son was given up. And because the Father gave the Son, then the end of verse 32, notice, you can be sure that everything else you need will also be given to you. It's one of those greater to lesser arguments.

You might remember, do you remember Louis and the sack of potatoes? Do you remember that Sunday? Maybe you do, maybe you don't. We tried to prove that Louis could pick up one potato, right, off the floor.

How did we prove that Louis could pick up one potato? Well, he picked up a whole sack, right? And then when he's carrying the sack, you know that he's able to pick up one potato. It's a greater to lesser. The greater proves the lesser.

And so says Paul here, God has given up the Son for your salvation to justify you. Do you think now that he will withhold from you anything else that you might need?

[10:52] Of course not. That would make no sense at all. Would God give you what is most precious and valuable to him and then withhold from you what is less valuable?

It would be nonsense, wouldn't it? It's like giving someone your iPhone and then refusing to give them a polo mint. So the Father won't send the Son only to let you be ruined for lack of strength or comfort or courage.

He won't surrender his Son to the cross only for you to live your life under his hostility. He has given Christ for you to access future glory and he has every intention to get you there.

All that you need will be graciously given to you. There's a second greater to lesser argument though in verses 33 and 34. Look at those verses with me.

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. No one.

[11:52] Here the greater part of the argument is the justification that is yours through the death of the Son. Justification you might remember is the declaration by God that you are righteous, in the right, perfect.

Here the case is that that declaration by God means that anyone else's condemnation is a lesser thing. No one can declare you guilty if God has declared you righteous.

In other words, if you've been cleared by the Supreme Court, the provincial court of human opinion shouldn't matter. Now, just for clarification, Paul is not saying that the Christian is above the law.

He's not talking about crimes that should be punished by the state. He'll actually come to those in a few chapters time. He's talking here about spiritual and moral justification. Saying that if the father of divine justice, God himself, declares you not guilty because of the work of the Son, why should it matter so much to you what the opinion of others is?

No one can condemn you. Not if God justifies. If you have now the verdict of not guilty, pure and righteous in your hand, even ahead of the day of final judgment, then you can be sure that you will not be condemned along the way.

[13:08] Just ponder this with me for a moment. Because I think, if you think about this, I think there is a surprise here. Notice what Paul is saying.

He's, if you've been tracking with us in Romans chapter 8, he's been talking really about suffering. Yeah. He's been talking about the world groaning. He's been talking about us groaning.

That actually we live in a broken world and we suffer. And so he's been talking about suffering and now he ends up talking about moral guilt and justification. And that should be a surprise to us.

You should think in these verses, oh, Paul, you've suddenly switched categories. We were talking about suffering and comfort and help. And now you're talking about moral guilt and justification.

Why that?

Why bring that into the equation? What's that got to do with it? Well, I think if you've ever suffered, you will know exactly why. It's because whispered into the ear of the suffering Christian is your suffering because God is punishing you.

[14:13] That somehow your sickness or your struggle with poor health or your relational pain or your unemployment or your difficult marriage or your unwanted singleness, your struggle to come to terms with past trauma, that's because God is paying you back.

For something that you've done. For something that you've done. Or God is withholding from you something that you need. Something that would make life livable and bearable. That maybe if you've been a better Christian, if you'd read your Bible more, if you'd attended church more regularly, if you'd known more answers to more Bible questions, if you'd prayed properly, then God would have given me those things.

But he hasn't. And he's punishing me. And Paul says, that is not true. It can't be true. Why? Well, because who can charge the not guilty with guilt?

If God has cleared you in Christ, no one can condemn you. Now, we're so slow to learn this, aren't we? I am so slow to learn this. I don't want to accuse you of being the same thing. We must keep revisiting it.

We are hardwired in our nature to think that we have to continue to earn God's favor and forgiveness. You know, grace is a divine instinct. It's not a human one that we have very much.

[15:24] And so we keep thinking, don't we, that our guilt is the spark of our suffering. But it's not. Guilt has been dealt with. And our suffering cannot atone for our sin.

It just is not possible for us to suffer enough in this life to atone for our sin. That requires something way more significant. Our guilt before a holy God can only be dealt with by his son.

And God the Father gave the son because he is for you. And if he is for you enough to give you his son, don't listen to any voices that tell you in your head something different to that.

God justifies the sinner whom he has chosen, who has faith in him. No one can condemn them. In a way, we should just kind of pause.

We should take the next hour just to roll that around in our minds. God is not irritable. He's not annoyed with you. He's not looking to take revenge for every moral failure.

[16:26] He's not waiting just to poke you with a stick because you didn't read your Bible this morning. Father, God is for you. If you are trusting in him, your sin is cancelled. Your suffering cannot take that away or change that or undermine it because God gave himself for me, for you, in the person of the son dying in human flesh on the cross.

And along with him, he will give you everything you need. Who can be against you? No one. That's the first point. Second point, nothing can defeat us. Here we move, don't we, from the work of the father in sending and giving the son into the work of the son in loving those he saves.

I'm going to read the verses to you. We'll pick it up partway through verse 34. And just notice how many times the love of Christ gets mentioned. Okay, verse 34, partway through. 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.

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's written, for your sake we face death all day long.

We're considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I'm 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's in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[18:03] Over the last few months or so, Vanessa and I have been watching a little bit of that Netflix show, The Good Doctor. You seen The Good Doctor? I'm going to talk about it, but I don't necessarily recommend it, right?

So if you go away and go, oh, Steve recommended it. I didn't, yeah? If you hate it, it was not my fault that you watched it, right? Don't come running to me. Anyway, in that the show is Good Doctor set in a hospital, maybe unsurprisingly, and in one of the episodes, a mother whose daughter has died in a car accident is asked to donate her daughter's organs to another child.

But it's not her heart or her kidneys or anything else like that. Rather, it's her daughter's face that she is asked to donate for a transplant onto another child whose face has been disfigured by an accident with a gun.

Now, listen, I told you I'm not recommending the show, and I don't know how the science of this works, and I don't really understand why it's the same like two or three doctors who seem to be able to perform any surgery in the entire world successfully every time.

So I'm doubting that, but that's not really the point. Anyway, what is fascinating is she donates the face of her daughter for the girl who has been horribly disfigured.

[19:22] And what's fascinating is the angst of the mother in deciding to give up, in effect giving up her daughter's identity to somebody else. And the gift is made, and the child receives the face transplant.

And then at the end of the episode, the mother comes into the room where the girl is recovering from surgery, and she talks to her. She gives her some pictures of her daughter who's died.

This is what she looked like. And then she kisses her on the forehead before leaving. And what's amazing is that the bond between those two is obvious, right?

The affection for the lost daughter has been planted onto this daughter as she has been given her identity. And you can't give so generously without forming a bond of love, can you?

And in a way, it's a virtuous circle, isn't it? Because it's sort of love and affection for the other, which leads to the gift. And then the gift itself leads to the sort of cementing of that love.

[20:26] And it goes round and round. In a sense, that's the image here. You and I were horribly disfigured by our sin. We lived for ourselves in a world that God had meant.

We rejected the God who made us, though we were made for him. We knew God, but we turned from him and lived for ourselves and our own glory. And we were horribly disfigured by that.

And yet, whilst we were in that state, the Son, in loving obedience to the plan of the Father, died on the cross for us and for our salvation, so that his righteousness might be transplanted onto us to cover over the horrors of our sin.

And the receipt of that gift of love makes you and I the bearers of his image, which further cements this bond of love. You are the one that I love in Christ.

A love that cannot be broken because we look like his son. Paul goes on to list, doesn't he, the things that will not break that bond of love. He says, See the link here, right?

[22:06] So verse 37 says that we are more than conquerors. We are more than conquerors because we cannot be separated from the love. Now you know, don't you, that a more than conqueror is a logical impossibility, right?

You cannot more than win, can you? You cannot more than win a game of football. It's impossible, isn't it? The word here is a combination of the word super or hyper and victory.

This is a super conqueror. Again, it's not meant to be possible. It's really to emphasize a truth. That defeat for the Christian is not the presence of struggle or difficulty in their lives.

True defeat for anybody would be separation from the love of God in Christ Jesus. And that is impossible for you if you're a Christian this morning.

Because God did not spare his own son, but gave him up for you and you bear his image and you cannot be separated from his love.

[23:11] And in love now the son prays for you, intercedes for you, brings you to the father, making you a super conqueror, more than a conqueror, who can never be separated from his love.

Let me speak to you this morning if you're perhaps not a Christian. It's great that you're with us this morning. We love having you here. This, I think, is a sober warning for you. Listen, future defeat is not visible in your present circumstances.

Just like future victory is not visible in present circumstances for the Christian. Because victory, in Romans 8 sense, is not about having everything you want.

Victory is not living your best life. Victory is not being in good health. The super conquerors of Romans chapter 8 are not those who are full of great health or have full wallets.

No, super victory in Romans chapter 8 is being defined as being with God in love. That's victory in Romans 8. Not without God in judgment.

[24:21] And that means, doesn't it, if you're not a Christian this morning, what you desperately need, it doesn't matter what your circumstances are, what you desperately need is the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Because without that, you are more than defeated, if I can put it that way. To be a super conqueror, you need to come to Christ.

You need to trust in him. You need to receive his unbreakable love. So please, can I plead with you? Come to him. Don't be defeated. Turn in faith to Christ.

Receive this identity from him. This unbreakable bond of love. We thought earlier, didn't we, how there's a surprising link between suffering and guilt.

And how sometimes we think that God is punishing us when we suffer. Now you have the link between love and suffering. Which is perhaps less surprising, right? We often, even as Christians, think that God maybe doesn't love us because we're suffering.

[25:26] So we ask questions like, don't we, you know, if God really loved me, would he be letting this happen to me? Or, you know, if God really loved me, why would he let me experience such grief?

If God really loved me, wouldn't I be married? Wouldn't we have children? But Paul's point is that you don't understand God's love just by looking at your circumstances. Circumstances are not a good indicator of the love of God.

Instead, you see God's love by looking at Christ and his work for you. You see the love of God in the work of the Son. He died, he rose, and now prays for you in the presence of the Father.

Again, think about how this works because we must cement this in our thinking. You see, you know, you think, don't you, if you really love someone, you'd do anything for them, right? You know that, don't you? People that you love, you would do anything for them.

Anything that you could for them. And so you assume, don't you, well, if God loves me, he would do anything for me. And surely it's within his power for me not to suffer, for it not to be so difficult in life.

[26:32] So why, if God loves me, does he not do it? But the problem is that we have forgotten the good that God is working for. What is the good that God wants for us? You see, you and I think that good lies in the temporary pleasure of a passing world.

Or a life of comfort where we're left unchanged and unchallenged in our motives and desires. But that's not the good that God is working for. If you're a parent and you love a child, you will want that child to be taught and to learn.

And you will allow them even to face difficult things, even for them to learn those things. Because you're not just looking at their feelings in the moment, but you're looking at the character over years to come.

It's why the term spoil your children is true, right? Because if you give them everything that they want, you will, by definition, spoil them. Because you need to think to the future.

And God has a good in mind for you this morning if you're a Christian. It's there in chapter 8, verse 29. We looked at it last week. Look at it again. What is the good that he is working for?

[27:44] He wants you to be more like Jesus. That's the good that he's working for. He wants us to be like the one whose identity we already have.

He wants us to dwell in glorious union and communion with him forever and ever in a resurrection world, liberated from the curse of death. And because God loves us, because that's what he's fitting us for, so he will allow suffering in our lives.

Because his good is not our pleasure in the moment, but our eternal transformation into the likeness of Jesus Christ. And so in infinite wisdom and in ways that we can't always understand, he allows us to suffer, not as a contradiction of his love, but even as a sign of his love.

Not to defeat us, but to transform us. C.S. Lewis captures it really well in the book *Mere Christianity*. He says this.

He says, imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. And at first, perhaps, you can understand what he's doing. He's getting the drains right. He's stopping the leaks in the roof and so on.

[28:51] You knew those jobs needed doing, and so you're not surprised. But presently, he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably. Doesn't seem to make any sense.

What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of. He's throwing out a new wing here. He's putting on an extra floor there. He's running up towers. He's making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a perfectly decent little cottage. He's building a palace. Where he intends to come and live himself.

That's it, isn't it? So for you this morning, Christian, God is for you. And he's at work in you. Not to punish you and not to defeat you, but in love to change and transform you.

He's not saved you to lose you along the way. He's not withholding from you anything that you truly need. Instead, he is for you and will graciously give you all things.

[29:56] Praise his name. Let me pray. Let's just take a moment to pray in your own hearts.

Maybe respond to something that you've heard. Heavenly Father, it is incredible that you, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, the God of all glory is for me, for us.

Thank you that nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love that you have for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Thank you that we carry his identity. Thank you you're transforming us into his likeness. Thank you that one day we will be with you eternally in the glories of a remade world.

Oh Lord, come, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.