

Romans 8:35-39 Security in Christ.

Following on from last week, Paul is again referring to the present condition of the Roman believers. As I shared last week, Emperor Nero is on the throne at this time. The Roman believers are facing persecution and even death. We read throughout chapter 8 references to this suffering.

17... If indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

23 We ourselves, who had the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

26 in the same way , the spirit helps us in our weakness.

V35 It is in this context that Paul asks the question, 'Who (or in the Greek it can mean 'what') shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Believers are 'loved by Christ' and are saved. Another way of asking this is , 'Can anything separate a believer from salvation?' When believers are under persecution, it is traumatic, can have a detrimental effect on their faith and even cause them to doubt. Paul is speaking to these concerns that the Roman believers have. Paul is speaking from personal experience as one who has gone through many trials and sufferings for the sake of Christ.

"²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?" 2 Corinthians 11:23-29

Paul knows what the Roman believers are going through because he has walked that path. The Roman believers are in the midst of persecution/trial or suffering for their faith, and he is encouraging them in essence to hold fast. Jesus himself tells us this clearly that persecution will come on account of him:

“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.” Matthew 5:11

V 36 “Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” Psalm 44:22

Paul is referring to God’s people in the past who have suffered. For the Roman believers he is basically saying that their suffering is nothing new. God’s people have always suffered. Clearly death is a very present possibility for the Roman believers. In the early church suffering was very much part of Christian life. Paul is talking about the suffering that goes along with the Christian faith because they are identifying themselves with Christ. Peter also refers to this:

“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And, “If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?” ¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.” 1 Peter 4:14-19

Just to say that this is the same for the church today. Many of our brothers and sisters around the world are going through persecution and suffering.

August 27th 2020 “Pastors and front-line workers in Myanmar’s Wa region are rethinking church strategies after an intense season of persecution. Wa state, in eastern Myanmar along the Chinese border, is an autonomous region governed by the Communist United Wa State Party. Christians in the region have been heavily persecuted since 2018. Most church buildings have been destroyed or confiscated, and almost all pastors in the region have been imprisoned at some point in the past two years. “Many pastors are scared to share their faith under threat of death or returning to prison,” a VOM worker said. Christian leaders in the area have decided that the best strategy is to transition traditional churches into underground house churches. To that end, leaders are now training local pastors and encouraging them not to live in fear. They are also teaching church planters how to start house churches. Pray for Christians in Myanmar.” <https://www.icommittoprayer.com/request/2074/front-line-workers-in-myanmar/>

Suffering and persecution are part of the church. I believe that death was a very real possibility for the Roman believers. Death is clearly a possibility for the pastors in Myanmar. Just like Paul is encouraging the Roman believers during their suffering and persecution, the local Myanmar leaders are encouraging the Christian pastors in Myanmar during their persecution as well.

V37 Paul is saying that in all these things that the Roman believers are facing (trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or the sword) they can ‘conquer’ because of

the love of Christ. This conquering does not come from human strength, but from supernatural strength and divine intervention of the Holy Spirit.

“I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves. ¹⁷ Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues. ¹⁸ On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. ¹⁹ But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, ²⁰ for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.” Matthew 10:16-20

As believers, we will be victorious because of the love that Christ has for us. The Holy Spirit will be with us always in any situation or trial.

ὑπερνικῶμεν (upernikōmen) ‘to be more than a conqueror, to gain a surpassing victory’.
Strong's

“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” Psalm 139:7

There is no place where the believers can be without the Holy Spirit. There is no where they can go without the presence of Christ’s love!

“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” ⁶ So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” Hebrews 13:5-6

V38 Paul answers his question from v35 **Nothing can separate the believer from the love of Christ!** This list is absolutely complete: death or life cannot separate us, the spiritual realm cannot separate us, present or future cannot separate us, no power is able to separate us, space (height or depth) cannot separate us, nothing in all of creation can separate a believer from the love of Jesus Christ.

“Paul exclaims that it is impossible to be separated from Christ. His death for us is proof of his unconquerable love. Nothing can stop Christ's constant presence with us. God tells us how great his love is so that we will feel totally secure in him. If we believe these overwhelming assurances, we will not be afraid.” NIV, *Life Application Bible*

That's what Paul is saying to the Roman believers. 'Don't be afraid of your current circumstances because nothing can separate you from the love of Christ. You can conquer it' When we look at the end of Paul's life we know that for him, it is a truth.

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure (death) is near. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." ²
Timothy 4:6-8

Paul knew that his own death could not separate him from the love of his Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. He tells Timothy with confidence that he knows where he is going. There is no doubt or fear in him. Paul was beheaded by Emperor Nero and the traditional date of that was A.D.65.

How can we relate to this today? We are not experiencing any suffering or persecution in our part of the world. Well not yet anyway; that may come in the future and personally, I believe that it will.

If you have put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ then there is nothing that can separate you from the love of Christ - nothing at all! If you are in the cancer room he is there with you. If you are in the depths of grief over a loved one, Jesus says 'never will I leave you and never will I forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5).

"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" Psalm 139:7

There is no trial that you are going to go through where you will not have his presence of the Holy Spirit with you. There is no situation that you are in where Christ is not present with his love for you in that situation. Think of your personal trial right now. Perhaps, it is a personal trial or a trial with a family member or friend. It could be a trial of a situation or a certain fear that you are facing. **Nothing can separate you from God's love in Christ Jesus your Savior.**

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. **The Lord is near.** ⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Philippians 4:5-7

Brothers and Sisters, if you are a believer you are secure in Christ and nothing can separate you from his love.

Prayer & reflection

Pray for those brother and sisters in the Lord who are being persecuted
<https://www.icommittoprayer.com/>

Pray about your own trials at the moment. How does today's passage reassure you?