

Floodgates of Blessing

The Scripture I was meditating on Thursday Morning was Romans 8:35 and 37, which say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? . . . No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

There are several key truths that emerge from these verses. First, it is clear that living as a Christian in a world that was and is increasingly hostile to Christ is not easy. For those who belong to Jesus Christ there will be trouble. There will be some hardships. Persecution at some point or another is almost guaranteed. By virtue of the fact that we belong to Jesus Christ we can expect attacks. The reason for this is that there is a war going on and the minute we say yes to Jesus Christ His enemy puts the laser beam of his hatred upon us, and he is bent on destruction.

Ultimately the enemy is the Devil, but he has many accomplices. All over the world there are secular people and people who belong to other religions who hate us just because we bear the name of Christ. There are people who love their sin and hate us simply because we represent a different kind of life and our very existence is felt as a threat to their hedonistic lifestyles. There are some decent people who hate us because they have believed lies that God haters in the media have crafted against us. There are people who once believed but have fallen away from Christ, and some of them will do everything they can to get us to join them in their rebellion against God. As the old saying goes, "Misery loves company."

But no doubt the greatest enemies we have as Christians are the enemies within our own minds and hearts. All of us struggle with old hurts, fears, doubts, lusts, ambitions, jealousies, and selfishness. The Devil knows how to play us in these areas. He knows how to set traps for the unaware. He puts temptations before us and makes them look so desirable, so pretty, so delicious. Paul says that our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities and spiritual wickedness in high places. Paul goes so far as to say in Romans 8:36: "As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" you **Christians are in for a battle everyday.**

2

A second key thing I see in these verses is in the form of a question; that question is this: Can any of these things separate us from the love of Christ? Another way of asking that question is to ask: Is there anything that we can ever think or do that will change or cancel God's love for us? What about the sins we've all done before we became Christians and what about the sins we have all committed after we became Christians. Do these things disqualify us from God's love or from His kingdom. Paul has already answered this question in the verses leading up to the rhetorical question in verse 35. Romans 8:31-34 say: "What, then, shall we say in response to this? 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 is he that condemns? 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." **Nothing--absolutely nothing--can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

The third key truth I see in Romans 8:35 and 37 is found in verse 37: Paul says "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Please notice the word "more." When we avail ourselves of the resources and weapons God provides for us in the battle we are asked to fight, the contest isn't even close. We are more than conquerors. We are victors. When we call upon the Lord, in our battle against sin, all the armies of heaven are on our side. Jesus told His disciples, "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." So, it seems to me that as strange as it may seem, when we recognize that we are under attack, when the world, the Devil, and our old sinful nature are ganging up on us, the thing to do is stop and smile. "Be of good cheer," Jesus says, "I have overcome the world." Isaiah 54:17 puts it this way, "'no weapon forged against you will prevail, and you will refute every tongue that accuses you. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and this is their vindication from me,' declares the LORD." **We are more than conquerors!**

But before I go on to share something else with you this morning, there is one more thing I want us to notice in Romans 8:35 & 37. These verses tell us that we are in a serious spiritual battle-involved in a war of epic proportions. They tell us that we are secure in the love of Christ. And, these verses tell us that we are more than conquerors because the outcome of the war we

3

are in has already been decided: Jesus, through His sacrificial death has overcome the world, and His resurrection from the dead proves His victory. But we cannot miss the end of verse 37. Paul says, "in all these things we are more than conquerors *through him* who loved us." The security we have, the power we have to overcome, the victory we have, is found in one place and in one place only. None of this is gained by our own strength, wisdom, or cunning. Paul says it is through Christ. We need to be trusting Christ, standing firm in Christ, allowing Christ to be our shield and our defender, and taking orders from Christ in the midst of every battle. We are more than conquerors through and in Christ. In all of life's battles we need to be intimately connected to Christ; He is our security. He is our place of safety. He is our victory. **It is in and through Him that we are more than conquerors.**

"More than conquerors." As I was meditating on this phrase Thursday morning the Lord gave me a picture. How many of you watched the Super Bowl? How many saw what happened in the stadium at the end of the game? How many of you would like to have been a part of the ground crew that had to clean up that mess? You see, throughout the game, somewhere high above the field and beneath the stadium dome, all that confetti was bagged and ready to be released. Or if you have ever watched the political conventions, on the night they choose or announce their candidate for president, high up in the trusses of the convention centers are thousands of red, white, and blue balloons, ready to be released at the right moment. Well, beneath the canopy of heaven there is another and much greater distribution waiting to be revealed. It's not confetti. It's not balloons; it's blessing. God is standing by waiting to pull the string, throw the switch, or push the button to release His blessings upon us, more blessings and more joy than we can contain.

Earlier in Romans 8:18 & 19 Paul says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed." Just as the people at the Super Bowl were waiting for the victor to be revealed at the end of the game, and just as the delegates at the political conventions await their candidate to be announced, Paul says that the whole creation waits for the children of God to be revealed. And then he says, "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us."

The point is that we who believe are all the children of God in process and the whole of creation is waiting for our unveiling, waiting for us to step forward and to begin to live into who we are in and through Jesus Christ. Can you picture it? Under the canopy of heaven are blessings, manifold blessings, countless blessings--salvation, miracles, healings, reconciliation with God and with one another, joy unspeakable and full of glory, just waiting to be released, blessings for us as individuals and for us as a church. And, they will be released to us the moment we fully trust and each time we fight off the enemy and obey the Lord.

There are several scripture passages that picture this release of blessing. One of the longest ones is Deuteronomy 28:3-8. God says to Israel: "You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock--the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. The LORD will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. The LORD will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The LORD your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. . . ." Then verses 11-13 say: "The LORD will grant you abundant prosperity--in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground--in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. The LORD will make you the head, not the tail." What's the catch? What do the people need to do to be blessed? Deuteronomy 28:2 says, "All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the LORD your God." Deuteronomy 28:13b says, "If you pay attention to the commands of the LORD your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom." Trusting the Lord, and placing our lives in the hands of the Lord, to the point that we obey Him, that's the ripcord that opens the blessings of heaven upon us.

Malachi 3:10 says, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates

of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

Luke 6:38 says, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Acts 5:32 says, "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

I don't know about you but I can feel the holy suspense. Can you imagine how the people responsible for releasing the confetti at the Super Bowl must have felt when the moment to let it loose drew near? Can you imagine how the people responsible for letting out all those balloons at the conventions feel when their special moment comes? Can you imagine the suspense of the angels as they wait for the exact moment to release the blessings of God upon His children. But the truth be told it is God who is waiting in suspense and it is we who have been given the power and the privilege of releasing His stored up blessings. Every time we choose to trust Him rather than to follow our own fearful instincts and every time we choose to obey Him over the temptation to disobey, we tug at the ripcord that releases His blessings. The more we trust, the more we obey, the more we love, the more we walk not after the dictates of our lower natures and the more we walk according to the Holy Spirit, the more we pray the prayer of faith, the more blessings we invite into our lives and into our church. I have the power, you have the power, together we have the power to bring down the blessings of the Lord. It's all about trust, surrender to Him, and the obedience that flows from that surrender. Beloved, all creation waits for the children of God to come out from hiding, to show themselves before the Lord, and to surrender their lives to His ways. O how all creation waits and O how the Lord desires to bless us.

The Fourth Street Church of God

2001 Fourth Street
Altoona, PA 16601
942-1007/946-4110

Sermon for February 20, 2011

Floodgates of Blessing

Romans 8:29-39

Jon R. Neely, Pastor