

Sunday Jan. 24, 2021

Lesson 8: Nothing Can Separate Us From God's Love in Christ

Scripture: Romans 8:31-39

Context:

Our series continues to focus on God's hope for humanity. This week we go to the book of Romans to look at the good news delivered to those in Rome. The focus of today's lesson on hope is how the depth of God's love in Christ proves there is no power to shake that love.

The book of Romans is perhaps one of the richest in terms of theology for the modern church. Because of its length and content, much of our understanding of the faith comes from this book. The book is a letter written by Paul towards the close of Paul's career as an apostolic preacher, somewhere in the time of A.D. 55-64.¹ We do not know as much about Paul's relationship with the church in Rome other than what we can deduce from the contents of the letter.

Per the letter, Paul was not as familiar with the church in Rome as he was with other churches. Even though Paul had never been there, we do know he had a lot to convey to them whether it was one congregation or several house churches who needed counsel and direction. We do know Paul wanted to visit them (1:11-13), to continue his mission in Spain (15:24), and how he was ready to focus on other parts of the Mediterranean world after completing work in the eastern half (15: 19-20).² For Paul, the Roman church was a gateway to the western world and thus he spent much of his letter explaining tenets of faith as he examined having faith in Christ, professing Christ as Lord, and the power of the resurrection.

This passage comes in the midst of Paul exploring God's foreknowledge of God's will for the world. This chapter acts as a conclusion to the whole of chapter eight, which is supremely Paul's chapter on the surety of God's grace.³ Paul has given a summary of God's knowledge and is able to tie it together.

For Paul, the surety of God's grace is rooted in Christ's presence in our lives who upon giving his life for us, continues to advocate for us. Nothing can separate us from Christ. There is no situation, no powers, no objects, no angels or rulers, who can separate us from the love of God.

As a conclusion statement, this one delivers a key insight to Paul's theology. Because of who Christ is, nothing will ever separate him from those he loved. As such, believers have the assurance on this journey that God is for us. Nothing that happens to us during our life as creatures of God can have any negative effect on God's loving care

¹Paul J. Achtemeier, "Romans," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 19.

² Ibid.,

³ Ibid., 148.

for us.⁴ Because of Christ advocating for us, we will never be alone.

Application

This scripture passage is perhaps one of the most powerful in the bible. After Paul has given a justification of the Christian faith focusing on the sovereignty of God, he moves to a practical application piece. Because God knows and loves humans, God is for humans through all trials to come their way. God does not abandon humanity and nothing can separate God from humanity.

The text is especially good news for Christians because of our tendency to declare things for God. At times, the Christian faith has been used as more of a bully pulpit to shame or push people to do certain things than actually follow Christ. People warn of behaviors or activities that separate us from God. I've heard people comment on the faith of others not based on their good works, compassion for others, or deep faith, but on things such as "He doesn't cuss one lick or touch one drop of alcohol," as if these are the things to hinge God's blessing or choosing. Somehow we love attaching the idea of holiness with possessing a perfect moral card we've chosen for the acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. It's easy to slip into, especially for those of us who like to make lists or think we can control things.

Yet if anything, this text flies in the face of us trying to control how God's love is granted to us and to others. We are loved by God not for what we do or not do, but because Christ loves us. There is nothing we can do to earn that love; not perfect behavior cards we can carry around to convince God to love us. God loves us regardless of what we do or do not do. God loves us when we sing the hymns with gusto. God loves us when the day goes haywire and we say that cuss word just to get it out of our system. God loves us when succeed and God loves us when we fail. We have a victory in Jesus.

The other good news in this text is how nothing on this earth can separate us from God. Death or life, angels or rulers, not present or future things, not powers or height or depth, or any other things will ever block our path and connection to God. None of these things can get in the way of the relationship we have with God.

For me, this text especially speaks to the more troubling situations in life we see to arise. How many times in the Deep South do we have someone commit suicide and the whisperers and righteous proclaim how the person's soul is now being tormented in Hell because of "what the Bible says about people who kill themselves?" To be clear, the Bible doesn't say one thing about those who commit suicide except to note the tragedy of King Saul falling on his sword or the grief of Judas in both his death accounts.

Even more so, we forget this passage, which reminds us of how absolutely nothing will separate us from Christ's love. We have a victory in the one who loves us and who proclaimed a defeat of death and the evil of this world in a resurrection. Whether it is someone who commits suicide, an unfortunate miscarriage for a couple, or an escalating conflict in our community, we are reminded nothing can ever separate us from the love of God.

Why do you think it is important to not make lists of who is acceptable to God and who is not? Why do you think we like the idea of trying to earn God's love? What are ways you can remember God's love for you and for others? How can this passage

⁴ Ibid., 150.

give you hope in difficult situations? Why is it important for us to remember this passage in times of uncertainty or loss?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009