

Sermon for February 18, 2024 – First Sunday of Lent

Romans 8:31-39 (EHV)

Theme: **Nothing Can Separate you from God's Love**

- 1) No Accuser
- 2) No Pain or Persecutor
- 3) No Power of any Kind.

³¹What then will we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him? ³³Who will bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies! ³⁴Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus, who died and, more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us! ³⁵What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶Just as it is written: For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces, ³⁹neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

My neighbour at my first parish in Milwaukee - a former Airborne Ranger and veteran of the first Iraq war - once told me: "Pastor, I don't think I can ever go to heaven. The Bible is clear: "Thou shalt not kill," and I have killed people. I don't think there is any way God can forgive me." He felt that God could never love someone like him because of some of the things he was commanded to do during the war.

So, what did I tell him? The truth. "Joe, when God says: "Thou shalt not kill," he is forbidding murder and not the killing a soldier does in defence of his country. The Scriptures are clear on that point. But even if you were guilty of murder, know this: Jesus died on the cross for every sin you have ever committed. He paid for them in full. Nothing can ever change that fact. Trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of all your sins and be at peace."

Like Joe, there are times when we are also tempted to wonder whether God loves us. For some of us, it is the shame and regret we feel over some past sin we think is unforgivable. For others, it is some problem, pain, crime, or mental anguish that has us wondering, "If God loves me, why would He allow me to go through something like this?"

With St. Paul as our guide, let us consider God's promise to the believer: **Nothing can separate you from God's love:** 1) No Accuser. 2) No Pain or Persecutor. 3) No Power of any Kind.

Part One: No accuser can separate you from God's love.

Our sermon text is the last section of Romans chapter 8 – one of the most comforting chapters in the Bible for a suffering Christian. If you are unfamiliar with this chapter, get acquainted with it because the last half points out that, even though suffering is inevitable on this earth, it does not compare with the glory that will be revealed in us on the last day. The Holy Spirit himself intercedes for us when we are weak. God helps us endure – promising that all things work together for the good of those who love Him.

All this leads the Apostle Paul to ask: *What then will we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

We have powerful enemies like the devil, wicked world, and our sinful flesh that try to stand against us, but what harm can they do us if the almighty God is on our side?

But how do we know that God is really on our side? St. Paul writes: *Indeed, he who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also graciously give us all things along with him?* God sending Jesus to be our Saviour is proof beyond any shadow of a doubt that God loves us and that we can trust Him.

Therefore, the apostle asks: *Who will bring an accusation against God's elect?*

The devil, together with our sinful flesh, certainly tries to accuse us - constantly reminding us of our past sins and overwhelming us with immense feelings of shame to get us to despair. And the world? It loves to parade our faults in front of everyone whenever it can.

But the truth is that no matter how much the devil, world, and our sinful flesh bombard us with feelings of being unforgivable, they have no say in the matter. Their accusations are meaningless because *God is the one who justifies!*

To justify means to “declare not guilty” – to acquit someone of wrong. God is the one who justifies: acquits us of all sin for Christ's sake. And if God pardons you through faith in His Son, *Who is the one who condemns?*

Only one Judge can send a soul to hell,ⁱ and that Judge is Jesus. On the last day, He will show this authority by condemning the devil and all his allies to everlasting death. Yes, Jesus is the only one with the authority to condemn us, but will He?

The apostle writes: *Christ Jesus, who died and, more than that, was raised to life, is the one who is at God's right hand and who is also interceding for us!*

Consider this: the only person with actual authority to accuse and condemn you is the same person who stopped at nothing to die for your sins. He rose from the dead - showing that your past, present, and future sins have been paid in full. Whenever the devil accuses you before God the Father, Jesus – the one who both paid for your sin and has been appointed by the Father as your Judge - intercedes on your behalf.ⁱⁱ

Therefore, no matter how sinful or unworthy you feel, having turned to Jesus in repentance, you can be sure your sins are forgiven. You are at peace with God and loved by Him. The Scriptures promise it. Never doubt it because no accuser can separate you from the love God has for you in Christ.

Part Two: No pain or persecutor can separate you from God's love.

Well, if the Almighty God loves us so dearly, we can expect a trouble-free life on this earth, right? Wrong. The LORD never promised anything of the sort. Instead, he warned: *"In this world you are going to have trouble. But be courageous! I have overcome the world."*ⁱⁱⁱ

Therefore, the Apostle Paul asks: *What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

We face all sorts of problems in life - all of which test our faith. "Why did God take away my spouse? Doesn't He know that I need him?" "Why did God take my health away? How can I support my family?" "Why did God allow me to be a victim of an assault? Didn't he promise to protect me?" The list of faith-testing afflictions God allows in our lives can go on.

³⁶ *Just as it is written: For your sake we are being put to death all day long. We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*

According to Open Doors World Watch, 317 million Christians face very high to extreme levels of persecution for their faith. That's an average of 1 in 7 worldwide. In Africa, 1 in every 5 Christians is persecuted. In Asia, the ratio jumps to 2 in 5. Yes, in a very real way, these followers of Jesus face death all day long.

Will all the world's raging and evils the devil puts in our lives be able to separate us from the love of Christ? "No," the apostle Paul emphatically writes, *"in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."*

No matter how many Christian bodies persecutors dance over, they are not the victors. The killed Christians are! How so? Because the Bible says: *"Precious in the eyes of the LORD is the death of his favoured ones."*^{iv}

No matter what we experience, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. How so? Because we Christians realize that this world is temporary. Our true home is with our Father in heaven. No matter what the world takes from us - our health, relationships, dignity, or even our life - the one thing it cannot take from us is the love God has for us in Christ Jesus. No matter what we suffer, believers remain God's dearly loved children - holy and precious in His sight.

God promises to work in all things for our everlasting good.^v Sometimes, we do not feel or perceive this, but His promise remains true. Hold on to the one who loves you so much that He died on the cross for your sins; then, on the Last Day, you will see precisely how victorious we are through

faith in Him. No pain or persecutor can separate you from the love God has for you in Christ, nor can any power of any kind, as we will learn next.

Part Three: No power of any kind can separate you from God's love.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, neither things present nor things to come, nor powerful forces,³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul was convinced of God's love for us - and we should be too. No power, ruler, time, creature, force, spiritual being . . . nothing in all creation can separate us from the love God has for us in Christ Jesus our LORD.

But if this is true, why do we suffer all sorts of troubles and trials? Simply put, we suffer them because God uses them for his glory. We might never understand why or how God uses them, but we can trust God when he says all our suffering, pain, and problems – as scary as they may be – are for our everlasting good.

Let me explain what I mean with a little illustration: all a child may want to do is sit in front of a screen all day, eating junk food and drinking soda. Those things give him pleasure. But are they good for the child? No. So, what does a loving parent do? Restrict those things. He may even force his child to go outside and get some exercise. He might even force the child to eat foods that don't taste that good but are healthy. In all those things, the parent is looking out for the child's future – even though the child may not be able to understand it. Yes, loving parents don't give their children what they want; they give them what they need.

As the perfect, loving father that he is, God takes away things we might like or makes us go through things that hurt. Why? Because he knows the future and what we need to face it. This is why he doesn't give us what we want but need.

Yes, dear Christian, regardless of how unworthy or unforgivable you are tempted to feel, know this: God loves you. Proof of this fact is not found in whether you have an easy, "pain-free" life. No, the evidence is found on Jesus' cross and in his empty tomb. Because of these things, you can be sure: nothing in all creation can separate you from the love God has for you in Christ Jesus our Lord. While it is true that you can separate yourselves from God by not believing in Jesus, it also remains true that nothing that either you or anyone else does can make God stop loving you.^{vi}

Therefore, whenever you feel oppressive shame over your sins or are suffering under a mountain of pain or sorrow, look at Jesus' cross and empty tomb to find the assurance of God's love for you. Remember His promise that nothing in all creation can ever separate you from the love God has for you in Christ Jesus your Lord. And, taking that promise to heart, accept the things that happen to you with patience and faith– trusting that God will keep his promise to use them for your good. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Matthew 10:28

ⁱⁱ Cf. 1 John 2:1,2

ⁱⁱⁱ John 16:33, EHV

^{iv} Psalm 116:15, EHV

^v Cf. Romans 8:28

^{vi} Cf. 2 Timothy 2:11-13