

LIFE IN THE SPIRIT: Spiritually Assured

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Romans 8:31-39¹

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When Nothing Is Everything

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."

"God's work must be hidden, so that you do not stop listening to Christ and depend upon your inner feeling ... all depends upon the faithfulness of God to God's promise."

[Paulson, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:282]

Introduction

[SKIT GUYS VIDEO]

In John Grisham's novel *The Testament*, is a rare moment in modern literature where the Good News of the Gospel is on display for all to see. Where, the main character Nate O'Reilly finds himself in the throes of spiritual drought and death. Rachel Lane, the heir to a great fortune (but wanting nothing to do with it), attempts to breathe Christ's life into O'Reilly, an alcoholic, bankrupt, under indictment, divorced, suicidal, confused and for the most part alone. Rachel speaks, "Your sins are forgiven, Nate."

"Which ones," he inquires. "There are so many."

"All of them," she assures, as she takes his hands and leads him in prayer to the One who forgives ... and restores hope.

OR ...

"Meanwhile, where is God?" So penned C.S. Lewis in his classic work *A Grief Observed*. Written after his wife's death, Lewis wrestles intensely with his emotions, like anyone who has lost someone close to them. Taking for granted the Lord's presence in the good times, what do you find in the darker times? Lewis' honesty makes us uncomfortable:

¹ Other potential "series": God's Everlasting Love ... No Separation ... An Eternal Confirmation ... as per the Skit Guys video, "When Nothing Is Everything"

"A door slammed in your face, and sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once. ... What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?" [5-6]

Thanks be to God through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Main Thought:

"In spiritual warfare mighty forces – supernatural as well as natural – are arrayed against the people of Christ, but through Him they overcome them all and remain irrevocably encircled and empowered by His unchanging love." [Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 179]

Yes, let the Pentecost people of God "embrace the Good News that in all things, nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from God and His love for us through His Son's death and resurrection." [Hovel, *CPR*, 18:3, 31]

That "nothing," child of God, is our everything. Amen.

+ + +

Well, when we left off last week, we did so with this life-affirming promise ringing in our ears [Romans 8:30]:

"Those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified."

Yes, with the Lord of Life clearly *doing* our salvation, the "golden chain of redemption" that has come by grace to His sons and daughters, cannot be broken. Even in the midst of groanings from within/out that chain – forged by blood and water – is sure. It **is** "*most certainly true*."

Leaving Romans 8:31-39 ... Paul's conclusion to what life in the Spirit looks like. Where, as the chapter began with "*no condemnation*," it ends with "*no separation*," as Paul asks a series of questions, each meant to point squarely to the solid declaration of our life in Christ, a life that cannot be shaken:

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If [or since] God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

"God for us!" Such is the portrait before us ... "a three-word summary" – penned in scarlet – of your salvation. With this foundation *beneath*, and shield *about* us, we rise, putting down our enemies ... crushing them, like the head of Satan, into the dust. [Franzmann, *Romans*, 157]

So, go ahead ... bring it on. Try to shake the faith of this child of God. Bring on the circumstances that war against a sure and certain hope in Him. Bring on death. Bring on the pain and suffering. Bring on the uncertainty, which seems greater with each broken dream and each failed endeavor. Try and cast a different picture on my God and His love for me.

And you, Satan? Would you also accuse? As my sin is great, and my faith is small, would you try to convince me that I am not who Jesus says I am? Would you call into question God's grace and forgiveness? Would you try and convince me that I am not worthy to be called Christ's own, even as I stand covered in the blood of Jesus, my Lord?

Save your breath, Satan. For the case has been decided. The verdict irrevocable!" *"We have an advocate with the Father,"* John says [1 John 2:1]. His name is Jesus, my Savior. If you have any issues, take it up with Him!

³⁵ [Yes] who [or what] shall separate us from the love of Christ?

Nothing! Did you get that? *Nothing!*

And yet, those "nothings" still try and become *something* don't they? In fact, not only do they try, they often succeed in looming large in our lives ... as we swim in oceans past that at times accuse and cripple us ... as we flail about in our raging waters present that seek to paralyze and hold us back ... swallowing our future, that at times fill us with doubt and fear.

Paul is in no way trying "to deny the seriousness of the pain and suffering that people experience." To look beyond ourselves and our circumstances "should not lead to a superficial and glib 'Smile, God loves you.'" [Raabe, CJ, July 1993, 245] But [and this is huge] God's promise stands, come what may!

[Be it] tribulation ["pressure"], *or distress* ["narrowness"], *or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*

Where, perhaps the swallows of San Juan Capistrano may be of some help:

"The swallows never fail." Where, every year, around March 19 [St. Joseph's Day] thousands of orange tailed Cliff Swallows arrive from Argentina to a Spanish mission in San Juan Capistrano, California, as they have done in the over 250 year history of that mission. "Whether it be rain or sunshine, they come and the mission greets them with the peal of its bells." [*St. Louis Post Dispatch*, 3/20/1994, 9A in *CPR*, 6:3, 12] Where, with almost the same precision as their arrival, around October 23 [the Day of San Juan], the infamous cliff swallows return to their wintering grounds in Argentina, 6,000 miles south.

Such is our hope in the certainty of the promises of God ... where:

³⁷ *In all these things we are more than conquerors through HIM WHO LOVED US.*

This is the *coup de grâce* ... the *pièce de résistance*. This is everything!

Yes, if we have hope in the midst of our suffering and we most certainly do, it rests solely here – "in this love: God's love that makes us God's own beloved children, one with Christ, to share His glory." [Chakoian, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:283]

Wherein, God's love is self-sacrificial, a love offering on our behalf that means that this God will "do anything, give anything, to ensure our spiritual flourishing." [Pogue, *Feasting on the Word (A)*, 3:283] Without that, we truly do have nothing. But in this nothing *is* everything! *Everything!*

THEREFORE ...

- † Embrace your times of upheaval, waiting patiently on the Lord for what *He* will do. He will show you His way forward, as He leads us to repent of what needs repenting, and strengthens us in what/whom He calls us to believe. [*“Lord, I believe; help, Thou, my unbelief!”*]
- † Second, return to what you “know” – His Word that endures ... His call in that cannot be revoked ... His willingness to meet you, where you are, in whatever condition – at His Table. As these gifts have breathed life into you, those same means will never disappoint you.
- † Third, pray ... intentionally ... deeply ... in the Spirit ... discerning what God is up to. Only the Holy Spirit can make sense of what you are going through ... “He who gives the lament of your heart to the One who made the promise, not to the one who trusts it.” [Paulson, 280]
- † Finally, tell someone! Redeemed and full of the Spirit, Jesus’ own are called to participate in the Spirit’s work of walking alongside others, to reach out to this world God so loved. Tell of the abundant life He offers. That “there is no reason to fear, and every reason to rejoice.” [Pogue, 283]

Conclusion

On a tour of Daniel Boone’s home near Defiance, Missouri, you will be told how Boone built his own coffin and kept it under his bed. From time to time, it is said, he would get into it to see if it still fit.

Prof. Reinhold Marxhausen of Concordia Teacher’s College in Seward, Nebraska, did the same thing, kept a coffin leaning against the wall in his office, and periodically would climb in. However, not to see if it would fit, but rather, to meditate, to be reminded that all in this life is fleeting.

Child of God, there is no greater promise than that there is nothing that can diminish the hope that our Savior Jesus will see us through. In spite of anything that may oppose us, we are safe in the love of God.

Rejoice in this – God’s Good News!

³⁸[Where] I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, not any powers, ³⁹neither 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.

Yes, let the Pentecost people of God embrace the Good News that in all things, nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from God and His love for us through His Son’s death and resurrection. That “nothing,” child of God, is our everything.

Where, in the words of Oswald Hoffmann, long time speaker for the Lutheran Hour, “What more is there to say than, ‘Amen’?”

So it shall be for you, in whom the Spirit dwells, on this day of God’s grace, and on all of the days to come. Amen!

Amen.

Bible Study:

OPEN:

[Read introduction from IVP study on Romans, p. 42!]

1. Why is it often difficult to feel like a conqueror?

[Though redeemed in Christ, the “unholy trinity” of life in this world, Satan and his horde attempting to see us undone, and our own sinful nature, we can come away from the battle worn and dejected ... or worse, despondent and in despair. Romans 8 paints another portrait – brining us to a high and holy distinction not by of our own reason or strength, but with the victory of victories! Therefore, rejoice! Again I say, “Rejoice!”]

Read Romans 8: (1-30 by way of review), 31-39.

DIG:

2. How would you characterize the overall mood of vv. 31-39?

3. By way of review, how would you characterize God’s good purpose(s) for us (vv. 28-30)? Who is it that insures these promises? How do “we know” (v. 28)? Why is such knowledge better than what we experience?

[The true goal of the Gospel is salvation and life in Christ – the down payment of which we have received, and the full complement to be received not yet!. God alone insures this life, as we see who is doing all the verbs, and who gives us His Word and Holy Spirit as His personal guarantee. When the experience of life in in the Spirit has worn off – the Word remains!]

4. *“What, then, shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?”* How are you encouraged by Paul’s answer (vv. 31-32)?

5. Vv. 33-34 evoke a courtroom. Who is our judge? Who is our defense attorney? How and why would *they* reply to any of the charges against us?

[God, the Father ... Jesus/the Holy Spirit ... the Father justifying us on account of His Son ... the Son proving the Father’s love by going the way for us ... the Holy Spirit “calling, gathering, enlightening” us according to His gifts.]

6. How might *"tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword"* cause us to question God's love for us (vv. 35-36)? Any of these bothering you right about now?

7. In spite of these things, why does Paul proclaim that we are *"more than conquerors"* (vv. 37-39)?

[It is all grounded in "Him who loved us ... the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." That is the whole deal. Without that, we don't stand a chance.]

8. Where do you need the blessed assurance – that nothing can separate God's love from God's people – to comfort you today?

REFLECT:

9. Questions that God asks (as the Holy Spirit does in vv. 31-35) are not simply to be dismissed. They are intended to accomplish several things: 1) to stop us and cause us to pause the deeper truths of God; 2) to convict us and bring us to face something or some reality in ourselves that needs to change; 3) to bring assurance, forgiveness, encouragement and strength to the child of God. Of those three purposes, what do the questions posed by Spirit through Paul evoke in you?

10. Reflecting on your "tour" through Romans 8, what have you appreciated the most about your study? What are one or two takeaways?

Additional Illustrations:

See Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, pp.5-6!

"One day, as I was passing in the field, and that too with some dashes on my conscience, fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul, Thy righteousness is in heaven; and [I thought therewith] I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand ... I also saw, moreover, that it was not my good frame of heart that made my righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same, yesterday, and today,, and forever." [Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, 229]

[Friday E-mail:] So, there is this great scene in the 1988 movie *The Bear ...* a story about a bear cub that is left alone, unable to feed or defend itself, when its mother is killed in a rockslide. Well, eventually, the cub attempts to bond with a male grizzly, which, in the wild often eats cubs for breakfast. Initially the grizzly ignores it, until the grizzly itself pursued by hunters, and the cub comes to its aid and wins the grizzly's affection. Not to give too much away, there is this great scene towards the end when a mountain lion now has the cub in its sights. Backed out on a limb, there is no hope for the cub to win. Where, in one final and desperate measure, the cub rears up on his hind legs and gives out a growl. To the audience's delight, the mountain lion retreats with haste, when, in the next screen we discover why the cat fled in terror: behind the cub is the cub's protector. In the protective shadow of the grizzly, no enemy could threaten his child.

What a great picture of our life in Christ. Where, in week one of our series "Life in the Spirit," we rejoiced that there was "no condemnation." In week two, "no obligation." Last week, there is "no frustration." Bringing us to this week ... "no separation." That's how Paul characterizes our life in the Spirit in **Romans 8:31-39**, the *coup de grace* of all that Paul has been saying up until now. In fact, I'd suggest you go back and read the whole of Romans 8 in order to take in the full scope of the assurances Paul brings us to at the end. Where, "in spiritual warfare," says F. F. Bruce, "mighty forces – supernatural as well as natural – are arrayed against the people of Christ, *but* [a biblical Word that always signals a momentous shift] through Christ, we "overcome them [all of those forces] and remain irrevocably encircled and empowered by His unchanging love." What a promise!

Where, child of God, there is much in this world to cause our hearts to fear. Our pasts, the present reality, as well as the future each bring with them voices that would paralyze us and lead us to doubt all that God says in His Word. But the redeemed of the Lord are not so quick to flee. Jesus our Savior is in the house! He is risen, indeed! Wherein, God's Good News reminds us that in all things, nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from God and His love to and for us in Christ. Nothing! Nothing! Where, in God's economy of grace, *His* nothing is *our* everything! SYOS