

MORE THAN CONQUERORS, ROMANS 8:28-39

Pax Romana #20

◆Intro: (Pilot and parachutes, Lucado, “Grip of Grace”, p.129) Only one item is necessary for the jump and it’s been provided. Yet so often people are not content, but anxious, even demanding. Its the same with placing our faith in God. We want to change the plans. Some folks even refuse to jump at all, preferring to go down with the plane. Don’t go down with the plane, and trust yourself to the parachute of God’s compassion.

◆This text wraps up chapters 5-8 or Romans, in which Paul has been showing us the solution to our fallen sinful state, namely salvation through Jesus and freedom in his Holy Spirit. He started out assuring us that there is “now no condemnation for those who are in Christ (5:1)!” Now as he ties up that beautiful theme, he raises a set of five questions the worried listener might counter with:

◆Who and what out there might be against us?

◆What if God doesn’t give all the things we need?

◆What if someone points the finger at our failures?

◆Won’t we be condemned?

◆What if something happens so I’m separated from God’s love?

What if I do something really bad? What if I fall away?

◆We ask these things too, sometimes late in the night. Sometimes after fits of rage, or indulgence. Doctor’s diagnosis’s can bring them up. So can a court of law, or a phone call from the bank, or a short discussion in the boss’s office. Who can be against us? We can think of some things: disease, inflation, taxes, corrupt leaders, a child drowned or maybe frozen in the snow, a policeman gunned down, the irrational sexual confusion we live in where we can’t tell a girl from a boy... there are many things that

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seem against us. And all these start us questioning our own destinies. We see the things that are wrong in the world, and we know instinctively that we carry the same malfunction in our sinful nature. And so we worry.

◆ Can I blow it after being reborn in Christ? Is there something else I better add to the mix for a safe future landing? My loved one is gone, and what if I never make it to heavens shore? To all this, Paul writes our passage.

◆ Read 28-30.

◆ **1. God's love is unstoppable and irresistible.** Everything Paul says about God's love shows it to be the ultimate conquering power. There is great confidence to be had in knowing it. That makes entering into God's love a high priority, wouldn't you agree? Some times we live in a false confidence as though it is God's job to bless us all in the end. It is not. When Paul says that "all things work together for the good" there are some things he is not saying, and we shouldn't confuse them.

◆ He is not saying that everything always balances out, as though we will experience as much pleasure as we do suffering in this life. He is not saying that it will all come out in the wash for everyone. Everything does not work toward ultimate goodness for those who do NOT love God (v28). So, without Jesus as your savior the colors invariably run in the wash, and lint collects in the seams of life. This message is for followers of God only, those "called according to his purpose."

◆ Verse 28 is talking to the "called". This does not mean everyone who hears about Jesus and the Gospel. It is not the external call, but the inter-

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nal call by which the Holy Spirit transplants a new heart, and gives the gift of faith. We know this because in v30 everyone called is also said to be justified. We know that many who hear the Gospel externally reject it and therefore are not justified before God. Nowhere does the Bible teach universalism, that everyone is saved in the end.

◆ Verse 29-30 is often referred to as the “Golden Chain of Salvation.” The “called” are caught in the middle of that chain that began before they were born or even had an opinion about God. You’re hearts love began in God’s heart and plan. Paul calls it “foreknowledge and predestination”. After the “calling” there comes justification (being declared right in God’s eyes), and glorification (being brought all the way to glory, heaven, perfection.). Notice too that these things are written in what’s called the prophetic past tense. Paul doesn’t say the believer “will be justified and glorified someday.” The believer is already glorified! You already have an address and mailbox in heaven. In Christ, it’s as good as done!

◆ If you are a believer in the resurrected Jesus, you can look back into history and see that it is the unstoppable love of God has caught you up in his arms! On that basis you can also look forward into the future confident in flow you find yourself floating in, leading straight to God’s throne room.

◆ **B. God’s saving love is an intensity that will not be denied.** Sometimes people think that God has willingly decided to limit his love to those who might decide to return it, as though God’s love is a weak love in the face of which our rebelling is stronger. This can not be true. When God calls to the heart of one he loves, all things must bend and mold and press to the eventual end of their good.

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◆ *“Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails.” Proverbs 19:21, NIV.*

◆ *“I know, O LORD, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.” Jeremiah 10:23, NIV.*

◆ Some picture God as loyal to us, close to us, desirous of us –but also affirm that he has limited his love such that he does not reach in and do something in us without our request. This safeguards the theory that man is free to choose on his own. I don’t understand the delight in such thinking for it makes God our biggest cheerleader, but not our coach. Like Aladdin’s genie, he is unable to actually save us unless we ask. So WE are sovereign over destiny. Please excuse me for not being particularly enamored of such giant groupie who is powerless, or respectful of my infinite depravity in my choices! And perhaps more than one in the room is like me, and not so confident that we will ask, or even want to ask for that which is actually best and holy. For I find within and inordinate propensity to like the wrong thing. Recall Romans 7 for verification of that.

◆ I ought not to want to be my own sovereign God, and thankfully I am not. The believer looks back in astonished relief at grace that chose to predestine her to become like Christ (v29). There is no greater comfort and surety.

◆ Read 31-34

◆ **2. God’s love is eternal and unchanging.** Some folks imagine that God’s love is like people’s love often is; conditional on our doing the right thing, or believing enough of the right things, or conforming enough of this

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life over to his ways. They think that God's love can change. But this is not the picture of God's saving love in Romans 8.

◆ **A.** Does God's love change? Suppose you saw a forlorn, orphaned child, destitute and malnourished and hungry. Suppose you took him home, gave him a bath, presented him with new clothes. Time went by and you adopted him, becoming legally responsible for something you had already been behaving as responsible for. Suppose you wrote him into your will, enrolled him in school, marked his birthday on your calendar, took him on vacations with you, and put him on your insurance policy. Then one night you hear him softly crying on his bed and you ask what's wrong. He says, "I'm afraid of tomorrow. I'm afraid I won't have food when I'm hungry. And that you won't love me tomorrow. What if I do something really bad?" Now what would you tell that little boy? Wouldn't you say something like, "Son, look what I have done for you. You are mine. Nothing you can do will change that. I may be disappointed if you choose evil. I will not agree with it. It won't be ok with me and you will likely suffer from such things. But son, my love for you is for good. You will always be my boy. You may forsake my love for you, but that will not change me."

◆ Four of Paul's 5 questions respond to this possibility that God could change his mind or that his love is limited.

- ◆ Is God really for us?
- ◆ Will he give us anything more?
- ◆ What about new charges or additional skeletons?
- ◆ Who else might condemn us? The Father, the Spirit?

◆ In other words, can our situation worsen? It can not.

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◆ B. Jeremiah 31 says that God's love is an everlasting love. Isaiah 49 says it is impossible for God to forget his children. His love goes beyond expectation. Remember the "all things" that must work for my good as a called person? Then in verse 32 it reappears: if God would give us his Son, he will certainly give us the "all things" as well. Jesus was the big prize, everything else is merely tip change. Paul's argument is that God's saving love is not a limited compassion, it is an existing, unchanging reality. It is a reality not affected but that affects and determines "all things".

◆ "being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6, NIV.

◆ Not, "he who began a good work in you will hope you agree."

◆ *"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it." 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24, NIV.*

◆ Not "The one who calls you will wait to see if you make it." It's just not like that. It comes down to, if you know your heart loves Christ, then you also know yourself to already be chosen and loved by Christ from before creation. You know it did not depend on your wisdom or merit, but on the gracious gift of God. And if you know this, the obvious conclusion is that you cannot blot God's blueprints. Satan may cause you to stumble on the road but the road ends in heaven and he can't get you off it. Daily victory is at stake depending on your choices, but salvation never is.

◆ *"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand." John 10:27-29, NIV.*

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◆ read 35-39

◆ **3. God's love is all-encompassing.**

◆ A. Paul's final question wonders if there might be some line too far for God to reach over. Or some place where he will not go. Or some trouble that is just too much, you know, an unpardonable sin, or situation. His answer is a group of extreme pairs, which attempt to capture both ends of possibility; like saying "to both ends and everywhere in between." (merism) So life & death covers the whole gamut of possibility. Height and depth covers any spacial area. Angels and demons covers the expanse of spiritual powers much of which we don't even know about. You get the point.

◆ Paul pairs make it clear that as Christians we will live probably in any of a million circumstances, everywhere on the spectrum of delight and disaster. But none of these is beyond the reach of God's love. We should not expect untarnished ease. That would be misunderstanding God's predestined purpose. V29 to become like our holy brother and savior. His purpose is not our pleasure, although ultimately we will have this when we reach his real purpose.

◆ Lets put it in terms of things we might experience: I am convinced that neither more money than I know what to do with, nor rent I can't keep up with, neither too many hours or being laid off, neither elation nor depression, neither a dead son nor a living enemy, not global warming nor the heating bill *-and nothing in between any of this-* can cancel out to working of God's love for my good! In Christ, I cannot lose!

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◆B. Circumstances definitely do fluctuate. Our assurance fluctuates. But we are not to doubt that God's loving hand is not present anyway. When we willingly sin against God we begin to doubt his love is as eternal as he says. We are more easily discouraged. We enjoy life less. When we decide we know better than God's commandments, we may run into tragic defeats in this life. Joy disappears. Victory is not characterizing your life. Sometime young people have asked me things like, "If I forget to pray, and then end up dying on that day, will I go to hell?" or "Can I go to heaven even if I am a greedy person?" The Gospel, good news is NO, failing to pray is not a ticket to hell, though you would have experienced more heaven here if you remembered. And YES, someone who has not conquered x or y, greed or false witness, can wind up in heaven if they are repentant of their sin and ask Jesus to carry it. Jesus' death is of so much value that even sins not yet dreamed up can be covered by them. This of course is no reason to dream them up.

◆**Conclusion:** Some imagine God's love as a sentiment that will even follow you to hell and mourn your life there, should you so insist on going. That does not sound like the sovereign love of Romans chapter 8, nor does it give much comfort to have a father watching his child but not interfering when he is about to create a disaster. You see, much of our fear, our questioning of the plans, our unwillingness to take God's parachute and jump, comes from our error in thinking that reality is up to us, and that we determine our destiny. Or that there are fates, or powers, or beings, or forces that may yet be greater than God. Or that the God we've heard

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about as being loving toward his children may possibly suffer from a split personality, or might simply change his mind about living us. Such person will never be confident and sure.

◆ But there is much security to be had by the believer that after the fact discovers that God came seeking her before she sought the Lord. That is why followers of Jesus must know what God and his love are like. When tragedies come, and they will –they need not, no, will not destroy you. When you fail, and sin, and you will –it does not alter your destiny. It may likely make the road there much more difficult, but it will not change your destination. When we suffer loss and heartache, and we will, it does not preclude an beautiful end result, even if I cannot imagine it.

◆ Are you tired? Weary? Sometimes seriously wonder if you're gonna make it? Have questions? Going down? Listen, it is not yours to argue that the pilot may hand out parachutes or not. Do you hear him offering you one or not? Maybe he will forcible strap it on you and push you out. There is nothing left to do but rest suspended by grace.

Wayne Watson

Psalm 139: 7-12/Isaiah 50: 2

A million dark alleys you can hide in
Dig a tunnel to the center of the earth
Convinced you've got nobody to confide in
Got you questioning the sum of what you're worth
People label you the black sheep of the family
Come collect upon your prodigal reward
Chorus
'Cause you can never outrun
Or go beyond the reaches
Of the long arm of the Lord

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I've been ashamed--I've been humbled and forgiven
I've been chastened by my Father's loving hand
But still, at times, I go on with my evil
It seems to constitute the nature of a man
But forgiveness is as close as my confession
And my sin amputated by His sword

Chorus

If He gave to me all that I deserve
This could be my final breath
But with compassion in His eyes
He's drawing me home
Into His arms--Into His tender arms of rest

There are pagans at the corners of creation
Making light of the salvation that we know
And with a small, narrow mind I give them over
To the passion of the Godless seed they sow
But, in truth, we have just as much potential
To be Godly and perfected by the Word

'Cause no one in this world
can slip beyond the reaches
Of the long arm of the Lord