

Faith Not Fear

Romans 8: 35 – 36

- For a year and a half, we have been climbing what many would argue is the Mount Everest of Scripture. The book of Romans.
 - In the first 8 chapters, we have ascended to the mountaintop as Paul has taken us step by step through the Gospel to show why he asserted this at the beginning of the book:

Romans 1: 16 – 17 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

- In Paul’s day it would have been easy for a Christian to be in the closet. To believe the promises of the Gospel, to have their new identity in Christ, but to want to hide that identity in fear, because to wear that identity in public brought nothing but trouble, suffering, and even death.
 - But there is no room for fear in Christianity.

1 John 4: 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

- We all tend to live in fear. What I fear isn’t the same as what you might fear, but no matter what it is we fear, we all tend to fear something.
 - In fact, what we fear often will point us to what our idols are. For example, if you fear failure, like I do, then your idol is success.
- But think what John tells us there. Whoever fears has not been perfected in love. What does He mean? Well think what does imperfect love look like. It looks like loving the wrong thing in the wrong way.
 - When we love God, the way we ought to love God, there is no fear because the object of our love is the unchanging, eternal God. But when we misplace our love, and invest it in anything else, fear will follow because the thing we are loving will be fickle and we know because of that the day will come when it will be gone.
- But notice what else John says there. Fear has to do with punishment, and as we spoke about last week, Christians have no punishment they need to fear because Jesus paid it all. God has justified us completely through Him and this no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
 - Now it is true that God discipline His children, but he will never punish, because Christ was punished in our place.
 - The only ones who have to fear punishment are those who have disordered loves—who love the world more than God. They should be afraid, very afraid.

- But Christians never should fear punishment, and frankly Christians should never fear discipline.
 - Deep down we all fear discipline on some level, because as the writer of Hebrews reminds us God disciplines those He loves. He does it for their good, but the writer of Hebrews also reminds us that no discipline seems pleasant at the time.
 - Discipline is never pleasant, but think what suffering and discipline accomplish in the lives of those who love the Lord. God uses all things for our good (and all things certainly includes unpleasant things that we tend to fear). He uses them for our good to conform us to the image of His Son, and that is the whole goal of the Christian life.
 - If we understand God's love and what God is doing, there is a sense in which rather than fearing and running from God's discipline, we ought to be saying, "Whatever it takes to make me what you want me to be. Whatever it takes so that your name is glorified. Whatever it takes to bring me to glory."
 - ♦ I'm not there yet, and my guess is neither are most of you. We are struggling through this together. It's why we need each other to encourage each other.
- But here is the truth in all of this. The more convinced we are of how high, long, wide, and deep the love of God is for us in Christ Jesus, the less we will fear anything in this life.

Romans 8: 31 – 38 What then shall we say to these things? If 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, 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." ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- This is the point that the power of the Gospel leads us to to—complete and total security in the love of Christ and the power of God for our salvation and a life with nothing to fear not even death itself.

- To help us think through what this Gospel means for our lives Paul asks us a series of questions that build on each other:
 - If God is for us who can be against us?
 - And the inescapable answer is that no one can.
 - Now a person may be thinking, “Okay, that’s great. No one can be against me if God is for me, but how do I know God is for me?” Paul addresses that in the next statement and question: He who did not spare his own son but graciously gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?
 - God is so for you, God so desires that you would be His forever, that He gave His very best—His Son to have you as His own. All the proof we need that God is for us and will do whatever it takes to bring us to glory with Him forever is found in this one fact, that God gave up Jesus for us.
 - But isn’t it possible that I could do something to mess all of this up, so that God stops loving me and is no longer for me?
 - No, and the reason why is found in the next questions Paul asks that we looked at last week. Who can bring any charge? Who can condemn God’s elect? No one can, because the reason God gave up His Son for us was for our justification.
 - ◆ Because Christ came and lived the life we should have lived, by faith his righteousness becomes our righteousness. Because Christ died the death that we deserved to die, his sacrifice for us takes all the condemnation and guilt away, as far as the east is from the west.
 - ◆ Because of Christ’s death on the cross for my sin, Christ experienced the complete and total separation from God that I deserve. That is why his cry on the cross was, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” Because Christ experienced that separation for my sin, I never will.
- But is there anything else, any other force that can separate us from the love of God? This is our question for today as we focus in on verses 35-36.

Romans 8: 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

- Paul is not speaking from some ivory tower here. This is not just a theory for Paul. This is His life, his experience that he is writing about.

2 Corinthians 11: 24 - 28 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger

from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

- When God draws people to Himself and they begin to trust Christ in faith, Satan throws everything he possibly can at them to try to make them falter and doubt. He tries to get us to doubt God's power to work in our lives. He tries to get us to doubt God's love for us. He tries to get us to doubt ourselves by continually whispering accusations against us in our ears—reminding us of all of our failures, and if those attacks fail, then Satan throws the kitchen sink at us.

1. The kitchen sink of troubles

- What are tribulations?
 - The English word tribulation comes from the Latin word "tribulum," which in Latin describes a farming tool that was used to thresh grain. It was a sled-like tool with strips of metal on the bottom that was drug over the stalks of grain and the pressure created by the threshing sled would separate the grain from the chaff.
 - Satan brings tribulations into our life with the purpose of doing that very thing to us. Satan tries to use the adverse circumstances of our lives to put pressure on us and separate us from the love of God.
- In addition to tribulations, Satan also bring hardships.
 - When you look at the Greek word that has been translated into our English word hardship, you see that hardships are different than tribulation. The Greek word that Paul uses is "stenochoria" and it means tight places. So, what Paul means by hardship is to feel so constrained or trapped by life that there is nowhere to go and seemingly no hope.
 - In tribulations the circumstances of life press hard on you. In hardships, the circumstances of life confine you.
- But in addition to using the circumstances of our lives to try to separate us from the love of God, Satan also seeks to use people to do what circumstances can't. Look at the next word. Persecutions.
 - We have a notion what persecution is. But here in America, most of us haven't experienced it....yet. But the more we stand on our faith and confront the world with the claims of Christ and the truth of God's word, the more likely is that the world will push back and try to silence us through persecution.



- But they are not the only things that Satan uses to try to separate the people of God from the love of God. So next, Paul moves onto material things that Satan may use to try to separate us from the love of God.
 - Famine and nakedness.
 - Famine is a communal suffering caused by a lack of food. It is a problem that has plagued the world ever since Adam and Eve sinned and it will continue to plague the world until Jesus returns to make all things new.
 - Nakedness in ancient times was another way of saying extreme poverty. Being so poor you didn't even have clothes to wear.
- In addition, to famine and poverty that affected both Christians and non-Christians, there also dangers that posed specific difficulties for those who were in the early church. Dangers such as beatings, arrest, trials, and imprisonment.
- And finally, there was the ultimate danger, the sword—death. Being executed for proclaiming Jesus is Lord, and the early church was so filled with martyrs that after Paul speaks of the sword at the end of verse 35, he quotes the words of Psalm 44: 22.

Romans 8: 36 As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

- From the first martyr of the church Stephen, right up to today, Christians have been martyred for their faith. We have little concept of this in the comfort we enjoy here in America, but worldwide there are 1000s of Christians who are killed for their faith each year.
- This is how Satan operates against the church of Jesus Christ, first he uses tribulation, hardship, persecution, danger, famine, and nakedness to try to make us give up Christ and conform to the world, and when then doesn't work, Satan seek to separate us from the love of Christ by destroying us.
- But Satan is no match for the love of God that is ours through Jesus Christ.

2. How does Christ's love hold us fast?

- To begin to understand how Christ's love holds us fast, we need to first understand the nature of that love. Now this is not any easy thing to do, because the nature of Christ's love for us is both eternal, and infinite.
 - In other words, like God, it knows no bounds. Like God, it has no beginning, it has no end.
 - As finite humans this is a difficult thing for us to wrap our minds around. And the sad part is that too often, we don't even bother to try, and because of that we often lose sight of how all-encompassing Christ's love is and how secure we are in it.

- So, the result is that rather than standing rock solid in the face of tribulation, hardships, persecution, danger, famine, nakedness, and sword, we become filled with doubts and fears.
 - “How can God really love me, when He is allowing me to go through all of this?”
 - “I am supposed to be God’s child. How can God possibly love me and still allow His child to suffer such abuse?”
- Well, before we answer that, let’s try our best to understand the dimensions of the love of Christ for us.
- Let’s begin by noticing that Christ’s love for us is an eternal love. The phrase before the foundation of the world appears in different contexts throughout the New Testament, and many of them involve our salvation.

Ephesians 1: 3 – 5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.

- Another is at the end of a parable that Jesus taught in Matthew 25.

Matthew 25: 33 – 34 (At the final judgment) He will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. ³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

- At the final judgment, what happens to those who have been blessed by God? They receive the Kingdom that was prepared for them from when? Before the foundation of the world. What is the basis for receiving this Kingdom? They were chosen to be blessed by God before the foundation of the world.
- How did God choose to bless them before the foundation of the world? Through the love of Christ.

1 Peter 1: 18 – 21 you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God,

- There is that phrase again, before the foundation of the world. Before the foundation of the world, Christ set his love upon you. Why? Because before the foundation of the world, God the Father chose you for adoption to himself as His children who would inherit the kingdom and appointed His Son to become the means of your righteousness.

➤ Before the foundation of the world, as the elect of God, you were in the love of Christ.

- In the book of Revelation, we come to literally the end of the world. And look what we see happening.

Revelation 13: 7 – 8 authority was given (the Beast) over every tribe and people and language and nation, ⁸and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain.

- The Beast is a reference to the Antichrist. Who is the Antichrist? I think the easiest and most correct way to think of the Antichrist is that it represents that which is against Christ.
 - But my main point in bringing this up is simply to see this phrase before the foundation of the world.
 - ◆ Those whose names were not written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world will worship the beast, the Antichrist, but those whose names were written in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world will not.
- Wow! Think about that means. If you are Christian, meaning your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, you not only are adopted into God's family to receive the Kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world, but there is no chance that you will ever fail and fall prey to worshipping the Antichrist.
 - When Satan brings tribulation, hardship, persecution, danger, nakedness, famine, or sword to try to make you fall away from Christ and worship Satan instead, it will not and cannot possibly happen, because before the foundation of the world you were loved and your name was written in the Lamb's book of life, and Christ died for you.
 - Now I know this runs completely contrary to all of the fear mongering that is so much a part of our modern Christianity and its focus on the end times and watching out for and wondering who is the Beast and what the mark of the beast is, but one who is truly a Christian has nothing to fear because:

John 10: 27 – 29 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

- If God has written your name in the Lamb's book of life from before the foundation of the world, and chosen you in Christ from before the foundation of the world to receive a kingdom prepared for you from

before the foundation of the world, it is a done deal, no one and no thing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

- It is an eternal love that holds you completely fast because it is not dependent on what you will or will not do, but solely upon the Lamb of God who was slain for you.
- It is a love so long it stretches from one end of eternity to the other.
- It is a love so high that it could reach all the way from the throne room of heaven to a manger in Bethlehem as God's own Son came to live with us and redeem us.
- It is a love so deep that it caused Jesus to humble himself and become obedient to death, even death on a cross.
- It is a love so wide that it could embrace and forgive even those who would nail Jesus to the cross so that too could be forgiven and welcomed into the Father's arms.
- It is an all-satisfying love that will not only quench every thirst you have ever had, but it will flow out of you to the world around you.

John 7: 37 Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

- Think what this love does for you. The more you know God's love for you in Christ, the more it will remove all fear from your life.
 - Why? Because you will know that whatever tribulations, hardships, persecutions, and dangers that Satan brings to your life to try to destroy you, God will instead use for good to refine and conform you to the image of His Son.
 - This is how the love of God through Jesus Christ holds us fast. As we look at the cross, we see how God used the ultimate evil of the cross to bring the ultimate good to our lives.
 - Tribulations, hardships, persecutions, famine, poverty, danger and even the sword will not destroy us, but instead transform us.
- Because you are eternally bound to God through the love of Christ, the words of Psalm 73 can be the song of your heart, no matter what tribulation, hardship, persecution, or danger you may be facing.

Psalm 73: 23 – 26 Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand.

²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.

²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.