

Totally Inseparable

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[0 : 00] Our passage today is in Romans 8, verse 31 to 39. It's page 1135 in the Church Bibles. 1135. 1135.

Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus, who died more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, for your sake we face death all day long.

We are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither 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.

[1 : 41] Amen. Well, good morning.

Let me pray as we start this morning. Father God, guide our hearts and our minds as we consider Jesus today.

Thank you for the cross. Would you help us to understand all that you have done for us and what it means to know you? Amen. Well, here we are.

We've been going through the book of Romans for quite a while now. And we finally arrived at the end of Romans 8. It's the mountaintop of the book of Romans from which we survey all that God has done.

This is one of the most beloved passages for God's people. One that has encouraged and sustained the church for many generations. Paul's concluding an argument that's been going on for four whole chapters.

[2 : 45] And he's going to end with this message. If we have been justified by Jesus' death on the cross, then nothing, nothing in all of creation can separate you from the love of God.

So, where are we going this morning? Well, first we need to take a short look back at Romans. How did we get up to this place on the mountain? What have been the blessings of God's love?

Then we need to look at the cross to see the most powerful demonstration of God's love. And finally, see our total security in God's love that is present for every Christian believer.

So, first then, let's look back. Now, a number of years ago, I went to Peru. And I did the four-day Inca Trail to the incredible Machu Picchu.

There should be a picture. It is genuinely stunning. It is an incredible place. But the sense of achievement you get having walked there for four days makes it even more stunning.

[3 : 57] It gives you an idea of just how remote this place really is. How impressive that this city was ever built. The thing is, when you get there, there's loads of tourists who've come up from the other side on a bus.

And you just feel a bit short-changed, really. You've walked for four whole days to get to this place. And they've just come up on a bus for half an hour. The thing is, I just don't think they would appreciate it as much.

It's hard to get a sense of just how incredible it was that this was ever built, that it came to be. Unless you've taken the path to get there. And I kind of wonder if that's how we might feel about this morning's passage.

We're so familiar. But it's such big language that unless we understand where we've come from, we will understand how wonderful it is that we are justified and what it means that Christ is interceding for us.

So let's just take a walk back then through chapters 5 to 8 of Romans. Verse 31 of chapter 8 is going to say, What then shall we say in response to these things?

[5 : 01] The big question is, what does Paul mean by these things? Unless we understand that, the rest of the chapter won't make very much sense. So let's just follow our way up the mountain from chapter 5.

So Paul opened by saying that we are justified, that is, made right with God, by faith, bringing us peace with God. The gospel is not about our efforts to have a perfect record, but Christ's perfect work for us.

Because we are justified, we are no longer under God's wrath. The punishment that we deserve has been taken by Jesus. Therefore, we have died to the power of sins that is no longer our master.

Instead, in Christ we have been made righteous, having his perfect record given to us. Because we have been made righteous through Christ, we have been freed from the law, and thus are free from condemnation.

Because the verdict on us is no longer guilty and condemned, but righteous and free. God adopts us into his family in Christ, and promises us a glorious future, free of all the suffering of this life.

[6 : 11] Eternity with him, and a sure and wonderful hope. We've come a long way in the last four chapters. And having climbed up here, we just need to pause and admire the view.

Just see how much God has done for us. See how many blessings the cross and the resurrection have achieved for every person who have faith in Jesus. Paul asks what the right response is to these things.

Well, what could we do except give thanks to God? If this is true, what else could I possibly need? How else could you respond to so many blessings except in praise and thankful worship?

Because if you're a Christian here today, then every blessing that Paul has described is true of you in Christ. See how much he gives for his people.

God really is for his people. Now, God being for me doesn't mean that he just backs me up. That he has to guarantee my life plans.

[7 : 18] That he just wants me to feel good about myself. He's all about my self-esteem. Well, God's not my heavenly cheerleader. God's actually much, much bigger than that.

Nothing we could imagine for ourselves would ever be as big as what God has done for us. He has addressed our greatest need. Far beyond anything that we could ever ask or imagine.

And what's the proof of this love? That God has given his only son at the cross. The thing is, we often forget that that is what God is like.

We often start reducing him down from his huge size to a small God that we can put in a box and kind of take ownership of. He does things for me. The problem is that that God can't do anything for you.

If we start to wonder if he's maybe as generous as he makes out. As kind as his claiming. If his promises really, really are true.

[8 : 27] Well, then we start to lose sight of him. Imagine with me a family who have a child that's just old enough to go to school. They've taken this little girl out to get her new school uniform.

Her new backpack. A pencil case full of fun-colored stationery. New shoes and new coat. So she can stay warm on the walk to school with her dad each day. This little girl has everything she needs to enjoy school.

And is really excited to go. Really thankful for what her parents have given to her. And she loves school for the first week. But on the Friday, the teacher says she's going to need a PE kit for next week at school.

And she realizes she doesn't have one of those. Oh no, what's she going to do? The thing is, all she has to do is think about what her parents are like. They've looked after her her whole life.

Devoted their time and love to her. They've given her everything she needs. So she doesn't have to worry about the PE kit. Of course they're going to give it. Why wouldn't they?

[9 : 32] They love this child enough to give her everything. Why would they withhold the last thing? Or imagine you go and buy a house. If you've bought the house, you don't begin to worry.

What if they don't include the pipes and the staircase and the wiring? Well, of course you don't worry. If you've bought the house, of course those things are coming with it. You see, if you have the biggest thing, then you don't need to worry if the smaller things are going to come too.

In our relationship with God, then, do we need to worry that he might not come through on his promises? Well, look down with me at verses 31 and 32.

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Paul is showing us that God has earned the right to be trusted because God gave what was most important. He did not spare Jesus at the cross, so we can trust him completely.

[10 : 40] God has guaranteed his promises of glory and everything else through Jesus' death on the cross. And if he has already freely given what is most valuable to him in the whole universe, what reason does he have to withhold anything else from us?

Now, as Martin mentioned last time we looked at Romans, it would be hard to read verse 32, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up. That being reminded of the Abraham and Isaac episode back in Genesis.

So all the way back in Genesis, we hear this story of Abraham, the great-grandfather of the people of God. God promises that through Abraham's family line and descendants will come a great nation.

And eventually, his wife Sarah gives birth to a son, Isaac. But then, twist, Abraham has to go and sacrifice Isaac on a mountain.

We ask, what is God doing? Asking this man to do this? This is awful. But the whole episode is a test that's meant to teach us something. Abraham says to Isaac that God will provide a lamb for the sacrifice.

[11 : 54] And he is absolutely sure that God will make an exchange for Isaac. And just as he raises the knife to kill Isaac, God says, And at that very moment, God provides a sheep for the sacrifice.

Abraham is willing to give the most important thing, his own son. And this is proof of his devotion to God. But notice that Isaac didn't need to die in that story because God provided a substitute for him.

The whole point of this episode shows us that being willing to give what is most valuable is proof of total devotion. Therefore, when we think of Christ at the cross, we should see that it is God's most powerful demonstration of his love for us.

God's sacrificing his son for us. So we need have no fear that God would withhold eternal glory from us because he has already given us Christ.

What has the cross achieved? Well, look at the second part of verse 34. Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

[13 : 21] Jesus' death has taken our punishment away. Jesus' life has given us access to glory. And Jesus ascended to rule at the right hand of the Father to intercede for us.

Which means that right now, Jesus is in heaven, living to guarantee that his work at the cross will not fail. That the people that he bought with his own blood will not ever be condemned and will remain justified, unwaveringly bound for glory.

This is the unshakable, unbreakable work that Christ has achieved at the cross. And this is what it means for us to be loved by God. Christ lives to intercede for you.

He does that actively for your whole life, making sure that you will never, ever be condemned. So here we are at the mountaintop surveying God's wonderful work.

Just pause and let that sink in. That is true for you if you are a believer in Jesus today. And that can fuel every day of our life as believers. It is the most sure and secure thing in the whole universe.

[14 : 38] But, as we know well, that thought doesn't go unchallenged in our minds, does it?

The thing is, that's not all there is in this passage. In fact, far from it. Up here on the mountaintop is wonderful, but what about down in the valleys where we actually live?

Does this all stand up when daily life is often so frustrating, filled with suffering, and the world is so fraught with tension? You might feel, well, you say I'm more loved than I understand, but I'm suffering more than you know.

Am I really connected to a God of love when life is this hard? Well, with that thought in our mind, we're going to move on to our final point, the total security of God's love.

Throughout this letter, there are hints that there's a real tension in the Roman church that Paul's writing to, and significant pressure that they face from the outside.

[15 : 40] They live under the terrible might of the Roman Empire, and it must be so hard to feel secure when there is just so much stacked against you. There must have been many factors making them question if God really was with them and for them.

But Paul writes to show them that the love of God is totally secure in every way, and nothing in all of creation could ever separate them from it.

So let's just follow that idea through our passage. So back to verse 31. If God is for us, who can be against us? Now I wonder if when that's been read out today, you've just twiggled in your mind, actually, loads of people, loads of people are against the church.

Whole governments of whole nations are set up against Jesus and against his people. That's true in Paul's day, and it's true in ours. From the large-scale persecution of parts of Iran and Syria and North Korea to the mundane apathy and antagonism toward the church in the West, many people are against the church.

So what is Paul saying? Well, he's saying that no matter how powerful they are, how big they seem, our God is still bigger. They all pale in comparison to Jesus, who is sitting as the ruler of heaven alongside God the Father.

[17 : 05] And the anti-God powers of this world are tiny by comparison. They remain under his judgment and under his power. It's really good news that we can pray for our persecuted brothers and sisters with confidence that justice will be done for the persecuted church on the day when Jesus comes.

No power that sets itself up against the church will ever take us out of God's hands. They may take our lives, but they will never take the kingdom.

Secondly then, verses 33 and 34. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns?

No one. When God has declared someone righteous in Christ, they cannot be condemned. If the judge says you're justified, who can disagree?

Well, let me give you three people who might try and disagree, actually. First is the world. We've already talked about that. They will set themselves up against the church, but they won't get anywhere.

[18 : 12] But secondly, the accuser, the devil himself, with all the spiritual powers mentioned in verse 38. But because of Jesus' work at the cross, all the devil's accusations are made false.

Jesus has disarmed those spiritual forces by his own death and has risen to justify his people so that they can never be condemned. Every single time the devil says, not good enough, too much of a sinner, condemned, Jesus says, I've died for them.

There's nothing you can do. You're wrong. But maybe the loudest voice in our head, the one that condemns us most strongly, isn't the world and isn't the devil, but it's our own voice.

How could God take me? I'm just too sinful, too broken, too far gone. You don't know what I'm like. You don't know what I've done. God could never, ever have me in his family.

I can make it look good on a Sunday, but I am nowhere near him. Well, I'm sorry, but that decision's way above your pay grade. You simply don't have the authority to make it.

[19 : 27] Only God has the authority to condemn you, and he has declared you not guilty in Christ. So no matter how much disappointment you feel about your own sin, how far you feel from God, you can never be condemned if you're in Christ.

And isn't that wonderful, wonderful news? Any day when you feel far from God, well, good news, you're not, because in Christ you cannot be separated from his love.

Finally then, and I think what is often the biggest obstacle to our trust that God really is with us and that his love really is secure, is suffering.

Look at verse 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

What an odd list of things to suffer from. Well, it's not as random as it seems. This is actually a list of things that Paul himself suffered. If you were to go to the book of 2 Corinthians chapter 11, you'd basically find a hugely extended list of all the things that Paul went through in his mission and ministry.

[20 : 39] He had an incredibly tough run, but he knows fine well these things are not a sign of God's rejection, but a sign that he is taking on the sufferings of Christ and that Christ is with him, making sense of all this suffering and giving it a purpose.

What about verse 36 then? As it is written, For your sake we face death all day long. We are considered a sheep to be slaughtered. Well, this quote comes from Psalm 44.

It's a psalm of lament in the Old Testament, something that God's people would sing in distress and suffering. If you go back and read it, you find that Israel are crying out to God to deliver them from suffering, but unusually for Israel, it's not their fault.

This is not one of the times where they've mucked it up and had to ask for forgiveness. They're just suffering. Their enemies are strong. Things aren't going well. Their suffering is prolonged.

They're crying out for a rescue. In fact, that psalm ends with these words. Rise up and help us. Rescue us because of your unfailing love. God's people have always suffered.

[21 : 51] That's true throughout the whole Bible and it's still true today. But it has never been a sign of God's rejection of his people. So ask the question when you read verse 36.

Who came like a sheep to be slaughtered? And how did God rescue his people? Well, this is where we find Jesus again and we're back at the cross. God not only sent someone to rescue, he sent Jesus to suffer with and suffer for his people.

So can even suffering separate us from the love of God? Well, verse 37, no. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Not only is Jesus victorious over suffering, but suffering can now be used in a believer's life for good.

We have been made more than conquerors. Dear church family, if we suffer, that doesn't mean that God has disappeared.

God is always with us and is totally unchangeable. God and his people are inseparable. And at that point, what is there left to say?

[23 : 03] Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor demons, neither the present, nor the future, nor any powers, nor 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.

The love of God is totally, totally secure. And we need to learn to put that idea into practice in our own lives. So let's think about what that means for us.

What can separate us from the love of God? Can public derision and insult? No. Can job loss, persecution, and aggression? No.

Can our mental health, anxiety, and depression? No. Can the breakdown of our bodies and age and death separate us? No. Can governments or violence or terrorism know?

Can even our own sin, our own struggles, and our own consciences, failures, and mistakes separate us from the love of God? Absolutely not. Nothing in all creation can separate you from the love of God.

[24 : 09] It is the most secure thing in the whole universe, and nothing can take that away from you. In Christ, you have all God's blessings. The most powerful demonstration of that love is Christ at the cross, and in that, you are totally and completely secure forever.

Let me pray. Father, thank you that through Christ, you have shown us the greatest love that is totally secure, that in you we have everything we need, and our eternity in glory with you is guaranteed.

remind us of this truth every day, and we ask all this confident of your promises in Jesus' holy and mighty name. Amen.