

I.N.I.

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 1, 2013
Romans 8:31-39

In Christ Jesus, Who is our conquering Savior, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

“You can’t go along to the picnic,” Thomas told his youngest sister. “You’re too little. You’ll have to stay home.”

Thomas was only teasing her, but Cecily started to cry. She ran to her father and sobbed, “Thomas says I’m too little to go to the picnic.”

“Well you tell Thomas that he doesn’t get to decide who goes along and who doesn’t. I decide, and I want you to go,” said Father.

Cecily was all smiles again. She didn’t care if Thomas was against her—her father was on her side.

That was the beginning of Thursday’s opening devotion at school this past week based on the first words of our text **IF GOD IS FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?**

The example? Dad was on Cecily’s side and he was the authority in the house not son Thomas. So also if God is for us, and He is the ultimate in authority, who can be against us? How did we answer that Peter and Jonah? **NOBODY!**

One man wrote about our text: **In all of Paul’s letters there are few passages that equal and none that exceed this song of triumph and victorious faith, in lofty and sustained power. It should never fail to rouse the Christian to the greatest of faith’s enthusiasm and to the utmost confidence and trust in the mercy of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.**

From Paul’s words we have chosen as our theme these words:

THE CHRISTIAN’S TRIUMPHANT FAITH: HE FOR US!

As we see the end of the world and of time approaching it is real easy for us Christians to become pessimistic about the future. We know that it is going to get worse and worse, God tells us that. We also see it all around us---the evils of the widespread use of illicit drugs, alcohol abuse, pornography, the rampant spread of sexual diseases due to pre-marital and extra-marital relations, the gross indecency and immorality of much of our music, movies and talk shows, the high divorce rate, dysfunctional families and the rapid disintegration of the family unit, the lack of respect for authority. Add to this list the daily barrage of reported murders and robberies, kidnappings and rapes, scandals and cover-ups, and its no wonder the Christian becomes pessimistic and despairing about the future.

It is hard to be optimistic and upbeat when we see the godless immorality of this world make such tremendous inroads into the lives and attitudes of so many people, yes, even religious leaders, yes, even religious lay people.

But the problem is the age old problem of focusing our eyes on the wrong place. We are focusing on the problem rather than on the solution. In our text Paul says **WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS!** How can Paul say that? Was his day and age so much more religious and moral than ours. Hardly! Were Christians in positions of power back then? Not at all! Christians were just beginning to be persecuted and it got a lot worse.

Paul can say this because he kept his focus on Christ and His Word. Paul begins our text with several questions. The first is this: **WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY TO THESE THINGS?** What “things” is Paul referring to? To answer that question we need to look back at several key verses of this eighth chapter that we have heard and studied this past month:

Verse 1) **THERE IS THEREFORE NOW NO CONDEMNATION TO THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS, WHO DO NOT WALK ACCORDING TO THE FLESH, BUT ACCORDING TO THE SPIRIT.**

Verse 18) **FOR I CONSIDER THAT THE SUFFERINGS OF THIS PRESENT TIME ARE NOT WORTHY TO BE COMPARED WITH THE GLORY WHICH SHALL BE REVEALED IN US.**

Verses 28-29) **AND WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD**

TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD, TO THOSE WHO ARE THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE. FOR WHOM HE FOREKNEW, HE ALSO PREDESTINED TO BE CONFORMED TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON, THAT HE MIGHT BE THE FIRSTBORN AMONG MANY BRETHREN.

WHAT THEN SHALL WE SAY TO THESE THINGS, these truths, these passages? Paul answers his own question with another question. **IF GOD IS FOR US, WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?** Paul doesn't answer his question with a **NOBODY**, like we did on Thursday morning in our opening devotion, but he does answer it with another question, **HE WHO DID NOT SPARE HIS OWN SON, BUT DELIVERED HIM UP FOR US ALL, HOW SHALL HE NOT WITH HIM ALSO FREELY GIVE US ALL THINGS?**

Three questions--three beautiful truths.

I: HE FOR US in our Justification.

Paul continues with this questioning method of deductive teaching: **WHO SHALL BRING A CHARGE AGAINST GOD'S ELECT?** Again Paul answers in an indirect way by saying **IT IS GOD WHO JUSTIFIES.** If God justifies us, than can anyone bring a charge against us? **NO!** Remember when you hear this term **justify**, think of the courtroom verdict. The whole world stands before the One almighty Judge: God. He surveys all of mankind. He sees all of the sinners and hears the prosecuting attorney, Satan, with his accusations of how we all have sinned and deserve nothing but capital punishment: death and damnation. And then the Father looks at our defense attorney, Jesus. He sees His Son's sacrifice; His atoning suffering and death upon the cross and He declares the verdict.

What is it? Is it guilty as charged? The whole human race damned!? No, unbelievably the verdict is **NOT GUILTY! INNOCENT!** We are set free because all of our guilt and punishment has been placed upon our Advocate, Jesus. God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all; sacrificed Him instead of us; for us! Christ, our defense Attorney is declared guilty and is punished, while we, the guilty ones, are declared **Not Guilty** and are set free--purchased and redeemed by Christ's shed blood.

That is **THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUMPHANT FAITH: HE FOR US!** Not everyone for himself. If it were everyone for himself, we would all be lost and damned. But we can shout it from the rooftops, declare it in the valleys and on the mountains, in the cities and in the country, far and near: **GOD IS FOR US! CHRIST IS FOR US! CHRIST BORE OUR GRIEFS AND CARRIED OUR SORROWS; HE WAS SMITTEN BY GOD AND AFFLICTED; HE WAS WOUNDED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS BRUISED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; THE CHASTISEMENT FOR OUR PEACE WAS UPON HIM AND BY HIS STRIPES WE ARE HEALED. FOR THE LORD HAS LAID ON HIM THE INIQUITY OF US ALL.**

II: HE FOR US in our daily Trials.

And not only is God for us in our justification--the most important thing ever done for us--but He is also for us in our daily trials of life, for Christ **IS EVEN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD, WHO MAKES INTERCESSION FOR US.**

Paul now reaches the pinnacle of this section with two more questions.

Verse 35: **WHO SHALL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST? SHALL TRIBULATION, OR DISTRESS, OR PERSECUTION, OR FAMINE, OR NAKEDNESS, OR PERIL, OR SWORD?** Paul here progresses from the lesser to the greater.

- 1. tribulation:** troubles that cause stress in our life. Literally the word means pressure, like the pressure and pain that is caused when one is squeezed in a vice.
- 2. distress:** this is the inward feelings of being closed in, not knowing what to do when serious illness of financial burdens or loss of loved ones occur.
- 3. persecution:** literally--pursued, being chased down, assaulted either physically or psychologically.
- 4. famine:** the lack of food, or it could just mean a lack of rain and no growth of crops.
- 5. nakedness:** oftentimes the result of persecution was poverty, fleeing with nothing because of your enemies.
- 6. peril:** danger, risks to body and soul.

7. sword: the most lethal street weapon of Paul's day. Being killed for one's faith.
None of these terrible things and much more can separate us from Christ's love.

III: HE FOR US makes us more than Conquerors.

All of these troubles can and will befall Christians because of their faith in Jesus or simply it may happen to us because we live in a world of sin. God does not remove all of the trials and troubles from our lives, but as we heard last week He has promised us the strength to overcome them, to endure them to work them out for our eternal good. Paul in his letter to the Philippians confidently proclaimed: **I CAN DO ALL THINGS THROUGH CHRIST WHO STRENGTHENS ME!**

In our text Paul puts it this way: **YET IN ALL THESE THINGS WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US.** We have the victory. Persecution cannot defeat us. Problems cannot destroy us. Even martyrdom cannot conquer us; for death for the Christian is a victory, not a defeat. Too often we as Christians look upon the problems, troubles, trials, temptations and persecutions in life as defeats and in self-pity go around feeling sorry for ourselves, getting angry and feel like quitting.

But even as we rejoice in Christ's suffering, rejoice in His substitutionary death for us, so also we should rejoice in our suffering and trials; rejoice in the trials to our faith. James tells us in his letter: **MY BRETHREN, COUNT IT ALL JOY WHEN YOU FALL INTO VARIOUS TRIALS, KNOWING THAT THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES PATIENCE. BUT LET PATIENCE HAVE ITS PERFECT (finished) WORK, THAT YOU MAY BE PERFECT (mature) AND COMPLETE, LACKING NOTHING.** For those who are in Christ, victory is always the outcome. In every encounter with adversity and trials, troubles and tribulations, even in death, the Christian is the victor in Christ!

Yet, so very often we feel that when things go wrong in our life and problems mount up we're the loser, that Christ does not love us, that He has turned His back on us, or we are being punished for something. For surely if He loved us He wouldn't allow these terrible times to come or this horrible thing to happen or life would be much better than it is.

The truth of the matter is found in these words and throughout the Bible. Christ's love for us is always concerned for our spiritual welfare. And in His love for us He is in the process of sanctifying and purifying us. Even though we are completely forgiven by a loving Father through His Son and enjoy this loving Father-child relationship, we are still sinners, weak in faith who live in a sinful world of temptations. So God uses the conflicts, the trials and troubles of this world to strengthen and to purify our hearts and lives when these things cause us to despair of ourselves, give up on our own resources and turn to the Lord and His Word for help in every need.

Remember, Paul says **WE ARE MORE THAN CONQUERORS.** We don't just "get through" trials; we "**CONQUER**" them in Christ. We don't just "barely make it through" persecutions or hardships we are "**VICTORIOUS**" over them in Christ. When we as Christians suffer, it should bring about spiritual maturity, not selfish, self-pity; a purity of heart, not a blaming of God or of others for making us miserable; real contentment in Christ not an angry lashing out with complaints; and many other spiritual blessings.

Remember Jesus' beatitudes? He promises us many blessings when we are **poor in spirit, mourning, hungering for righteousness, persecuted; insulted or slandered for His name's sake.** Jesus and His love for us turn hardships into spiritual blessings, for He has promised, **NEVER WILL I LEAVE YOU, NEVER WILL I FORSAKE YOU.**

Paul concludes this crescendo of faith with these powerful words: **I AM PERSUADED:** (literally: **CONVINCED**) that separation from the love of Christ is an impossibility. We read: **FOR I AM PERSUADED THAT NEITHER DEATH NOR LIFE, NOR ANGELS NOR PRINCIPALITIES NOR POWERS, NOR THINGS PRESENT NOR THINGS TO COME, NOR HEIGHT NOR DEPTH, NOR ANY OTHER CREATED THING, SHALL BE ABLE TO SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD.**

What more can be said?

Amen.

HALLELUJAH!