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**Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith**  
**Message: More Than Conquerors**

**Transcribed Message**  
**August 15, 2021**  
**Romans 8:35-39**

I think it's fair to say that you can divide people into two groups. I'm going to ask you to raise your hand here in just a minute to tell me which group you're in, but I think you can divide people into two groups. There are those who love the beach and those who love the mountains. So tell me. Don't be afraid. Be brave. How many of you would rather right now ... well, not right now ... but how many of you would rather be at the beach? How many of you are beach goers? Don't be shy. How many of you are mountain people? Oh my goodness. Well, just exactly what I thought. It is mountain people who have it. Do you know why mountain people have it? Not only because we're in the majority this morning by quite a bit, but mountain people have it because the apostle Paul was a mountain person. Now you say to me. How do you know that? He told me. He told me because in Romans 8 he takes us to the highest point in all of the book of Romans. The highest mountain that you can go to. We're looking out over the landscape of this incredible truth that has been revealed by the Spirit of God. We couldn't have seen some of these things from the beach. I'm sorry. There are some beautiful things you can see at the beach, but you couldn't have seen some of the truths that Paul is pointing out here.

This morning we come to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter verses 35-39 and this is the plan. This is the plan, Stan. I don't mean be coy, Roy, but just listen to me. I've always wanted to do that. But here is the plan. We're going to finish the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter this morning. We come to the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter. Next Sunday is our fall kickoff Sunday. It is the tradition at Covenant every fall kick off that we break away from whatever we're doing so we're going to do that next Sunday. We'll be looking at people who are committed to unity. Then I'm going to take a little studycation, I'm going to go and try to figure out what it is that's coming in chapters 9, 10, 11. If I come back and have any idea what Paul doing in these next chapters, because it's some pretty amazing stuff again,

then we'll either go in to chapter 9 or we'll circle back and start in chapter 8 all over again. So we'll see which of those we do. But that's the plan for now. So that's what we're looking forward to.

This morning this is what we want to see. God's promise is to never stop loving us, to never stop covering us with His grace. That's not just good news. That is eternally good news. So a very quick review. We've been talking about the fact that eternal life, or to say it another way eternal security, is what God has committed Himself to. You can just mark down that this in my mind is a character of God issue. This is what God has promised that He will do. This is what He's taken upon Himself. It's God's work. It's not my work. This is what He has promised. He's the one who keeps me secure. That's why when people talk about perseverance of the saints, I just don't think that's good language. It's not so much persevering saints as it is our preserving God. He's the one who is holding onto us.

Secondly, assurance then as we've seen the last couple weeks is then my response to what God has promised. If in this matter of eternal life God has made some promises to me, then I have to step into that truth. I have to believe that truth and that's what this matter of assurance is about. Very quickly, let me give you four reasons why people sometimes do not have assurance. There's more than this but these are four I think are fairly common ones. The first one is sometimes they're simply taught that they can't have assurance. Some of you probably were in a setting as you came into your Christian experience and you were simply taught that you couldn't know for sure. You were always hanging in the balance and hoping so. There were things that you were called on to do to keep you in that place of safety before God. So some people are simply taught that. It is my observation that when people are taught this particular perspective of how they understand Scripture, most of the focus is on themselves. Most of the focus is on what they have to do to keep themselves saved. They're constantly looking within. The focus is what I have to do. What do I have to do in order to stay saved?

A second reason, and I think these two things go together, is some people just simply do not understand the grace of God. You don't understand the grace of God. You're not going to step into the doctrine of assurance and the understanding of eternal

life. Sometimes it's simply a lack of understanding of the grace of God. If I asked you the question what did you do to earn salvation? What did you do to earn salvation? If you understand grace at all, then you'd say I didn't do anything to earn salvation. It was a gift of God. Then I would follow-up and say what is it you have to do to keep your salvation? That's where sometimes people forget at that point the grace of God and they begin to think of what they have to do to keep this salvation. That is a misunderstanding of grace.

Thirdly, some people doubt their salvation because of sin. Sometimes people doubt their salvation because of sin. My initial response to that is that's not all bad. That's what sin does. Sin disturbs. Sin destroys. It tears down. It takes away. The very nature of sin can disturb us in that regard. There's thankfully the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. The point of that is you don't have to go get saved again. You don't have to repeat over and over again the matter of believing the gospel.

Then lastly, some people doubt because they're undergoing trials. Some people doubt because they're undergoing trials. Suffering as we've seen. That is this whole context of Romans 8. It's a chapter dealing with suffering. Nothing will cause you to question almost everything like suffering will do. Paul's answer to that is no, you are saved. You are safe and you are secure. In verses 31 through 39, we have these five unanswerable questions. We've already looked at four of them. We only have this last one to look at this morning. But look back over these questions that we've looked at.

The first one is if God is for us who can be against us? If God is for us, who can be against us? You can just simply come back if you want to at that point and say it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter who is against us at that point if God is for us. It doesn't matter who is against us. That's Paul's point here. God is for you. God is not neutral towards you. God is not waiting to see how it is that you're going to work out all of these things. He is for you.

The second question is how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things. He's pointing us to the cross at that point. he's pointing us to the cross. Jesus was forsaken so that you and I wouldn't be. Jesus was separated from the Father in time so that you and I wouldn't be. Jesus was rejected so that you and I wouldn't be. That's the whole point of what Paul's telling us.

Thirdly. Really, questions three and four go together. Who will bring a charge against God's elect and who is to condemn? Those two questions forced us right into the courtroom, remember? It was as if we were standing before a judge and the prosecuting attorney is coming before the Father and saying I want to bring a charge against Carlon. I want to condemn Carlon for something. The Father simply looks at him and says. wait a minute. There isn't any charge that can be brought against him. He is standing in the righteousness of Christ. So questions three and four really have to do with our judicial standing before God. They really have to do with my position before God. It's a position, as I said, that testifies to the fact that I have been justified. That's what Paul said. So I'm standing before God and I'm standing in the righteousness of Christ.

In this last, this fifth and final question, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? This question really centers on the whole matter of experience. So if questions three and four have to do with our judicial standing before God, then this question has really to do with what is my experience day-to-day looking like. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?

The first thing I want you to see is the one who's holding on. The one who is holding on. In other words, we are asking who is holding onto who. Who's holding on to who here? What is in view here with regard to the love of Christ? When he says who shall separate us from the love of Christ. The first thing I want to say is if this is me holding on to God, if this is centered in on my love for God, then I'm going to have to confess that Romans chapter 8 isn't nearly as comforting to me as I would hope it would be. The reality is my heart is fickle. The reality is I have an incredible propensity to lift up idols in my life that try to take the place that's reserved for Christ alone. That's why Jesus in Revelation 2:4 writes to the church in Ephesus and says you guys have left your first love. Could there be any more disheartening or more penetrating words than to have the Savior write to us as a church and say it looks a lot on my end like you guys have left your first love. But that's what he's talking about. He is talking about not their salvation. He is talking about their passion, their desire, their heart for God and for Christ being the Lord in their life.

Who and what can separate us from God's love? God's love. God is the one who's holding on. That is the answer to the question. Who is holding on to who here in verse 35? The answer is it is God in His love holding on to you. We know that because the context. Verse 31, verse 32, verse 33, verse 34 ,now verse 35. They all have God as the center. The focus in all of these is not on you or me. The focus in all of these is clearly on God. His love is what keeps us secure. His love is what keeps us secure. He's seen our sin. We sang about it. It was a line in one of the songs this morning. He's seen our sin. He knows everything about you. He knew everything about you when He chose you in eternity past. There isn't anything that you can do or say that is going to take Him by surprise. He knows all about you and in spite of all of that, He's forgiven you. He loves you. We don't have to pretend. We don't have to hide. We don't even have to pretend and hide in front of each other, because after all, we're all sinners saved by grace. We're all strugglers on the way. But we certainly don't have to hide and pretend before God. We don't need to be anxious about the future because He just has told us that He is the one who's holding on to us. He'll never say to us that's it. You've done it now. You've gone too far. You crossed over the line. Enough. Enough is enough. He'll never say that.

I saw this little cartoon this past week. It showed the prodigal son and the father. I think the caption was something like everything was okay for the prodigal son until a past social media tweet surfaced. It's the way our culture operates. Someone is just rocking along and then something surfaces out of their past and then they're canceled. God says He'll never do that. It is not happening. It doesn't matter what it is that might surface in that regard. We are saved. We are safe. We are secure. Nothing can separate you from the love of God.

Now, just to make the point, Paul then next steps into the stuff that can separate us. The stuff that can separate us. He starts off and he lists seven different things that could separate us. What we want to realize and see at this point is this is Paul's personal testimony. These things are things that Paul knew firsthand. When you go to 2 Corinthians 11 and verses 26 and 27 and Chapter 12 and verse 10, almost every one of these things is listed are things which the apostle Paul himself had personally already endured and gone through. He's giving us a first-hand account here. \

The first two words “tribulation and distress” are almost like synonyms, but in my mind it's almost like tribulation and distress form kind of an umbrella picture. Underneath that umbrella then we have these next five words. These are obviously words that are very specific to times of significant testing in trials and difficulty. Actually the word “tribulation” is a word that is used for the crushing of grain. That’s the picture here of tribulation. There's a refining process. The word “distress” is a picture of something that's being squeezed. It's like the walls are closing in upon you. That’s the idea of distress. Then he goes into these others.

Persecution. Think of the fact that when this was written to the believers at Rome what was yet to come. There was certainly already persecution that had happened to the Christian community. That's why they were driven out of Jerusalem. The church had already experienced persecution. But there was incredible persecution that was still coming. So here's Paul writing and he says you need to understand tribulation or distress or persecution for that matter. Some of these people were going to be martyred for their faith in the Colosseum. We think today of believers in a country like North Korea. A little remnant of people no doubt hidden away from public view. Or believers in Iran or Afghanistan or Pakistan or Nigeria. The largest country in Africa, Nigeria. Over 200 million people split almost equally between Muslim and Christian. You know that in this year, here we are in August, and already in Nigeria over 3500 Christians have been killed for their faith. Thousands injured or displaced simply because they believe in this wonderful name of Jesus. We haven't experienced that kind of persecution, but it could be coming even for us.

Then there is of course this idea of famine and nakedness, which I think are simply reflective of extreme poverty. Danger and sword, violence. These are the experiences of believers down through the ages. It is as if Paul is equipping the church at Rome and to us today to say when these kinds of tribulation and distress come your way, don't ever forget the love of God for you.

But even all of this isn't everything. This isn't all there is. Other things could be added to that list. Obviously, Paul wasn't trying to be comprehensive in the sense of listing out everything, but we think of things today. We think of things like disease, like Covid, cancer. We think of things that happen within families, the disruption, to the

breakdown of family life, conflict. We think of job loss and financial hardship that come to people. We think of loss in terms of abuse that people experience. We think of betrayal, loneliness. All kinds of things. In all of these things that Paul speaks of here, the only thing, and this is what he wants you to see. If this list would go on for page after page the point of it is this. The only thing that we would need to fear, the only thing that could do us harm is the prospect or the possibility that we could be separated from the love of Christ. He is telling us that can't happen. He's reassuring us that we are saved and we're secure and we're safe. That's not a prospect that we need to be concerned with because God Himself has put His own character on the line and said that is not going to happen. Whatever else may happen in your life, whatever else you're calling into question, you do not need to question the love of God for you.

Verse 36 is like a lament. It's like a lament. "As it is written: 'For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered'". When's the last time you saw that on a coffee mug? That's not a coffee mug verse, is it? That's not a verse the people go around quoting as their life verse. It is not a verse that they name as the one that is their favorite in their reading for the week. If you look back at Psalm 44 because Paul is just pulling out of Psalm 44 and he is quoting the psalmist in Psalm 44 verse 21 or verse 22. But then when you look back at the context of the Psalm in the 44<sup>th</sup> chapter in verse 20 and 21, the psalmist before he makes this statement about the fact that we're like sheep that are killed, before that he said – but God. It's not like we have forsaken You. It's not like we're chasing after other idols. God, it's not like our hearts have been away from You. The point that the psalmist is making is God, we are walking with You as best we know how. We're doing everything that we can be faithful to You. And then he breaks into the lament of the 22<sup>nd</sup> verse in Psalm 44 and verse 36 here. For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. He is simply saying that this is a part of life. These tribulations, this kind of distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, sword, all of these things are to be understood as a part of the life of godly people. It happens to us. Our hope is not that we won't suffer. I know that's our hope on one level, isn't it? Our hope is that we won't suffer, but that's not a realistic hope. Our hope isn't that we won't suffer. Our hope is that there will be no separation. That's exactly what he confirms next.

Next, you notice that there's this matter of no condemnation. Chapter 8 verse 1. Then he wraps up this 8<sup>th</sup> chapter with this wonderful statement of no separation. In verses 37 to 39, we have this picture of the fact that we are truly to be more than conquerors. Look at verse 37. No, he says. No, in all of these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. I just want to stop at that point and ask who saw verse 37 coming? Who expected in verse 37 for there to be this declaration that we're conquerors? I don't think anybody realistically would have expected in verse 37 that after he gives that lament about being sheep who were slaughtered and that we're being killed all day long. I don't think anybody was sitting there waiting for Paul in verse 37 to say oh by the way, we're more than conquerors. We didn't expect that at all.

Before we look into that outline, let me say two things that I didn't put in your outline. The first one is the reason it's surprising is because he's talking about sheep. He is talking about sheep. How many of you have a sports team and if you could pick a mascot, it would be sheep? Anybody? Has anybody ever been on a team that you guys were called the sheep? Actually, if you have a good memory back when the Los Angeles Rams were in St. Louis, the St. Louis Rams were so bad that sometimes they were called the St. Louis Sheep. But that is another time. We don't do that. We have Rams. That is kind of in the family but they're not sheep. We have lions and tigers and bears, oh my, but we don't have sheep. We don't pick sheep because sheep aren't ever viewed as being more than conquerors. It surprises us that Paul jumps from that analogy to declaring that we're now more than conquerors. But here's the point.

The second point of this is because Paul is a realist. He does this because he's a realist. That's what he's just laid out here. He says no in all these things. This is life. There are troubles. There are tribulations. There are distresses. This is the doctrine of suffering, remember, that we're developing as followers of Christ. When these times of persecution come (and they're going to come), when these times of distress come (and they're going to come), we're not immediately doubting everything that we've ever learned, because we learned that one of the things that we should be expecting in this fallen, broken world are these very things. We're like sheep. We're being pursued all day long, ready to be slaughtered because we're followers of Christ. But still in this, the point that Paul is making is we're more than conquerors.



Look at this really big word first off. There is a really big word here that we need to press into because when you look in your English Bible and you read that phrase “we are more than conquerors”. That five-word phrase is one Greek word. *Hupernikomen*. That's the one Greek word. Right in the middle of this word is the word *nikao*. What word you think we get from that? You should know this name brand. Nike. Nike comes right out of that Greek word. *Nikao*. They're overcomers. They're victorious. They conquer. It is an intensified word form here so we can really translate this as they are super conquerors. That's what Paul is expressing in this one word. We are super conquerors. We are victorious. We're overcomers in spite of all of the circumstances. That's the way Paul wants us to see ourselves.

We are that through Him who loved us. Through Him who loved us. Notice just the tense of that expression “through Him who loved us”. Past tense. Why do you suppose that? Why didn't Paul say through Him who loves us? Present tense. I think it's because He wants us to look at the cross. He wants us to look back at the greatest demonstration of the love of God. He wants us to look back and see the cross and be reminded that in Romans 5:8 – But God showed His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Even in that little nuanced expression that the love of God is in this way looking back to the cross, sure, He loves us in the present moment. Of course, He does. But Paul is saying this comes to us through Him who loved us unconditionally at the cross.

Then I believe there is an even bigger impact that is in view here. There is an even bigger impact that is the desired outcome. What might the Lord of the church do with the church like us if we step into this truth that here we are sinners saved by grace, here we are undeserving, and yet we're a group that is walking as best we can in the power of God's Spirit, trusting Him in the hardest things of life. What is the impact that God would want to see realized in a church like ours if we were a group collectively encouraging and coming alongside of each other and building each other up and being there for each other at these moments of tribulation and distress and persecution and all of the rest. I can assure you what He wants to do in and through us is to have this greater impact for the glory of the gospel. He wants to put on display the gospel in the life of a church like ours, in our lives individually and in our lives corporately together.

He wants us to bear witness to the world that yes, we are more than conquerors. We can go through any of life's experiences as hard as they are. They're hard. They're painful and difficult. But we can go through those and be more than conquerors because together we're trusting God. We're walking with Him. We're encouraging each other in the power of the gospel. First we're more than conquerors.

Now notice secondly, we can be absolutely sure. We can be absolutely sure. Verse 38, verse 39. "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 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." Charles Williams said this is the grandest sentence. This is the grandest sentence in Greek literature, so said Charles Williams. It is the song of triumph. It's in fact Paul's personal testimony. He starts off verse 38 with the word "for". That just takes us right back to what he just said in verses 36 and 37. He is just linking those two concepts together. All of these things are happening. We are more than conquerors, he starts off in verse 38, for I am sure. He is so confident. He is so sure.

Paul lists out for us then 10 more things. So we have 17 things listed in this 8<sup>th</sup> and final chapter. Ten more things that cannot separate you from the love of God. At the beginning of that verse, he says I am sure. The Christian experience, the Christian journey is one that is based on objective, revelatory truth. It is not our emotion. It is not our feeling. It is not by chance. It's not by luck. It's by the revealed truth of the Word of God. That's what we're holding onto. We're not holding on to these hopes of being conquerors because of anything we see in ourselves. It certainly isn't anything that we see in our world. It certainly isn't because the stars are aligning in some way to make this possible. No. it's because God has revealed His truth to us. That's why Paul can say for I am sure. It's the same thing that he said back in verse 28. And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

What is it that Paul is so sure about? What is it that he knows with such confidence that cannot separate us from the love of God? He really starts off and he says neither death nor life. Death nor life. Death obviously we would understand I guess on one level, wouldn't we? To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Of

course, death isn't going to do it because it's our entrance into glory. But he includes life and all the things that happen in the present life with that as well.

It's angels or rulers, supernatural beings. Evidently both good and bad. Good angels and demons. They're not going to separate us from the love of Christ. Be careful in our theology of being a conqueror. Is there spiritual warfare? Absolutely there is spiritual warfare. Ephesians 6 pulls back the curtain, doesn't it? But it's not something that we should fear. It is that something that we should be afraid of because we're more than conquerors, even in the face of demonic oppression.

It's things present or things in the future. Okay. So things present. We get that. But what about things in the future? I can see somebody stepping in this and saying Paul what about the possibility of ... and he goes it's covered. It's covered. The present and the future. Somebody is thinking about what they're going to do in the future. He is saying I've already spoken to that. The things present and the things in the future are already covered.

The word "powers". I'm not sure what that refers to. It could be more of an indication about what he just said about unseen forces. Some people think it may be a reference to powerful human authorities. They certainly can make life very difficult.

Height or depth. Go to the highest mountain. Go to Mt. Everest which is about 29,000 some feet. Mount Everest, the highest point that you can think of. Go to the Mariana Trench 36,000 feet down into the ocean. Think whatever you can of the highest to the lowest point. Paul says it's all taken care of.

Then look at this last part of the statement when he says nor anything else in all creation. In other words, anything else that you can think of. Here's the final catchall. If somebody thinks of something else, he'll say I covered that in that sentence. Here is what happens. There are many Christians when they think about matters of security and assurance are confident enough to say I know God's got me. I know God can hold on to me. I believe that part. But there's a part of me that thinks I can jump out of His hand. There is a part of me that thinks that I can run away from God. There is a part of me that thinks I can still do something to mess this up. I think that's what he speaking of here. He's saying no, you can't because there isn't anything else either, whatever that might

be, that you can think of. There isn't anything else either that can separate you from the love of Christ.

That final triad of love. Verse 35. The love of Christ. Verse 37. The one who loved us. Verse 39. The love of God. It reminds me of that old hymn. Oh love, that will not let me go; I rest my weary soul in thee. I give you back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be. Listen, my friends. God's promise is to never stop loving you. God's promise is that His grace will meet you at every point of every need. Whatever it is that life looks like, He will be there for you and He will love you to the end.

What do we take away from this amazing conclusion of this 8<sup>th</sup> chapter? There could no doubt be many things. What struck me as I reviewed this again this week is that next to the gospel, next to the gospel and the basic facts of salvation, the most important truth that you and I can know is that nothing can separate us from God's love. This is just foundational. This impacts and affects every other area of your life and walk with God. When these difficulties of life come (and they will), when these trials come, when these doubts come, and we know they will, this is the truth that anchors the soul. This is the truth that holds us firmly in our understanding of God's great love. Anything less than that allows the enemy to come in, to seek to destroy and undermine and plague us with doubt. Here is God's revelation through His word to us about who we are and how He intends to keep us as His own.

But first of all, you have to believe the gospel. The first step is to believe this gospel. The first step is to trust in the Lord and to believe that what Jesus did in His death on the cross was all that needed to be done. Nothing else. Nothing else needs to be added to it. Nothing else can be added to it. Let go of whatever perception you have of your good works. God doesn't need them to save you. all he needs is a simple I believe and trust that what Jesus did was all that needed to be done.

Let's pray. Father God, thank You for this glorious word to us, this amazing truth of Your unconditional, never-ending love. Father, we pray that as Your people we will be greatly encouraged as we go through the challenges and difficulties of life, recognizing how tightly You're holding on to every one of us, no matter what. Father, I pray that by Your Spirit, You would open the hearts and minds of anyone who has not yet put their

trust in Christ alone, that they too would step into this wonderful provision for life that is eternal. We pray in Jesus's name, Amen.