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Romans 8:31-39 – *Inseparable Love*

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Romans 8:31-39

What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If **God** is for us, who can be against us? <sup>32</sup> 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? <sup>33</sup> Who will bring any charge against those whom **God** has chosen? It is **God** who justifies. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup> As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> 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.

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Paul’s prayer for the Ephesian church—

Paul’s prayer for us—

Is that we would “grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ...” (Eph 3:18)

Paul’s prayer is that we would know the love of God in Christ...

And not just “know” it...

But “grasp” it.

To grab God’s love and hold onto it tightly.

This is not a casual holding...

Like you would hold the hand of someone you love as you stroll the River Valley together...

Easily breaking the connection when someone needs to get passed you on a bike.

No, this is a firm grasp...

Like the one you would have on your child as you walk next to a steep cliff...

One where someone would have to pry your hand away from that child.

Grasp onto *this* love...God's love...

Because *this* is what we were made for...

God's love.

This is at the center of our being...

Without this you will always feel empty...

There will always be a gaping hole inside of you.

Our need for this love is behind every longing we have.

Every misdirected pursuit of wholeness, meaning, and acceptance...

Is ultimately a longing for the love of our God.

As St. Augustine (4<sup>th</sup> century) famously said:

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.”

This love of God is the ultimate goal of our existence.

Our reason for breathing is to be in a love-relationship with God. (JI Packer)

Paul's prayer is that we would know it and grasp it.

Our passage this morning is a celebration of God's love for his people.

God's "love" for us.

But what is it?

First, it's an action.

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” (1 John 3:16)

Love is an action.

You can tell someone that you love them...

But if the actions aren't there to back it up...

It's not going to mean much.

If I tell Kristi I love her one minute...

Then the next I'm running around on her...

Or doing something that hurts her...

Well, those words aren't going to mean anything.

God can tell us that he loves us—

He can tell us that he is our God...

And that we are his people—

But without an action...

“Love” is empty...

“Love” is abstract.

God's love is concrete though...

It's tangible.

God's love is demonstrated in this:

“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8)

The supreme demonstration of God's love is in the cross of calvary. (JI Packer)

If the measure of love is how much it gives...

The love of God for his people has no limits...

Because the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) gave it all.

Love is an action.

And for God, it's an action that takes the initiative...

It's an “I-loved-you-first,” kind of love.

God didn't wait around for us to save ourselves...

Because he knew we couldn't...

We couldn't fix our own brokenness.

We couldn't forgive our own sin.

We couldn't put ourselves in a loving relationship with him.

So, God takes initiative.

God the Father gives up the Son for us...

Taking the initiative to save us.

(And if you want to protest and say this is child abuse...

You don't have a proper understanding of the Trinity.

The Son willingly goes to the cross because this was their plan from the beginning.

The eternal Godhead decided the Son would lay down his life for the people.)

We can also say that in God's love, he turns toward us.

Or, as Paul says in our passage, "God is for us." (8:31)

Take a second to let that sink in:

God is for you, for those in Christ.

The Creator of the universe;

The one who holds the sun, moon, and stars in place...

Is for you...

Is for us!

"But isn't this the same God we turned away from during our rebellious years?"

"Isn't this the same God who knows all of my secrets?"

"Isn't this the same God who knows our most perverted and depraved thoughts?"

"Isn't this the same God we recently blasted with our angry words?"

Yes...and he's for us!

In Christ, God puts a mark on his people.

He says, "You are mine."

And *God* does what is necessary to be in a loving relationship with us.

He gets rid of all of the barriers that separate us.

Which means he justifies us...

Give us a clean record.

No more condemnation for our sins...

Because Christ takes them upon himself.

We are put back into relationship with God.

And so finally, our hearts can rest...

Because we are his and he is ours.

We're no longer empty and searching...

We've found what our hearts have been looking for all of this time.

God's love is ours.

It's an action that initiates a relationship with us...

A love that turns toward us...

Where God says, "I'm for you. You are mine."

At this point maybe some of us question—

Some of us wonder and even doubt—

Is God *really* for us?

Is God really for *me*?

What about the separation of my marriage?

Or break down of that relationship...

That's ripping out my heart?

What about the loss of my job?

What about the cancer diagnosis?

What about the unending cycles of depression?

What about the hopelessness that I'm feeling in life?

How can we say that God is for us?

"Look at *my* life and tell me God is for me..."

"Walk in *my* shoes and tell me that God loves me!"

What do we say to that?

Some of this remains a mystery to us...

There is never an easy answer for suffering.

Just a few verses earlier Paul says:

“We know that in *all things* God works for the good of his people...”

“He works in *all things* to conform us into Christ’s image.” (8:28-29)

But there are a lot of times this verse doesn’t add up to us...

The pain and suffering that makes up “all things” doesn’t make sense...

“Couldn’t God do things in a different, less painful way?”

There’s a paradox here: God loves his people yet allows them to suffer.

So what do we do with it?

What do we do when we feel like we *are* separated from God’s love...

Like he isn’t really *for* us?

One thing we can do is look to living testimonies.

Some people in our congregation have been through hell:

Tragic loss of children;

Watched their loved ones suffer painful deaths;

People have been abused physically or emotionally;

Some have lost their homes and business...

Some have lost their family.

And yet, they can say—

And they do say! Just talk to some of our seniors!—

“God is for us.”

“God loves us.”

Even after 70-80+ years of hardship...

They still are able to testify—

Because they’ve experienced—

That God still loves them...

That God is for us.

The words from our passage are written by a man who suffered:

“I have been in prison, been flogged severely, and been exposed to death again and again. <sup>24</sup> [...] <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, <sup>26</sup> I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. <sup>27</sup> I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.” 2 Cor 11:23-27

This is not abstract theology for Paul...

He is not writing Romans from a place of privilege (an ivory tower).

Paul writes these words having lived a life of pain.

And his testimony to us:

“God is for us!”

“Not even all of these could separate me from God’s love!”

It’s not that Paul is any more special or closer to God than we are...

God’s love for Paul is not greater than his love for anyone else.

It’s not that any of those who have come through hardship and still testify to God’s love...

It’s not as if God’s love for them is greater than his love for any other believer.

It doesn’t depend on people.

It depends on a person...

And one specific event in the life of that person.

You see, it all hinges on the resurrection of Christ.

If the story ended with the cross on that first Good Friday...

Then we wouldn’t be here today...

There would be no church.

If the last time the disciples ever saw Jesus was his taking his last breath on the cross...

Then they would have walked away for good—

Heads hung low—

Returning to their old lives...

Losing all hope forever.

*Then* they could have seriously questioned God's love...

Dying in despair and in the shame of unfulfilled hope.

But the story doesn't end on the cross.

The story doesn't end in defeat.

Because there is no longer a man hanging on that cross.

The bones of that man are not laying somewhere in a tomb in Israel.

No, the story doesn't end in death...

It continues in life...

Because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

And when Jesus Christ was raised from the dead...

It changed everything.

No longer did death have a hold of humanity.

No longer were we destined for the eternal grave.

No longer did suffering, pain, and hardship have the last word.

Or, as Frederick Buechner the American novelist said:

“Resurrection means the worst thing will not be the last thing.”

The resurrection of Christ ensures us that no matter what we go through—

Sin, death, loss, guilt, war, pandemic, depression...

You name it—

No matter what we go through...

It will not be the last word.

Because the last word for God's people is “love...”

God's love.

The resurrection means that nothing is strong enough to separate us from God's love—

Nothing in heaven, on earth, or in hell—

Is able to separate us from the love relationship we've been given in Christ Jesus.

It always ends in victory for God's people...

Because it ended in victory for Christ.

This means that it's not dependent on us.

We may feel like we're trying our best to hold onto God...

With all of our might we're trying not to let go of him.

Life has been beating us up and we feel like our grip on God is slipping.

Thankfully it doesn't depend on us.

It's *God* holding onto *us*.

*We* are the children that walk close to the cliff ledge...

And God is the parent that won't let us go.

Nothing we do—

Nothing that happens in life—

Will cause God to let go of us.

His love for us is never ending.

It never stops.

It never gives up.

It is always and forever.

Nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Thanks be to God for the resurrection.

Amen.