

## Romans 8:31-39

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[ 0 : 00 ] And turn again to Romans chapter 8. As Chris prayed, Kirsten, who is moving from the States to serve with us here, working in the Pregnancy Advice Centre and serving in church life.

We hope that she'll be here, I think later this week. So that's a real answer to prayer, isn't it? Do look out for her next Sunday. I'm away. But do welcome her. It's great to have Christo with us. And Christo is going to speak next Sunday during Adult Sunday School. And so we've been supporting and praying for Christo and Maria and Paul and Annie. And so can I encourage you all, next Sunday morning, come and hear Christo give an update on his family and the work in Bulgaria. That's 10 o'clock next Sunday. And it would be great if you could join us there for Adult Sunday School. And then lastly, just to say tonight, I'm preaching on Job.

And again, we've got probably three sermons left in Job. And we're looking at Job 33 to 37. And so we're not going to read all four chapters tonight. But if you get a chance this afternoon, in between your nap and lunch, read 33 to 37.

[ 1 : 13 ] And try and work out, is Elihu good, bad or ugly? All right. That's your homework for this afternoon. 33 to 37. Is Elihu good, bad or ugly?

From Job 33 to 37. Okay. So we're at the end of Romans chapter 8. If you're here as a visitor, what we do is we take a section of the Bible.

And each week we go through it. We try and understand it. What God is saying to us. And then next week, we go to the next section. God has given us a book. And we treat it like a normal book.

And yet we believe it's God's word. And it's our guide for life. And so I want to speak from verse 37, really, of Job chapter 8 and verse 37. And where the apostle Paul says, Knowing all these things, all of life, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

And one of the things is, you listen to as I was reading it, you will have picked up the suffering. You will have picked up the hardships that there is in life.

[ 2 : 19 ] And if you didn't pick that up from the reading, and you've lived long enough, you will know it in your own life. The problem of suffering is one of the greatest problems of human beings.

If you think of the thousands of years of the world's existence, how much has been said in trying to explain suffering. How much has been written. Great minds wrestle about suffering.

Why does it come? What is it for? How can we explain it? Christians give numerous answers.

And the Bible, I think, gives some answers. I don't think it gives a total answer. But I think often, when we come to this question, why does God allow suffering? We're coming at it from the wrong angle.

We are looking at it not in the most important direction. Because the most important thing about suffering is not why. The most important thing when it comes to suffering is not to find an explanation for it.

[ 3 : 26 ] But it's how do you live with it? How do you get through it? You can explain it, your suffering, but it doesn't make it any easier, does it, for some of you?

It's not to kind of elaborate clearly on the reasons for suffering, but to lay hold on something or someone that will get you through it. In other words, it's interesting enough to ask why.

Why does it come? But it's far more important for you to think how are you going to cope with it? Because it will come. And what effect will suffering have upon you? It's good, isn't it, to have our minds satisfied.

But you will still have to live through the crisis of life, whether you can explain them or not. You've got to live through them. And how is that to be done?

Well, Paul gives us that answer in chapter 3. Because Paul's concern is that he's just ended telling you some of the greatest truths about Christianity. Christianity. He's just ended this great section at

the end of verse 30.

[ 4 : 36 ] He says the message of the Bible is a message that stretches from eternity to eternity. Because those whom God predestined, he also called. And those whom he called, he also justified.

And those he justified, he also glorified. And from the start of the book in chapter 1, verse 18, he's been telling us of our need. Your need. In life and in death.

And how God has met that need in the Lord Jesus Christ. He's provided for you. He's talked about how you can be justified. How you can be declared right by the God who made you.

How you can be sanctified. How you can grow to be the person that you were meant to be. And he's about to move on to chapter 9 to discuss, well, why did God's people Israel, why do they refuse the good news?

But he pauses in verse 31 and he says, well, what shall then shall we say to these things? He asks you and I, have you really grasped the truths I've taught you?

[ 5 : 36 ] How will you use this truth that I've set before you in the struggles of life? What effect is it going to have on you? And so if you want a text, it is verse 37.

It's got 15 words in it. It's got 15 words in it. I didn't check that. Take my word for it.

And 14 of those words are words of one syllable. But there's something here that pulsates with a power that God gives these words.

That you can experience as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is the theme of victory.

Knowing all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

And so I want to show you three things about this victory, this conquering, that you can know in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 6 : 39 ] Look at what he says, the sphere of victory. The sphere of victory. He says in all these things, well, what is that circle? What is that sphere? What things?

Well, look at verses 35 and 36. Paul has talked about there, isn't he, in 35 and 36. Tribulation, trouble, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword.

I don't know what your troubles are this morning. But I suspect they can fit into those categories.

Pain and sickness. Sadness and loss.

Disappointment. Setbacks. Those are the things. He brings everything together in those verses.

Life at its most difficult.

Life at its blackest. Life at its most hurtful. Life. Life is hard. It's what he calls in verse 18, if you look there, the sufferings of this life.

[ 7 : 43 ] And he says, that is the sphere of victory. He says, that is the context, those things, in which victory takes place.

It's comprehensive, isn't it? All of those things. All of them. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. He takes a big marker and he draws a circle around them.

And he says, in all those things, you as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ can be victorious. I think that's really shocking.

He doesn't say, apart from those things, he's not saying, a lot of life is bad and sucks and is difficult. But there's another part of life which isn't bad and isn't difficult.

And when we get into that part of life, well, everything is well for us. That's not what he's saying. He doesn't say this. He doesn't say, after those things, after those things when life is over and you enter into an eternity of perfect happiness, well, it's there that you conquer.

[ 8 : 54 ] And there you'll have glory. No, he says, doesn't he, again, just look at verse 37. No, in all these things, in the middle of life. He says, while we are experiencing them, because of them, by means of them, we are more than conquerors.

We are more than conquerors in all these terrible circumstances. That is the arena. That is the sphere in which victory is won. And that is strange. And that should puzzle you.

And you should find yourself wrestling with this. Because how can you list all the horrible things of life and say, that is where the victory is? Where does victory take place?

Well, at the moment, there's lots of adverts for holidays and cruises. The travel industry is trying to entice you again, isn't it? And we envisage maybe sitting on a cruise, cruiser, or a holiday beach in a deck chair, eating a kind of great ice cream.

Is that where victory takes place? Is it when you finally managed to buy your own house in this expensive city? And you finally got it?

[10:07] Is it when you've passed your exams, which you've been laboring at for ages and ages and ages? Is that where victory takes place? That's not what the Bible says.

The Bible says that the place of victory is not some kind of immaculate, untroubled beach. It says no, victory takes place on a battlefield. On a blood-covered battlefield where there's carnage and there's stench and there's a screaming of war.

That is where victory takes place. Victory is for aching soldiers. Bleeding with wounds. Staggering with exhaustion. That is where victory takes place. And the sphere of victory, the area where victory takes place for the Christians is intense struggle and fear and pain and tears.

It's not antiseptic. It is not relaxed and it's not risk-free. And so if you are a conqueror, you are almost certainly bleeding.

You've got a broken arm. If you're a conqueror, you're exhausted. And you're hurt. And there are scars.

[11:24] And that is what conquerors are like, aren't they? And so we know, don't we, that wars are not just won by planes flying over and dropping smart bombs from high aeroplanes.

We know, don't we, in the last 20 years that wars are won on the ground. With all the difficulties. No war is won that isn't fought on the ground.

And that, you see, is the realism of the Christian life. That is what we're called to. And so I speak about victory and conquering this morning.

It is not pious escapism. The apostle looks at life. He confronts all the tragedies. And he's saying to you that the victory of the Christian life is not dependent on an ideal, perfect, totally happy circumstances.

Which none of us have. Because if that were the case, we'd be excluded. Believe it or not, you do not live in a perfectly happy, successful circumstance.

[12:31] Now what Paul is talking about here is far, far more valuable. Because he says this victory can happen where you are right now. And where you may find yourself in coming days.

Where your situation is difficult and painful and discouraging. And so within that circle, there is no situation where this doesn't apply. So this promise is earthed in day-to-day existence.

Alexander McLaren says, It is not that we shall be conquerors in some far-off heaven when the noise of battle has ceased. It is here and now.

In the hand-to-hand death grapple. That we overcome. That is where the victory is. That is where the sphere of victory is. So secondly, let's look at the superlative of victory.

The superlative of victory. So can you see from the verse, look at verse 37. In all these things, we are more than conquerors.

[13:40] More than conquerors. And so far, I think it is pretty daunting. We are faced by formidable enemies.

When we think of the Christian life, when I think of my Christian life, I think of all my struggles and my failures. The areas where I am not as strong as I would like to be. When I think of the devil and all his power and all his influence.

And I see what he has done to this world. When I know my own tendency to sin, I ask myself, what hope is there for me in this battle?

And so I'm very tempted. I'm tempted to think, I just want to survive. And maybe that would be great. I'll somehow cope and I'll win through by the skin of my teeth.

It's like those of us who are parents, isn't it? We've just thought for the last few weeks, if we can just get to half term without a positive test. If we can just get to half term. But Paul tells us here, that's not what the Christian life is like.

[14:48] Paul uses a Greek word here, and it's the only time it's used in the New Testament. It's not just that we conquer. Can you see it? Look what it says. It says that we are more than conquerors.

So think about that. It is total victory. It is overwhelming victory. And so the difficulties that we encounter and assault us, by God's help, we can overcome them.

And they're not able to damage us. They're not able to defeat us permanently. And we can conquer them. And we can destroy them.

What does it mean to be more than a conqueror? I think the most helpful way of thinking about that is to think about the person who wrote these words, the Apostle Paul. And the Apostle Paul, he didn't grow up a Christian.

You might know his name was Saul. He'd been a very, very religious man. In fact, he'd been a fundamentalist. He'd been somebody who hated Christians.

[15:56] He felt they were dangerous. He felt that they were a damaging society. And he hated Christians. He used the force of law against them. He persecuted them.

He even killed them. Saul was one of the greatest enemies in the history of Christ's church. And God could have conquered him, couldn't he?

God could have killed him, wiped him out. Could have met him on that Damascus road and just wiped him out. Left him lying there, dead. But he didn't.

Could have conquered Paul completely. But what the Lord Jesus did is Christ more than conquered Saul. He changed his name. He changed him to Paul.

He changed him from a hater of the gospel to a preacher of the gospel. He made him an apostle. He filled him with the gospel which he'd never believed. And he sent him to preach all over the country and all over the world to preach.

[17:00] And churches were built. And books were written. And thousands upon thousands of people were blessed. And perhaps dozens, hundreds of men were trained by Paul and sent out.

You see, Paul was more than conquered. And so what God does here is a superlative of victory. It's over and above conquering. God not only harms sin.

But he makes sin to help us. He not only defeats sinners, but he strengthens them as Christians. So it's more than a curse.

It is overruled for a blessing. It's hard to accept. In the depths of pain and sorrow, which some of you might be this morning, it may sound glib.

But it isn't. Imagine going up to someone in the throes of trouble and say, you know this is all a blessing in disguise, don't you? They don't want to hear that.

[18:05] It's not the time for that. But let me make a point here. Paul does not say that verse 35, that those things in themselves are blessings.

He doesn't say, ah, isn't distress great? Don't you give thanks for distress? You can't beat a bit of famine. That's not what he's saying. He says in and of themselves.

Those things are not blessings. They are the wages of sin. They are intruders into this world. And God hates them. Death is the last enemy. Jesus wept over sin.

He was deeply moved at the grave of his friend. Paul himself knew lots about trouble. In fact, in verses 35 and 36, he gives us seven troubles or sins.

Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. And he's already experienced six of them. And he will experience the other one. He is saying these things are not good in and of themselves, but they are overruled for good.

[19:17] They are overruled for our good. And God takes all of those things and he uses them and he brings good through them. And he changes us for the better because of things which are evil.

Remember Romans chapter 5 and verses 3 and 4. Not only that, he says, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope.

And so in the longer term, we understand why God has done these things. And we can thank God for them. I would want to say that's happened to some of you in this church, isn't it?

You've had trouble in your life and it's been hard. It's been heartbreaking. It's been painful. It's been desperate. It's been very hard. But as you look back, you see your faith has been strengthened.

Your priorities have been corrected. Your character has been refined and suddenly you believe in God in a new way. You believe his truth. Psalm 119 verse 75 says, I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous.

[20:28] And that in your faithfulness you have afflicted me. He's saying there, isn't it? I know, O Lord, you've allowed terribly hurtful, tragic, painful things in my life.

I look back and I can see your faithfulness. And so in all these things, we are more than conquerors. That is a glorious thing.

In all the ugly, terrible things. In all the things that have been so hurtful. In all of them, by God's grace, we are more than conquerors. The sphere of victory.

The superlative of victory. And then lastly, the source of victory. Can you just see the source? It's really important you see it. Because otherwise you'll think I'm some kind of motivational speaker.

Can you say, no, in all these things, we are more than conquerors. Through him. Who loved us. Through him who loved us. That is the source of victory.

[ 21 : 36 ] If we ended this sermon here, at the previous point, it would have been utterly arrogant. If I had said we are more than conquerors, full stop. That all people need to know is I'm a conqueror in everything.

You'd be right to question that. But Paul ends here with what one commentator says, a transcendent factor. What is it that turns our sorrow into joy?

What is it that turns defeat into victory? Through him who loved us. And if those words hadn't been there, it would be a piece of empty boasting. Whistling in the dark.

Because can you see his presence is noted here. Jesus Christ is the one who said, I am with you always. And he's with all his people.

Jesus Christ is with all his people. But let me say this. He is unusually with his suffering people. He is unusually with his suffering people.

[ 22 : 44 ] He is with his suffering people more. He is with them more caringly, more lovingly. So remember in the Old Testament, there's a great illustration of this. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

Lived very long ago. And they wouldn't bow down to the idols. They are put into the fiery furnace. Do you remember the three of them? They are going to be burned to death.

And the king looks into the fire where he sees. How many people does he see walking in the fire? He sees four. There's four of them.

He says, doesn't he, there is one in there that looks like the Son of God. We read that backwards. We know who that is, don't we? Who is with them in the fire? It's God who is with them.

So look at the context of me. Look at verse 35 of Romans chapter 8. What shall separate us from the love of Christ? If you're going to start thinking of pain and difficulty and hardship, what shall separate us from the love of Christ?

[ 23 : 56 ] Well, neither death nor life will. Neither 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.

God is unusually near his suffering people. Let's say, you're a parent, you have four kids, you have four children.

And you love them all. You love all your four children, you love them all equally. Each one is as dear to you as the other one. But let's just say one of those children becomes seriously ill.

And then, as parents, you give, don't you, more time and more effort and more thought to that seriously ill child than to your other children.

It doesn't mean that you love your other children any less. It doesn't mean that you're not interested in them anymore. But at that moment, at that time, there is one child who needs your special love and care and attention.

[ 25 : 10 ] And that is how God behaves with us. We are all his children when we are in Christ. He loves us all. He loves us forever. But there are times in all of our lives when he is especially near us.

You know that from Psalm 23, don't you? Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Well, is he with you when you're not in the valley of the shadow of death?

Of course he is. But it is in the valley of the shadow of death, the psalmist wants to emphasize, that his presence is felt more closely, nearer. We know that Jesus Christ has all authority.

We know that he has twelve legions of angels. We know that he could take away all our troubles with a click of his fingers, with a word. We know that Jesus could remove whatever is upsetting you this morning.

Jesus could remove it like that. And yet Jesus sovereignly allows the grief to continue. And that doesn't mean he doesn't care.

[ 26 : 16 ] His heart is moved towards you, extra, more intensely, more than ever. I am with you always. And there's more here than Christ's presence.

The source of victory is Christ's passion. It is through him who loved us. He has always loved his people. And if you are a Christian this morning, if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, he has loved you before the universe was created.

From everlasting to everlasting. He knew you. He loved you. And he will love you forever and ever throughout eternity. But the verb here points to one supreme moment.

One moment at one point in time in the past where Christ's love was extended to you in a unique way. At this time he loved us. That was when he loved us.

What's he talking about? He's talking about the cross of Calvary. Jesus says greater love has no man than this. That he's laid down his life for his friends.

[ 27 : 23 ] That is the source of victory who loved us. Because on the cross, evil was broken forever. He broke it. He paid the full penalty for our sin. For all the sin of every one of his children.

He robbed death of its thing. The grave of its victory. On the cross, Jesus secures everlasting life for every one of his own people. And in this act, the Lord Jesus faces the full force of evil.

All that the devil could do. And he not only overcomes it, which is wonderful, he turns it to good. So the deepest despair, the darkest moment in human history, is human beings hanging the Son of God on the cross.

As if there was ever a point in human history where you'd want to say, well, hell has won. It's that point, isn't it? It was as Jesus died. It seems like hell has won.

And yet, in fact, with every cruel blow of Satan, God was saving sinners. It's not a tragedy.

[ 28 : 30 ] It's a triumph. It's not a defeat. It's victory. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Think of the Lord's table.

We have the bread and the wine. Symbols of bleeding, dying, suffering. Souvenirs, isn't it?

You're going to London and you can buy souvenirs. In the sense that the Lord's table, God has given us souvenirs. He wants you to remember the most important thing, the most glorious thing.

God says to you and I, when we come to the Lord's table, when you remember me, you make sure you remember me like this. You remember that the devil thought that was his triumph.

But Jesus has turned what the devil did for good. There's kind of half-hearted Christians out there that want to say, well, listen, we don't want to talk about the cross.

[ 29 : 41 ] We don't want to ever mention it. We love Christmas. We're happy to talk about his birth. And we'll talk about his miracles. We're happy to talk about his resurrection. But we don't like talking about the cross. Why do you keep going on about the cross?

Jesus says, if I want you to remember one thing, I want you to remember this. Remember the cross. And so ever since, we as Christians, as followers of Jesus, we can look at sufferings without fear.

And we can confront the worst that Satan has got to do to us without being shaken. We are called to take up our cross and follow him.

And our victories are not marked with a swagger and cheerfulness. As Christians, we are tired and we are troubled and we struggle.

And sometimes we are very sad. But Jesus Christ is with us. And he is seen in us. And he bears witness through us. And that is how his work is done in the world.

[ 30 : 43 ] It is done through suffering. He is the source of victory. All the praises to him. And we are to trust him. One more thing to say as I finish.

We have been thinking of our tragedies and the kind of coming triumph through the love of Christ shown at the cross. But there is another tragedy that is happening this morning. And it is not immediately visible.

But there is no victory and there is no happy ending. And that is the tragedy of being Christ-less. Of being somebody who comes to church.

Maybe who knows lots of the Bible. And is liked by many, many people. But they have never trusted Jesus Christ for themselves in their heart. And as you have heard me speak about the troubles and the tribulations of life.

They actually terrify you. And they threaten you. And you have got no defense and no hope. No companion who is with you. And I want to say to you, how are you going to face them?

[ 31 : 49 ] Because they will come. And the Bible says there is only one answer to that. How do you face the troubles of life? And that is that you come to the cross and you look to the Savior.

And you claim his death for you. And you say he has died in my place. It is my sin that held him there.

And as you do that, his victory becomes your victory. His death becomes your death. His new life becomes your life.

And so that you can face sufferings and tribulations and troubles and death. And you will be more than conquerors. And you need not be afraid.  
It may be true for all of us in this building. Through him who loved us. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.