

INI
CLC Convention Communion Service
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Messiah Lutheran Church, Eau Claire WI
Paul Naumann, Speaker

IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS

Romans 8:31-39

Peace to you all who are in Christ Jesus, Amen. The Word of God chosen for our meditation this evening comes from the Epistle of Paul to the Romans, chapter eight, beginning with the 31st verse, as follows:

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² 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? ³³ Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." ³⁷ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, ³⁹ 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. This is the Word of God.

In the Name of our Redeemer God, *who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

The shepherd David was an unlikely conqueror as he entered the Valley of Elah that day. He was youthful and of ruddy appearance, eschewing armor and carrying as weapons only a sling and a few smooth stones. Standing opposite him was Goliath, a seasoned warrior. A man who did look like a conqueror. With his experience of war, his heavy armor and fearful weapons, the giant certainly seemed an odds-on favorite to crush the youthful shepherd. By all appearances, it would be an easy conquest. But the giant overlooked one important factor – God was on David's side. *David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts....This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand. -- 1 Samuel 17:45-46.* Goliath may have been a conqueror. Unfortunately for him, David – with God on his side – was a super-conqueror.

We are too! In verse 37 of our text, Paul says “*we are more than conquerors.*” By the way, in English that's five words; in Greek it's only one *upernikomen*. We are literally “hyper-conquerors,” or “super-conquerors.” Which is a paradox, isn't it, because sometimes it seems

like Christians are the ones who face the most suffering and adversity in life. We don't look like conquerors, and a lot of times we don't feel much like conquerors, either. Like the trembling soldiers of Israel, we tend to focus on how tall this fellow Goliath is, and how sharp his weapons appear to be, and... "I wonder if anyone would notice if I just slipped out the back way?" But appearances can be deceiving. In our text for tonight, Paul strips away appearances and shows us the reality. He invites us, as it were, to step up into the Victor's chariot beside our Lord Jesus. From here we can survey all the fruits of Christ's triumph. Fruits that He has given to us, and that cannot be taken away. Our theme tonight is,

IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS

- I. We can be opposed, but we can't be defeated.
- II. We can be accused, but we can't be condemned.
- III. We can be persecuted for Jesus' sake,
but we can't be separated from Jesus' love.

I. Prior to our text in chapter eight of Romans, Paul had touched on the subject of suffering. Not only do believers suffer, he says, but "...*the whole creation groans and suffers*" because of sin and its effects. Perhaps the persecution of Christians had already begun in Rome. It was certainly going to increase exponentially in the years to come. Soon the Roman government would inflict upon Christians persecution, imprisonment and – for many – a martyr's death. But is such suffering cause for despair? Not at all, says Paul! Not for the elect of God! For ... *in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.*

There have been many great conquerors in history. Five centuries before Paul's time there was a renowned conqueror named Leonidas. King of Sparta and commander of the elite Spartan army, he was considered a god by his people for his apparent invincibility in battle. But in the year 480 BC, Leonidas faced the vast army of the Persians at the mountain pass of Thermopylae, and was defeated. He and his 300 Spartans were slain to the last man. Leonidas was a conqueror. But **IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS**. For with God on our side, **we can be opposed, but we can't be defeated.**

Paul asks a question whose answer is self-evident: *If God is for us, who can be against us?* The pastors here tonight will recognize that as a first-class conditional sentence, the protasis stating a fact and the apodosis expecting a negative answer. For it is a fact that God IS for us in Christ, and therefore NO - no one CAN be against us. **IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS**. Paul doesn't mean that no one can oppose us, he means it doesn't *matter* who opposes us. No one can successfully oppose us, because with God on our side we can't be defeated. Period!

Which brings up a difficult question – why don't we *live* like conquerors? Why does it so often happen, when we're faced with suffering or hardship, that we fold up in a little ball? We wring our hands and furrow our brows in anxiety. Like Peter on the Sea of Galilee, we see the

boisterous wind and the billowing waves and we begin to sink. How often don't we richly deserve the Savior's rebuke, *O you of little faith, why did you doubt?*

Why DO we doubt? There is no reason for doubt. Our salvation, God's love toward us, His providence, His care, His protection in our lives...all this lies beyond the *possibility* of doubt. How do we know that? Paul answers with another rhetorical 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?*

Those of you who are parents, you know about this: there's not much you wouldn't do for your kid. It's pretty easy to imagine handing over everything you've got – even your own life, for the sake of your child. But what would it take for you...*to hand your child over?* To give up the life of your own child for the sake of a stranger – worse! – for the sake of someone who by nature was your enemy? That's what God did for us! *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; Paul said, yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die.* ⁸ *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* -- *Romans 5:7-8.* That's what makes us truly invulnerable. That's what makes us absolutely certain that God is for us, and that He can withhold no gift from us. Because He already gave His Son. **IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS.**

II. Erich von Manstein was a conqueror. For years Hitler's top general, von Manstein was an acknowledged military genius, responsible for many of Germany's early gains in WWII. Some say that if he had been in charge rather than Hitler, Germany might well have won the war. But how did this great conqueror end his career? In a courtroom in Hamburg, accused of war crimes, convicted, and condemned to years in prison. Von Manstein was a conqueror. But **IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS. For we can be accused, but we can never be condemned.**

And here the Apostle Paul brings us into the courtroom, which is familiar ground for him, because he was a lawyer. Trained under Gamaliel in the school of the Pharisees, Paul was an legal expert in Mosaic Law. That's why vv. 33-34 of our text can only be understood if you think the way Paul did – in terms of a courtroom. Paul says, *Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ *Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.*

Again, it's not that we'll never be accused. We're constantly being accused. But bear in mind who the *plaintiff* is in this case. Does the devil accuse you? Why does that matter? Your offense isn't against the devil. The world on its part is constantly accusing Christians of all sorts of things. Who cares? You owe nothing to the world. If it's your own conscience accusing you, remember – it isn't against yourself you have sinned. God is the plaintiff here. He's the offended party. It is His Law you've broken. And when you come in repentance and pray the prayer of the Publican – “God be merciful to me, a sinner!” – it is God who pardons you. Paul emphasizes that it is God Himself who has acquitted you, who has officially declared you “not guilty” for Christ's sake. Who can overturn God's own decision? No one. Who can reopen the case now that

God has closed it? No one. In Christ we have absolute immunity. Perhaps the simplest and most beautiful promise in all Scripture lies in verse one of this same chapter, where Paul affirms: *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.* The cross of Christ doesn't just answer condemnation, it makes all condemnation impossible. IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS. For we can be accused, but we can't be condemned.

III. Napoleon Bonaparte obviously was a conqueror; many say the greatest military leader in history. But at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 his enemies finally caught up with him and the conqueror was conquered. Imprisoned on the island of St. Helena, he was oppressed and persecuted by his small-minded captors. He died there six years later, separated from his family, separated from his beloved army, and separated from the country he held so dear. Napoleon was a conqueror. But IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS. **For though we can be persecuted for Jesus' sake, we can never be separated from Jesus' love.**

The question, again, is supremely rhetorical: *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* And again, it's not that they won't try. Paul mentions some of the factors that might tend to separate us: *tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and the sword.* If you follow that progression, it's almost as if he's outlining the downward spiral that leads to martyrdom. And historically, this is the way the persecution of Christians usually goes. It begins with *tribulation*, literally "pressure," from society and from the government. This becomes *distress*, literally "narrowness," when restrictions are placed on believers and life becomes difficult. Which is followed by outright persecution, confiscation of Christians' property, subjecting them to want. Then comes actual physical peril, imprisonment, and finally the executioner's sword. ³⁶ *"For Your sake we are killed all day long,"* Paul says. *"We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."* In the final stages, Christians are regarded as little more than "slaughter-sheep", marked for death by their unbelieving persecutors. Could that ever happen here, in America? I think the first step is already underway. Pressure on Christians is building, from society and government. Recent years have seen disparagement and ridicule of the Christian faith become commonplace, and accepted. Could the rest of the progression be soon to follow? In terms of history, it'd be very unusual if it didn't!

But even if it does, Paul says, all of this changes our relationship to Christ...*not one bit!* *"In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."* The world sees the external things, and to the world we look like losers. But God shows us the reality. Our eyes have been opened, so that we *...may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.* -- *Ephesians 1:18.* The reality is that IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER CONQUERORS.

But is this really what conquerors look like? Persecuted and suffering? Enduring *famine and nakedness and peril and sword?* It seems strange way of conquering. On the other hand, this was Christ's way, wasn't it? His road of conquest led through persecution and suffering, through Gethsemane, through Gabbatha, to Golgotha. On that first Good Friday, Jesus stepped into your place and conquered sin, death and hell on your behalf. He released you from the punishment

your sins deserved, and with His own blood wrote your name in the Book of Life. The writer to the Hebrews admonishes us to look “...unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”³ ...Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. -- Hebrews 12:2-3.

The early Christians in Jerusalem weren't discouraged. When they were persecuted, they scattered the way sparks scatter when a rock is thrown into a campfire. They ignited a blaze across the then-known world, fulfilling Jesus' assignment, "You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." -- Acts 1:8. And despite all the intervening conflicts and persecutions, here we are 20 centuries later, still blazing away. IN CHRIST WE REMAIN SUPER-CONQUERORS, still “showing forth the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.”

The greatest conquest, of course, is yet to come. For I am persuaded, says Paul, that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,³⁹ 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. Through Christ's love we will win out to the end, for He who has begun His good work in us has promised to bring it to completion. No angel or demon, no height or depth, in fact no created thing can keep us from the heavenly reward Christ won for us on the cross. How could it? The mighty Creator Himself is for us! Can any part of His own creation successfully stand against us? Ridiculous! Not even the cross was enough to separate Christ and His love from us sinners. Could any earthly trial or hardship accomplish what the cross could not? Could it separate us from the Love of our Savior? Absurd! Nor can death itself stand in the way of our ultimate victory. Because even in death – yes, especially in death! – WE ARE SUPER CONQUERORS IN CHRIST. For *Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory."*⁵⁵ *"O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"*⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.*⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. -- 1 Corinthians 15:54-57*

The Roman emperor Julian, also known as Julian the Apostate, was the last non-Christian emperor of Rome. A pagan who all his life violently opposed the Christian faith, he was mortally wounded in the Battle of Samarra in 363 A.D. It's interesting that his dying words, uttered in Greek, borrow a term from verse 37 in our text (do you remember that word I spoke about at the beginning?) Dying, Julian said, *nenikekas me, Galilaie* -- “You have conquered me, O Galilean.” That Christ is a great conqueror, history has shown. And His greatest conquest of all lies in the hearts of redeemed sinners like you and me. For each of us believers can say as well, in love and deep gratitude, “You have conquered me, O Galilean.” His love has conquered us, and made us conquerors, too. In fact, IN CHRIST WE ARE SUPER-CONQUERORS. We can be opposed, but we can't be defeated. We can be accused, but we can't be convicted. We can be persecuted for Jesus' sake but – praise be to His infinite compassion and grace! – we can never be separated from Jesus' love. To paraphrase the familiar hymn,

*If God Himself be for me,
I may a host defy;
For when I pray, before me
My foes, confounded, fly.
If Christ, my Head and Master,
Befriend me from above,
**NO foe and NO disaster
Can drive me from His love! AMEN.***