

“More than Conquerors: The Greatest Chapter in the Bible, part 4” // Romans 8:31–39 // *Romans #18*

El Paso/Dayton: 3 groups: the fearful, the angry and the oblivious

Summit: Let me welcome back our student ministry who got back late last weekend after several days at camp.

- They had over 700 of our middle and high school students and 21 POF that we know about.
- **STAND if you were there, either as a student or a volunteer.**
- (Middle School Volunteers, there is a special place in heaven for you.)

Romans 8, if you have your Bible. P. 54/Journal

I'm not sure if you've heard the name **Peter Deyneka**¹--he was a Russian immigrant who fled to America in 1911 to escape the Communist Revolution.

¹ Day-NECK-uh

Works Consulted:
Don't Waste Your Life, "More Than a Conqueror?" John Piper
Romans for You, "Romans 8," Tim Keller
"Does God Control Everything?" Tim Keller
"More Than Conquerors," Joby Martin
"You're About to Inherit It All," Erwin Lutzer

- He became a Christian shortly after arriving in Chicago, went to the Moody Bible Institute and was then powerfully used by God in both America and Russia in bringing people to Jesus.

He tells this great story about his escape from Russia.

- His parents had sacrificed everything to get him a boat ticket to America.
- He got on the boat with virtually nothing. No money; just a knapsack with a few clothes; his mom had stuffed some stale, hard bread into his bag for him to eat on the journey.
- He said that throughout the journey he would often look in on everyone in the dining hall, wishing that he could have some of the glorious meals they were eating.

Well, some of the sailors told him that if he helped them with their work that he could eat what they ate--still very meager portions: gruel and hardtack type of stuff--but it was at least more than his moldy bread.

He said it wasn't until the last day of the trip that he realized that three full meals a day came with the purchase of his ticket.²

Because I couldn't read what was written on the ticket, I didn't know what I was entitled to.

The Apostle Paul indicates in Romans 8 that many Christians live out their spiritual journey that way: We know that receiving Christ as

² <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-1987-07-29-8702250266-story.html>; Cf. Erwin Lutzer, delivered on November 23, 2008, "You're About to Inherit it All," from series Children of an Awesome God, sermon on Romans 8:31-32.

savior grants us a ticket to heaven, but we don't fully **understand all the benefits** included in the price of the ticket.

We left off last week considering God's **4-part promise to his children** in suffering:

- **Part 1:** God has **determined to make us more like Jesus** and he now pursues that purpose through all things in our lives.
- **Part 2:** **Our journey ends with the redemption of our body**, where our pain and sorrow is transformed into healing and joy.
- In the meantime, **part 3: The Spirit abides with us and prays for us.**
- **Part 4:** Through all of this, we have the **assurance that what God started**, he'll finish.

I want to pick up again in vs. 29, because that is where Paul lays out in concise form the purpose God is doing in our lives, because it sets up what he is about to do in 31–39: 29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, 30 and those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

Some big words here:

- **foreknew:** Foreknew doesn't simply mean that God knows facts beforehand, as in simply sees the future.
 - When Scripture says **God 'knows' someone**, it means he has a relationship with them.
 - **For example**, when Jesus says to a group of people in **Matt 7**, *'I never knew you,'* he doesn't mean he's never heard of them before, but that he had no relationship w/ them.³
 - So, **saying God "foreknew" us** means he **set his love on us before** we even existed.

- *Those God foreknew, Paul says, he **predestined**:* To 'predestine' means to *determine the destination beforehand*: God has **predestined those he foreknew** to end up looking like Jesus.
 - **Now I know for some of you the "p" word** brings up all kinds of questions, so I have two things for you:
 - **First, don't shoot me**, I'm just the mailman.
 - **Second, I promise next week** when we get into Romans 9 completely unravel all your theological mysteries for you, so you'll have to come back for that.
 - For now, I just want you to **understand why Paul is bringing this up**. He's not trying **to start a theological argument or even send you off into a theological excursus where you muse on the mysteries** of God.
 - **He's trying to give you assurance:** *Before time began, God had a purpose for you and nothing can deter him from that purpose.*
- *Those God foreknew and predestined, he also **called**:* The **first time God's foreknowledge and predestination** *really* broke into your life was when you **experienced the call**--which basically means you were drawn to want to know him.
 - **Sometimes people say, "How do I know if God foreknew and predestined me and called me?"**
 - Easy: You had a desire to know God.
 - **John 6:44**, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day." (**That means:** if you had any desire to come to Jesus, that is evidence of the call--apart from that, you would have had no desire)
 - **Phil 2:13**, "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (If you had a *desire to please* and know God, that was a call)
 - **One more: 2 Thess 1:4–5**, For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you,⁵ because our

³ Tim Keller, *Romans 8–16 for You*

gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. (If you experienced conviction of sin and were convinced of the truth of the gospel, you were chosen)

- Now, there can be **some mysterious interplay** with our choosing and God's sovereignty:
 - Some of you feel like you were drafted into God's army; others of you felt like you enlisted.
 - At the end of the day, **both elements are there**.
 - **If you belong to Jesus**, it's because you chose him; **but if you chose him** it's because God was drawing you.
- *Those he foreknew and predestined and called he also **justified**: Accepting God's call means simply accepting his offer to save you. When you believe that Jesus died in your place and claiming his sacrifice as your own, all **guilt from sin is removed**. You are **justified** (which I told you some people express concisely as: "**just as if I'd never sinned**.")*
- *Those he foreknew and predestined and called and justified he also **glorified**: This is the **final stop on the destination**.*
 - *"**To be glorified means to have all sin eradicated and to be made perfect in body and soul.**"⁴ (Just like Jesus)*
 - Now, if some of you were honest, you might think that doesn't sound all that appealing--being made just like Jesus--because **you grew up with the same image of Jesus** I grew up with, based on all the pictures I saw of him as a kid, sauntering around with his perfect beard and wavy hair and a pensive, detached, too-spiritual-for-this-world look on his face. (In **every picture I ever saw of Jesus growing up** he had the same expression... **Olan Mills Jesus**. As a middle schooler I didn't really think, "That's a guy I want to grow up and be like." He didn't honestly look like a guy I'd even want to hang out with.

- **But--John 10:10; Ps 16:11.**
- Which means to be remade in Christ's image is to be fully alive--joy at its fullest; pleasures at their highest; everything in you, physically, emotionally and spiritually, works like it is supposed to. **No sin. No corruption.** Which connects you to a fullness of life you **don't even have the capacity to comprehend yet**. I compared it last week to showing a Monet or a Rembrandt to a kindergartner. They don't even have the capacity to appreciate it yet.
- **DMLJ** says maybe the **most astounding thing** about this passage is that Paul speaks of **this future glorification in the past tense**.
 - *Those foreknew he called... he glorified. The glorified is as past tense as the foreknew..*
 - **It's as good as if it's already done!** It's as finished in God's mind as foreknowing you is.⁵

This is God's unalterable purpose.

Paul's logic: because he **paid the highest price to initiate it** (the blood of his son) and **supplied the greatest power to accomplish it** (the power of the resurrection in his indwelling Holy Spirit) and **swore by his sovereign purpose** to finish it, we can be sure that he is working *all things* together for good in fulfillment of it.

Paul could have ended right there. But he can't help himself. He **erupts with** an overflow of praise--no new content here, just praise. It takes the form of **5 rhetorical questions**.

- These are questions on which to build your life.
- **DMLJ** calls "**logic on fire**."⁶

⁴ TK, *Romans 8-16 for You*, 52.

⁵ Quoted in Lloyd-Jones, *Romans Chapter 8:17-39*, 258

⁶ Tim Keller, *Romans 8-16 for You*, 53-55.

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?

1. If an all-powerful God has purposed our good, why would we fear opposition? (vs. 31)

He's not saying no one will ever oppose us, just that nothing that opposes us can thwart the good purposes of God toward us.

I know some of you come in here facing all kinds of opposition. You say, "**Who can be against me? Try: A bad boss; or an antagonistic spouse; inward struggles and maybe addictions; chronic health problems; difficult kids.**"

Paul is not saying that the Christian will not experience opposition-- just that no opposition ever overcomes him. Because, while **the struggles he faces are big, the God behind him** is even bigger.

Growing up, **I always felt so safe around my dad**, because I assumed my dad was omnipotent.

- In my mind he was the strongest, smartest man alive. **Like I've told you--he could fix anything** with a pocketknife.
- He **wasn't scared** of anything--bees, snakes, nothing deterred him.
- **And he was strong**. I was positive he could have whooped any of your dads. ⁷
- **In fact, I think he still can**, which is why he sits down here close to the stage when I'm preaching.
- The bottom line was that **anytime I was around him, I felt safe--** not because there were no dangers--but because I assumed my dad was bigger than the dangers.

⁷ Heard Joby Martin say something similar in his sermon, "More Than Conquerors" (but totally true about my dad)

The way to remove fear from your life is not to isolate yourself from all dangers--because that's impossible--but to believe the promises of a God who is bigger and better than the dangers.

I was reading a woman's Bible study the other day (You say, "You read WBS?" Yeah, and if you got a problem with it, maybe you could talk to my dad after service.

- But **this study had a line in it** from that famous description of the godly woman in Prov 31. It says that **the godly woman "has no fear of the future."**
- I thought, "Is that even possible? With all the things that can go wrong in a woman's/your life, how can you "face the future without worry or fear?"
- **Does the godly woman have no fear about the future** because she's been wise and done PFU and has enough money in the bank that she's ready for any contingency and will always live comfortably, and she's in great shape with perfect health; and she's in a perfect marriage to a doting husband who is also in great health; she's got perfect kids with no issues getting straight A's in school; and she's surrounded by perfect friends who also have no issues?
- **Does she have no fear of the future** because all the right politicians are in office and everything seems to be trending in the right direction?
- If **that's your idea of the fearless life**, good luck with that.

The **godly woman has no fear of the future** because she **knows a God bigger** than anything that can threaten her, whose presence and power are with her no matter what, and **who promises to transform any of the things she's afraid of into an agent of his purpose**. PAUSE

This is what David felt in Psalm 23, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for you are with me.” The ‘Valley of the Shadow of Death’ does not sound like a great place to live. For some of you, your whole strategy is staying out of the Valley. But that won’t work—at some point you’re going to go through it. David says, “I can live there for a while for awhile, if I must, if you are with me, because **you are stronger than anything in this valley.**”

This ties into question # 2: ³² He did not even spare his own Son but offered him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything?

2. If God gave up his most precious possession to save us, why worry about any of the rest of our needs? (vs. 32)

They say the value something has is shown only by what someone is willing to pay for it.

- **Joby Martin calls it the eBay rule.** You may have something in your house that you feel is really, really valuable. Great. Put it on eBay, and you’ll find out it means about \$6 to everybody else. That collector’s edition of VHS Rambo tapes you think is such a collectible, that Nicolas Cage pillow--not worth that much.
- Or, **do you ever go to a yard sale where everything is ridiculously overpriced?** “I realize this feels really valuable and sentiment to you, but it’s just an old lamp to the rest of us.”
- **Or the opposite:** To me, the **only thing interesting** on those TV shows like American Pickers or Antiques Roadshow is when somebody has an item that they don’t think is very valuable—“I got this at a yard sale for \$3”—and then suddenly, they meet someone who’s willing to pay \$30,000 for it. **(BTW, this happened to my family when my grandmother died... she had no idea. We had no idea. I kicked a soccer ball around in that room. It was then that I remembered she wanted to leave me that room as my inheritance.**

Had we known the price someone was willing to pay for that lamp, we would have treated it differently.

God sacrificed Jesus to redeem you, and that should change how you perceive what God is doing with you.

- **Why would God put that kind of investment** into you and then not supply what you need to accomplish his will?
- Why would he **rescue you from sin** but not give you help in your marriage?
- Why **supply for you the Holy Spirit but withhold wisdom** from you in your parenting?
- **Sometimes when I am counseling people who are worried about** some decision. “*What if I make the wrong one? I tell them:* “It’s not like God is going to hide his will from you. He’s got more invested in your life now than you do!” Relax! **Sheep prayer.** If sheep roll over the wrong way in a nap, they can get cast and die. “How’d I get here?” Ps. 23:4

Here’s a verse I’ve been meditating on recently: “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” Luke 12:32

- I love that promise--Soak that in. I feel like **every word is specifically chosen** to help me in a time of worry. It’s an **explosion of metaphors.** “Fear not”:
 - “little flock...”
 - You’re just a sheep.
 - Throws in little, another insult. Not just regular sized flock, but little.
 - “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give...”
 - Not, “your employer’s agreement to pay”
 - Or, “Your slavemaster’s duty to provide your lodging”

- It is “your Father’s pleasure to give.” It’s in his nature. It’s his deepest delight. He’s like a dad who delights to take care of his kids⁸
- **To give you the kingdom.”** It’s something he is sovereign over.
- Normally, they tell you not to mix metaphors, but this is a good one. God is like a compassionate Shepherd, a tender Father, and an all-powerful King all wrapped up into one.
- **So what are you afraid of?**

Let me do questions 3 and 4 together... ³³ Who can bring an accusation against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies.

And then he builds on that in the next verse: ³⁴ Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us.

3. If God accepts me, whose disapproval need I fear? (vs. 33) AND 4. If Jesus, the Judge, was judged in my place, how could I feel guilt? (vs. 34)

Let me deal with those in reverse order. Q4: Scripture tells us God has **committed all judgment to the Son.**⁹ That means everyone will eventually stand before Jesus.

And that means the one who will judge me one day has died in my place. The one who sits on the throne who will Judge the whole world bore my punishment.

- Illus. **Apple store:** Laying out my case: “I go to BCC.” “Oh, so you know I’m trustworthy.” I don’t think he did me any favors, but it helps knowing that the one in the position of judge knows you and likes you.

- **One day the Judge of everything is going to look that way at me,** not because he hears me preach each week, but because he bears in his body the price of my justification. I can’t be condemned.
- I **can’t be condemned**--he’d have to deny himself.
- And even now, Paul says, **this Judge stands there interceding for me based on his finished work.**
 - I love how **the Apostle John** expresses this: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and cleanse us from all righteousness.” 1 John 1:9. I love that word “just.” Not merciful. Faithful and *just*. How I used to see it... It is just.
- **And so, Paul reasons, if you are sure God has accepted you, why would you be worried about anyone else’s approval?** Why would you struggle with feelings of guilt or inferiority or condemnation?
 - I know many of you **struggle with feelings of inadequacy** because of things said or done to you in the past, and I’m not saying that **just memorizing these verses will make those feelings magically go away.** People are more complex than that.
 - I’m telling you that at the core of overcoming that is the realization that you have a Heavenly Father who approves of you, thought you were **worth saving**, has justified you in his sight, and has declared a purpose over you greater than what anyone else thinks or says about you.

NOW, let me deal with one objection: Sometimes people say, “Well, I know God has forgiven me, but I can’t forgive myself.”

- I always say: So you think you are greater than God? That **your opinion of you** matters more than God’s opinion of you does?
- **Let me tell you what is happening when someone says that:** They feel like the only way can have worth is when they reach some standard of excellence. (It’s usually one established by comparison)--**in order to be worthy**, they have to reach a level of success, obtain a moral standard, be a certain kind of person, or

⁸ See John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World*, Demand #37.

⁹ John 5:44

avoid certain kinds of mistakes in comparison to others. And if they **don't obtain that standard**, they have no worth.

- **But I ask you: is your worth established by the good you've accomplished or the evil you've avoided?** If so, you're doomed. You have worth because of what God says about you.
- **Your identity is established by what the most important person in your life thinks about you.** (Not just religion: psychology.) If that person is you, or someone else (whose opinion you live for), you'll **always struggle with feelings of guilt or disapproval**, no matter what God says.
- **You need to re-establish God** as the most important Person in your life.
- ***I am who YOU say I am.***

I can't help but think here of one of my favorite stories I love to tell here...

- **My 15th anniversary here:** staff made fun of all the stories I repeat--they wove them together in one long, continuous story. Quite fantastic.
- In fact, I've **heard it described like this:** you know how in the old days before they had clocks and calendars they would tell time by "how many moons" had occurred? "He stayed there for 14 moons." You call date how long you've been at TSC by how many times you've heard this story. "Oh, I've heard this story 3 times, that means I've been here about 9 years.
- But I tell our staff: "First, if God entrusts you with a good story, you have to be a good steward of it and tell it often." Second, there's at least 3000 people here this weekend that weren't here last time I told this story. And none of the Garner campus Don't be selfish."
- **So, here goes: Soccer story:** It was great. We were at about the same maturity level. Look to Jesus. He's the most important! If he is for me, who else am I worried about?

Finally, question 5:

³⁵ Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

5. If we can't be separated from the love of Christ, is there really anything in the universe to fear? (vs. 35)

What's interesting: Paul lists these things out in answer to the question "**Who can separate us from the love of God?**"). You normally wouldn't think of those things as a "who". They are inanimate objects.

Why not say "**What**"? Was that a typo?

I don't think so. A couple of reasons. First, because when **these things come at us, it feels like a who.** But second, Paul wants to set up a contrast with a greater Who. **No matter who you have against you, you've got a Who** on your team than any who on their team.

Your dad is stronger.

And he's not just going to defeat those things for us. He's going to make us ("~~...in all these things we are more than conquerors.~~" vs. 37) Think about that phrase: "**more than conquerors.**" How can you be "more than a conqueror?"

I love how **John Piper** explains it: "A conqueror defeats his enemy, but one who is more than a conqueror subjugates his enemy. A conqueror nullifies the purpose of his enemy; one who is more than a conqueror makes the enemy serve his own purposes. A conqueror

strikes down his foe; one who is more than a conqueror makes his foe his slave.”¹⁰

- God **not only delivers us from our suffering**, he makes our pain and suffering *serve his purposes*.
- **Affliction is made the servant of God in his purposes. 2 Cor 4:17**, “This light and momentary affliction is preparing [working, or bringing about] for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”
- What Satan meant for evil, God uses for good, because God uses these attacks to work in us an even greater weight of glory than we would have experienced without them.
- **The Who of your salvation** is greater than the who of your opposition and he transforms the opposition into the servants of his purpose.

This also explains that strange quote Paul gives in the middle.

³⁶ As it is written

‘Because of you
we are being put to death all day long;

we are counted
as sheep to be slaughtered.’

(The inclusion of this **verse always confused me**--b/c right in the middle of this soaring rhetoric Paul, Paul quotes a rather depressing lyric: “Because of you, we are being put to death all day long, we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.”)

Paul is **employing a teaching technique common to Rabbis** of his day called a “*remez*”. They would **sing one lyric of a popular song**, and

¹⁰ John Piper, [More than a Conqueror?](#)

your mind would sing the rest. Like if I sing “*Ooh, I wanna dance with...*” your mind fills in the rest.

(MUSIC)

- **Psalm 44 was a well-known song of lament written at a dark time in Israel’s history** when it seemed like God had forsaken Israel because of her sin. Israel’s enemies were all around them, crushing them, and so the psalmist asks if God had taken his eyes off of them forever.
- **Romans 8 is the Paul’s answer to that, the *gospel’s* answer to that: NO.**¹¹ If not even our sin could separate us from the love of God, could anything else?
 - If God didn’t turn his back on us when we had turned our backs on him, will he turn his back on us now?

38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

- **Some of you are living in Psalm 44 today.** You think, ‘Pastor, if you only knew what I was going through, and how much of it was my own fault, you wouldn’t say God can turn it for good.’
 - **But can I tell you something?** If you are living in that dark, desperate, hopeless place of Psalm 44, you are **PRECISELY** the person Paul is talking about here.
- Your **Psalm 44 is being swallowed up in Romans 8.**
 - Do you feel like a sheep set to be slaughtered? Paul calls you **more than a conqueror**.
 - Do you feel like darkness is your only friend? Paul says that **not even death** itself can harm you.

¹¹ Joby Martin, “More Than Conquerors”, sermon on Romans 8:31-39, preached at Church of Eleven22; June 3, 2018

- **God's purpose is unchangeable**, his power is unchallengeable and his love is unconditional, so there is nothing I have to fear.
- **I am who you say I am**; the Who of my salvation is greater than the who of my opposition **and I am more than a conqueror**.

All those things that oppose you: *persecution and famine and sword, earthly and demonic powers*--**those just affect your situation**. They can't touch your identity.

Listen, struggling believer: You are greater than your situation. Your life is **not defined by your situation**. Your life is defined by who you are in Christ. You are who he says you are.

You are the treasured child of a Heavenly Father. And if that is true:

- What is there to be **afraid of**? What is there to fear or dread or worry about?
- **Who can stop the Lord Almighty?** He's roaring with power and fighting our battles, and every knee will bow before him--who can stop the Lord?
- **Who is there who can condemn you, discourage you, disrespect you** or marginalize you?
- What **unexpected news could devastate you; what unexpected diagnosis** send you spiraling into despair?
- You **have no need to fear any part of the future** no matter how much famine, nakedness, persecution or sword it contains!
- Again, this is **logic on fire!**¹²

And so, we should worship like Paul in that promise, and sing with that kind of confidence.

And realize that sometimes God gives us this kind of pain so we can put the excellencies of God on display for someone else, because often the **only way people can see the glories and excellencies of God** is to see them through the hope you possess in his promises amidst the tragedies of your life.

Watch this: Kylie White WY1 video

¹² DMLJ: "Think, man! Are you afraid (v. 31)? You aren't thinking! Are you worried (v. 32)? You aren't thinking! Are you feeling guilty (v. 33)? You aren't thinking! Embrace the logic of free grace and justification! These aren't dry

doctrines; they are life itself. And if you are not living right now with overwhelming assurance and power, you haven't really understood them!"