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Sermon Notes

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## **Conquering Life's Ultimate Question**

### **Romans 8:35-39**

August 8, 1914, Sir Ernest Shackleton set out from England in an attempt to lead the first expedition across the Antarctic Continent. What followed was among the most extraordinary tales of survival in history: a ship trapped and then crushed by ice; an expedition marooned, first on the constantly shifting Antarctic ice pack, then on a remote uninhabited island; a daring open boat journey across the world's most violent ocean; a trek across unmapped mountains in freezing weather; and finally, an amazing rescue. Although Lord Shackleton failed in his initial objective, he is remembered for his leadership and courage in bringing home every single one of his men alive.

The name of his ship was *The Endurance*... a fit metaphor for the Christian life

Romans 8 is designed by God to give you everything you need for Endurance in your Christian life... BUT it is endurance for a distinct purpose!! Every blessing of the Christian life is designed to advance God's kingdom to the glory of God's name

Assurance is the same... we are given assurance that we may have courage for the arduous journey ahead

***Romans 10:14-15*** *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? <sup>15</sup> And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

#### **I. The Ultimate Question Posed**

"What will happen to me when I die?"

Christian version: "Can anything separate me from the love of Christ?"

**vs. 35** ***"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"***

A. Christ's Eternal Love

1. The sweetest gift we have ever received
2. Loved totally, unconditionally
3. Forgiven completely
4. Loved before the foundation of the world!!

#### B. Christ's Complicated Love

1. We don't understand love
  - a. our love: an emotion that waxes and wanes
  - b. based on performance
  - c. uncertain future
2. The **Difficult Doctrine of God's Love**
  - a. false concepts of Christ's love
  - b. liberal tendencies: God loves everyone the same
  - c. "God's love in Christ equally given to everyone, but only some receive it"
  - d. THUS God can love me in Christ, and I still might end up suffering eternally in hell
  - e. UTTERLY FALSE!!! We need a whole new concept of Christ's love... this is just the passage to do it for us?

YET... we misunderstand Christ's love a second way... "If Christ loves me, then He will only let good things happen to me. If that is so, and if I suffer great losses on earth, how do I know I won't suffer them on Judgment Day?"

3. "If God loves me, why am I suffering like this?"

#### C. Christ's Future Love

1. All blessings come to us only in Christ
2. If I am "in Christ" today, will I be "in Christ" tomorrow, or next year, or when I die?
3. Can anything separate me from Christ's love

## II. The Ultimate Question Weighed

### A. What Does the Future Hold? Can I Be Separated from Christ?

#### 1. "Separated"

##### a. separation by divorce

***Matthew 19:6 "Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate."***

Ultimate question: "Will Christ divorce me because of some sin I may commit in the future?"

##### b. separation by departing

***Acts 1:4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not depart from Jerusalem..."***

***1 Samuel 16:14 Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.***

Ultimate question: Will I be asked to depart from my share in the heavenly Jerusalem? Will God's Holy Spirit depart from me the way He departed from King Saul?

##### c. separation because of holiness

***2 Chronicles 26:21 King Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house --leprous, and excluded from the temple of the LORD***

Ultimate question: Will our holy God find uncleanness in me and demand that I be separated from Christ the way Uzziah had leprosy and could not enter the temple of the Lord? Will God's holiness force me to be separated from Christ?

##### d. separation on Judgment Day

Wheat from tares: weeds separated out and burned

Good fish from bad fish: bad fish separated out from good and thrown out

Sheep from goats:

Ultimate question: Will our holy God separate me from the saved as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats?

This is the ultimate question concerning the future...

vs. 35 ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”***

B. No “Ostrich Assurance”

1. Assurance means nothing if not realistic
2. Worldly assurance is “ostrich assurance”
3. Romans 8: Red-blooded honesty... facing all the hardest questions of life

C. Possible Separators Named and Weighed

1. Tribulation

tribulations small and great are GUARANTEED

***John 16:33 “In this world you will have troubles...” [i.e. thlipsis]”***

***James 1:27 [the distress and trouble of orphans and widows called thlipsis]***

***Matthew 24:9 [the trouble given us by the world because we are Christians is called thlipsis]***

Then, the “Great Tribulation” is thlipsis:

***Matthew 24:21 For then there will be great tribulation, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again.***

d. trials make us stronger IF WE’RE TRUE CHRISTIANS

***Romans 5:3-4 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings [thlipsis], because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope.***

e. BUT false-Christians fall away during tribulation

***Matthew 13:21 [Rocky soil] The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. <sup>21</sup> But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.***

Tribulation is a time of great testing for the church, and false Christians do get sifted out. But true Christians only get stronger and purer.

How can I tell if I am a true Christian? We've said again and again that assurance is only for those who are truly Christian, and the Holy Spirit's job is to give you TRUE assurance, not false.

***Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***

***vs. 4 us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.***

***vs. 5-6 for those who are not carnally minded, but spiritually minded***

One of the key tests is how you respond to trials specifically brought on by being a Christian

The false Christian falls away... but the true Christian grows in perseverance!!

And if you're a true Christian, more tribulations will only have the same effect... constantly making you stronger and stronger

## 2. Distress

Gk. = concept of being crushed from every side

***2 Corinthians 1:8 We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life.***

***2 Corinthians 4:8-9 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.***

c. distress will not separate you from the love of Christ

## 3. Persecution

a. rejection and physical attack from unbelievers in the world

b. verbal insults, job troubles, even beatings and death because of faith in Christ

***Matthew 5:11-12 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.***

***1 Peter 4:14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.***

Remember that Christ said to Saul the persecutor, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute ME?!!!"

Next, Paul lines up four earthly trials common to all, but especially common to Christians under persecution:

4. Famine: stripped of food
5. Nakedness: stripped of clothing
6. Danger: stripped of peace of mind
7. Sword: stripped of life itself

**Famine** shall not separate us from the love of Christ... they may take our earthly food, but we still have food to eat the world knows nothing about

**Nakedness** shall not separate us from the love of Christ... I would rather be stripped of earthly clothing and be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, than to be clothed in the best robes the world can offer, but be naked in unrighteousness in the sight of God

**Danger** shall not separate us from the love of Christ... what is danger but a trial that may or may not come to me, and nothing comes to me except through the sovereign hands of God!!!

Paul knew danger, and it NEVER separated him from the love of Christ!

*2 Corinthians 11:26 I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers.*

**The Sword** shall not separate us from the love of Christ... "The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still!!" My physical life may be stripped, but never my eternal life

*Colossians 3:3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*

Now... all of this is true... each possible enemy which might separate us from the love of Christ has been weighed

BUT Paul goes deeper. He considers why these things come to us at all!!

### III. The Ultimate Question "Considered"

*vs. 36 "As it is written, 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'"*

#### A. Considered Sheep for Slaughter

1. "Considered" = "reckoned"... put in the ledger under a certain category

- a. vital word in Romans
- b. God “reckons” our faith as righteousness

***Romans 4:3 “Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”***

Literally, our faith is credited to our account as Christ’s righteousness

- c. We are to “reckon” or consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God

***Romans 6:11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.***

- d. here, God counts us as sheep for the slaughter

Illus. Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “When Christ bids us follow, He bids us ‘Come and die!’”

B. Is It God Who Does This??

***KEY: “For your sake, we face death all day long”***

- 1. lit. “Because of you”
- 2. Because we trust Christ and bear His name
- 3. Because of our association with Christ, we are considered sheep for slaughter

C. Principle Lived Out by Christ

***Isaiah 53:7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.***

- 1. God considered His own Son as sheep for the slaughter
- 2. God did not spare His own Son from death on the cross!
- 3. Why should we be spared?

D. Principle Lived Out by Christ’s Sheep

- 1. Christ taught it clearly to His disciples

***John 12:24-26 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.***

2. The disciples lived it out in the Bible

**[Paul]** *Acts 20:24 "And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. <sup>23</sup> I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. <sup>24</sup> However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me--the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.*

**[Holy martyrs]** *Revelation 12:11 they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

3. The Church has lived it out ever since

Rome killed one Christian after another... from the blood of the martyrs, many new Christians sprang up, even from among the ranks of the Roman soldiers who killed them

Martyrdom of Felicitas, widow and mother of seven sons: pagan priests denounced her, and the authorities brought her in to threaten her with death if she didn't renounce Christ. Her courageous answer rings through time:

**"While I live I shall defeat you; and if you kill me, in my death I shall defeat you all the more."**

E. Principle Explained: Why are we considered sheep for the slaughter?

1. We need to die... to sin, selfishness, comfort, ease
2. Others need us to die

Tertullian: "The blood of martyrs is seed for the church."

Out of these martyrdoms, more and more people trusted Christ

***John 12:24-26 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.***

FAMINE: Illus. #1: 1900, John Frederickson purposefully went to a famine-stricken region of India and rescued hundreds of starving children, transferring them to the care of other missionaries; then went back into region and worked so hard day and night he came down with dysentery... he died on September 5, 1900. When one of the children Frederickson had saved heard about his death, he exclaimed, "Two have died for us... Jesus and Sahib" (their name for the great missionary) Many of the children Frederickson saved went on to become stalwart Christians.

**DISEASE:** 1907, Jesse Brand went as a young missionary to serve in disease ridden Chat in India, called the "mountain of death"... on furlough he returned to spread the news of the deadly plague epidemic in that region of India. Fleas on rats would jump from dead rats to other live bodies, including babies. One who heard him speak was Evelyn Harris, a wealthy London socialite. She committed herself to go to India as a missionary and eventually married Brad. They spent their honeymoon caring for the Indian people they lived to serve. By 1927, they had given aid to over 25,000 people. During one year, Jesse preached over 4000 times in 90 villages. Churches had sprung up in many of these villages. But in 1928, worked to exhaustion, Jesse came down with malaria and died. The Indian Christians buried him with the epitaph: "He delivered up his life to the Lord in behalf of the people." Evelyn Brand continued to minister courageously in India without him, and raised their son, Paul, who grew up to be a famous doctor to lepers... Paul Brand's book Fearfully and Wonderfully Made is a Christian best-seller

**MARTYDOM:** Illus. #3: Sunday, January 8, 1956: six Auca Indians had murdered Jim Elliot, Nate Saint, Ed McCully, Pete Fleming, Roger Youderian; later their wives, including Elizabeth Elliot, had led many of the Aucas to Christ. Many know this...

What most people don't know is that one of the six Aucas who had killed the missionaries and later came to faith in Christ soon developed a heart to reach out to another tribe further up the river. The Aucas had been warring with that tribe for years. TONA volunteered to go upriver, and he was axed to death from behind. As he was being attacked, he cried out, "I am not afraid! I'll die and go to heaven." His attackers cried out, "We'll help you go!!" as they killed him! With his dying breath, TONA whispered, "I forgive you. I am dying for your benefit!" Many of those down river Aucas came to Christ as a result of TONAs sacrifice.

***John 12:24-26 I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.***

***vs. 36 "As it is written, 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'"***

The brutal truth of the gospel is this: God is willing to pour out your life to save someone else

**You may face: *trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword***

in order to bring someone to Christ

God has been pouring out Christians for centuries... and the church now spans the globe.

- He considers you as a sheep to be slaughtered
- Your **reputation in the world:** slaughtered

- Your **earthly comfort and ease**: slaughtered
- Your **superficial friendships with non-Christians**: slaughtered
- Your **professional career**: slaughtered

**How long?** ALL DAY LONG!!

**Why?** FOR YOUR SAKE!! For the sake of God's name, for His glory, for the growth of His church!

Now, the ultimate question answered

#### IV. The Ultimate Question Answered (vs. 37-39)

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

A. A Resounding Reply: NO!

B. Superconquerors in All Things

Battlefields listed

- Death
- Life
- Angels
- Demons
- Present
- Future: the GREAT UNKNOWN!!!
- Powers

***“My Father, who has given my sheep to me is greater than all, and no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand!”***

- Height or Depth

***Psalm 139: “If I go up to the heavens you are there... if I go down to the depths you are there!”***

- Anything else in all creation

God’s omnipotent eye scanned the universe, and all time from beginning to end and tells you “The coast is clear! You are safe! You will live with me forever in heaven!!”

C. Superconquerors THROUGH CHRIST!!

#### IV. Application: RISE to CONQUER!!!

**The ultimate question:** What will happen to me when I die? Can anything separate me from the love of Christ?

**The ultimate question weighed:** SHALL trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword

**The ultimate question considered:** why do these trials come? Because we are considered sheep for the slaughter

**The ultimate question answered:** NO!! NO!!! A thousand times NO!!! Nothing will separate you from Christ

RISE TO CONQUER... fear nothing, live for Christ

Witness for Him this week... put sin to death vigorously

Go overseas as a missionary... think like a sheep for the slaughter!!!