

Sermon on Romans 8: 26-end July 26th 202

This is one of those passages that really is a complete sermon in it's own right and at the same time could inspire a whole sermon series. I cannot do it justice in 10 minutes but I will do my best to pull out some highlights and hopefully challenge you to dwell on it further. And I do encourage you all to read and reread this passage and chew it over this week. Romans 8 is probably my favourite chapter in the whole Bible and God has spoken to me through it, taught me and comforted me with it many times.

Do you ever feel that you just don't know what or how to pray? Or even when you do know what you want to pray do you feel your prayers are inadequate? It's ok, God knows. He searches and knows our hearts and His Spirit lives in us, and prays with us and for us. And the Holy Spirit always prays in accordance with God's will. Even in prayer God is not leaving us to struggle on our own but is actively joining with us, by His Spirit in us, helping us, teaching us, covering our inadequacies. All we need is a desire to be in God's presence and for Him to know our hearts. In a sense words are optional. And this Hebrew verb "to know" actually means far more than intellectual understanding. It denotes a personal relationship of care and affection. God knowing us means He watches over us. And that leads us to the second point I want to draw out a bit, that we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him and have been called according to His purpose. Hear this – you, each and everyone of you have been deliberately called by God by name. He has a purpose for your life.

When Joseph, you know the shepherd with the technicolour coat, when his brothers sold him in to slavery, they meant it for evil, but God turned it to good, saving many lives. When the Jewish people were captured by the Babylonians and Jerusalem lay in ruins, God told Jeremiah to write to them

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and tell them, I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and give you a hope and a future. The ultimate example of God bringing good out of evil is the cross. The Jews and the Romans meant only evil when they crucified Jesus, but through their evil intentions God brought about the defeat of sin and death itself by Jesus's victory in His resurrection. Will God necessarily prevent us from suffering? No. Can God bring about something incredible, amazing, life giving, eternal from the worst situation – absolutely, just look at the Cross. The same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in every person who puts their trust in Jesus.

I am not going to get in to the whole predestination debate. There are many books on the subject if you want to read them. We know that there is always a both/and with the Kingdom of God. We freely choose to accept or reject the gift of salvation and God has always known who will accept and who will reject Him.

And so we come to these mind blowing truths – God is for us, so who can be against us! God justifies us and because we are justified by Him, no-one can accuse us or condemn us. There is no condemnation for us because we are in Jesus. God has our backs, always. No matter what people might say about us or to us, we are ok because God is our defender and Jesus is praying for us. How incredible is that? You know how you pray for the people you love. You know how it feels to care so desperately about what is happening to your loved ones. Well that is how Jesus is praying for you.

And because of this there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from God's love. Nothing! It is not that nothing bad will ever happen, it doesn't say that, but whatever happens there is nothing that can ever separate you and I from God's love, for all of eternity.

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Some of you may have heard of Brennan Manning, some of you may have read his book, the Ragamuffin Gospel. If you haven't, I strongly recommend that you do. If you haven't it certainly bears reading again. Anyway this is a quote from that book:

The question which the gospel of grace puts to us is simply this: Who shall separate you from the love of Christ? What are you afraid of?

Are you afraid that your weakness could separate you from the love of Christ? It can't.

Are you afraid that your inadequacies could separate you from the love of Christ? They can't.

Are you afraid that your inner poverty could separate you from the love of Christ? It can't.

Difficult marriage, loneliness, anxiety over the children's future? They can't.

Negative self-image? It can't.

Economic hardship, racial hatred, street crime? They can't.

Rejection by loved ones or the suffering of loved ones? They can't.

Persecution by authorities, going to jail? They can't.

Nuclear war? It can't.

Mistakes, fears, uncertainties? They can't.

The gospel of grace calls out: Nothing can ever separate you from the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You must be convinced of this, trust it, and never forget to remember.

Everything else will pass away, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Faith will become vision, hope will become possession, but the love of Jesus Christ that is stronger than death endures forever. In the end, it is the one thing you can hang onto.'

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So my challenge to you this week is to think about the things that you are frightened of, that make you anxious. Name them before God, bring them to Him with or without words. You might be scared of catching the virus. You might be anxious about someone you love catching it. You might feel that you aren't good enough in some way, or that you have something to prove.

Maybe you fear for your children or your grandchildren. Maybe you feel that grief or pain is separating you from God. I don't know what the secret fears for your hearts are. But God does, and if you want Him to, the Holy Spirit will pray in you and for you for those fears and anxieties. And know that even if the very worst of your fears were to be realised, if the worst thing happened, even then, nothing, nothing on earth or in heaven can or will ever separate you from God's love, that is in Jesus who is in you. So do think about that this week, as I said, think about whatever your deepest fears and anxieties are and bring them to God who knows you and loves you and watches over you and prays in you and for you and who will never leave you or forsake you, ever.