

Sermons through

# Romans

## More Than Conquerors

*Romans 8:33-39*

*Part 4*

*Sheep For The Slaughter*

*Romans 8:36*

*With Study Questions*

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# More Than Conquerors

Romans 8:33-39

Part 4

*Sheep For The Slaughter*

Romans 8:36

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? *It is God* who justifies. <sup>34</sup>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. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written: "*For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*" <sup>37</sup>Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. <sup>38</sup>For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup>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 (Romans 8:33-39)?

As it is written: "*For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter*" (Romans 8:36)?

## Does the Christian Faith Work?

Does the Christian faith work? Is Christianity good for your marriage? Yes...unless Nero kills your husband. Is Christianity good for your family? Yes...until ISIS kills your children. Is Christianity good for your nation? Yes...until those who hate Christ and the followers of Christ scatter the faithful.

It was during a period of relative faithfulness in Israel that the Psalmist wrote:

**But You have cast *us* off and put us to shame, And You do not go out with our armies.<sup>10</sup> You make us turn back from the enemy, And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves.<sup>11</sup> You have given us up like sheep *intended* for**

food, And have scattered us among the nations.<sup>12</sup> You sell Your people for *next to nothing*, And are not enriched by selling them.<sup>13</sup> You make us a reproach to our neighbors, A scorn and a derision to those all around us.<sup>14</sup> You make us a byword among the nations, A shaking of the head among the peoples.<sup>15</sup> My dishonor *is continually before me*, And the shame of my face has covered me,<sup>16</sup> Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles, Because of the enemy and the avenger.<sup>17</sup> All this has come upon us; But we have not forgotten You, Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant.<sup>18</sup> Our heart has not turned back, Nor have our steps departed from Your way;<sup>19</sup> But You have severely broken us in the place of jackals, And covered us with the shadow of death.<sup>20</sup> If we had forgotten the name of our God, Or stretched out our hands to a foreign god,<sup>21</sup> Would not God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.<sup>22</sup> Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long; *We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*<sup>23</sup> Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast *us* off forever.<sup>24</sup> Why do You hide Your face, *And forget our affliction and our oppression?*<sup>25</sup> For our soul is bowed down to the dust; Our body clings to the ground.<sup>26</sup> Arise for our help, And redeem us for Your mercies' sake (Psalm 44:9-26).

I do believe the counsel and wisdom of God is the wisest counsel for marriages, families, nations, businesses, educational systems, economical systems and everything else...especially the church. And I don't mean this in a 'even though it will make your life miserable, it's the right thing so do it anyway' sort of way. The wisdom of God, presented in the Scriptures, is tailor-made for the human condition. If a man is willing to love his wife as Christ has loved the church, for example, it will be the best thing for his marriage and the most honoring thing to God. It is not an either/or.

I am also find myself under the impression that the Scriptures teach that all who oppose the wisdom of the Triune God or commit themselves to indifference when it comes to the loving sacrifice of the ascended Christ – the Prophet, Priest and King of kings will, in the final analysis, finds themselves in a state of historical insignificance and eternal judgment.

**But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped. <sup>3</sup> For I *was* envious of the boastful, When I saw the prosperity of the wicked...<sup>17</sup> Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *Then* I understood their end (Psalm 73:2-3; 17).**

It is the Kingdom of God alone that advances victoriously through history. All other kingdoms have their wisdom and have their moment. But it is the truth of Christ – the kingdom of Christ – that will prevail through history then onto eternity.

**But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation. <sup>11</sup> Thus shall you say to them: “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens (Jeremiah 10:10, 11).**

Perhaps I, at this point, sound conflicted or confused. Is the Christian faith good for our marriages, families, nations, etc or not? I offer an emphatic ‘yes’. I mentioned something last week that brought an interesting question during our question and answer time. I had said that a minister/elder should never (with some exceptions) lay their family at the altar of their ministry. “What exceptions?” was the question.

I thought of martyrs, the faithful who are put to death for their convictions while their families watched – and would certainly suffer (especially in that hostile environment). Of course one might argue that such a sacrifice wouldn’t hobble the struggling family but would rather buttress their faith. The martyr would have to ask himself, ‘would I rather I/my family be comfortable or faithful?’

You see there is really no conflict at all. Jesus taught as much in the gospel of Mark when Peter began to engage in a cost-benefit analysis (no doubt, wondering if following Jesus was working) of following Him.

**Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” <sup>29</sup> Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no**

**one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,<sup>30</sup> who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.<sup>31</sup> But many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mark 10:28-31).**

“Now in this time” seems to speak of history and “in the age to come” obviously referring to eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth. The kingdom of Christ will advance and bear fruit throughout the earth, culminating in eternal life. But Jesus inserts a little phrase which should not escape our notice...“with persecutions”.

### **With Persecutions**

In Tertullian’s *Apologeticus* we see the phrase,

**“The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”**

Let us be careful not to throw a sweater on Jesus and place him in a late night infomercial giving proven talks on how to increase our cash-flow or extract immediate psychological benefits from his tips on having our dreams fulfilled in the here and now.

In the context of Paul’s statement “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Romans 8:36) it wasn’t their faithlessness that brought on the slaughtering but just the opposite. It was “For Your sake”. It was due to their faithfulness that they were accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:10).**

And when Paul conveys this, he conveys it with the phrase “we are killed all day long” *holen ten hemeran*. What could that mean but that their lives consisted of death continually being perched above them like the sword of Damocles.

So is the Christian faith work? Will it make your life better? On a wider scale, can it be said that the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ will make things better or worse on the earth? People hold Bibles in their hands and offer a variety of suggestions. Some emphatically propose that in spite of the advancement of Christ's kingdom the climate of goodness in the world will crumble like the icecaps. Others view the kingdom in such an immaterial sense that it just doesn't really matter that much – goodness will advance as will darkness. Still others present the Christian faith as if it is the immediate cure for all human sorrows – enough faith and you will be healed and happy here and now.

I find myself in disagreement with all of these eschatological/sociology theories when it comes to the gospel. We are not to consign history to the devil nor are we to view it as insignificant nor should we expect the immediate overthrow of darkness. Like a mustard seed the kingdom of Christ grows slowly, like leaven it permeates everything but there is a price paid for this.

The Apostle Paul was not engaging in heresy (as if his own blood could justify the saints or that Christ's work was insufficient to remit our sins) when he wrote:

**Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church (Colossians 1:24).**

It was rather a recognition that the blessing that would extend to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:3) would require continual sacrifice on the part of the faithful. This was the lens through which Paul viewed his own sufferings:

**I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me (and these were bad things) has really served to advance the gospel, <sup>13</sup> so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ (Philippians 1:12, 13 – parenthesis mine).**

The Christian faith works, it will bring up all the boats in the harbor. But not without storms – in a three steps forward, two steps back sort of

way. The faithful are called to a battle. It is a battle of love and thoughts and truth, but a battle nonetheless.

## **A Hostile, Yet Fruitful, Relationship**

Make no mistake, at the heart of it there is a hostile relationship between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of Christ. Upon deep analysis there is no common ground. The kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of Christ can mutually coexist only so far – like a bad marriage where the couple no longer have thoughtful discussions but must operate at a shallow level. For when ‘big decision’ time comes the conflict is revealed.

For the most part, the kings of the earth will suffer the folly of the Christian faith provide it stay in its zone – its jurisdiction. Have your Bible studies and prayer meetings but don’t suppose to inform Herod that his marriage is “not lawful” in the sight of God (Matthew 14:4) or we’ll cut off your head.

It is for this reason that there is an underground church currently in China. The government sanctioned Three-Self church is left untouched by the government provided they preach the gospel but leave the culture to the bureaucrats. Don’t attempt to live out your faith and certainly don’t question the authority and wisdom of the very government that has given you the freedom to exist.

There is a very unhealthy sentiment in today’s church which misunderstands Jesus’ words “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21) as if jurisdictions can be divided between God and men; as if there are things that are not God’s. Abraham Kuyper was spot on when he said

**There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!”**

It was in an effort to manifest their wholesale rejection of Christ that the people, when questioned regarding his kingship offered the cry “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). There are those who resist the efforts of Christians to engage in cultural transformation and, at some level,

I understand their concerns. We certainly don't want the church reduced to the 'social gospel'. Those concerned teachers don't want us to forget that the faithful are called to suffer for Christ. But they seem to ignore what (at least in part – a large part) is the cause of the suffering – the engagement with the culture.

In ancient Smyrna, around 2:00 on a Sunday afternoon in 155AD, the eighty-six year old Polycarp, leader of the church in that region, was given the option of acknowledging the lordship of Caesar or paying the price. It was a common occurrence that the faithful would be required cry out "Kaiser Kurios" (Caesar is Lord) in arenas where their deaths provided entertainment for a desensitized mob. Polycarp did not appeal to the common ground between Caesar and Jesus. He did not negotiate jurisdictions. "Iesus kurios" (Jesus is Lord) was his response and it brought a cruel death by fire and sword.

The world was not immediately transformed by the death of Polycarp. But it wasn't as if his faithfulness has no fruit – both eternally and culturally. In time the Roman Empire with its Caesars would cease to exist and the kingdom of Christ would grow like a stone becoming a great mountain and filling "the whole earth" (Daniel 2:35).

The Apostle would convey to the suffering and persecuted saints at Rome that there was nothing that could separate them from the love of Christ. Like the faithful Israelite in the Old Testament, they might be tempted to ask of God what many of us have perhaps silently asked, "Why do You sleep, O Lord? Arise! Do not cast *us* off forever. <sup>24</sup>Why do You hide Your face, *And* forget our affliction and our oppression (Psalm 44:23, 24)? They needed to know that God's apparent inactivity is not inactivity at all.

They were to remain faithful in the midst of a hostile religious and political climate. They were to imitate Christ. It was through the death and poverty of Christ that He would bring life and riches. That they would be "killed all day long...regarded as sheep to be slaughtered" did not indicate God's disfavor nor their faithlessness or failure. The death of Christ did not signal failure on his part and the death of the saints does not signal failure on their parts.

**For the blood of thy martyrs and saints shall enrich the earth,  
shall create the holy places,**



wrote T. S. Eliot.

**For wherever a saint has dwelt, wherever a martyr has given his blood for the blood of Christ, there is holy ground, and the sanctity shall not depart from it.**

Does the Christian faith work? The question itself seems flawed. It's like asking if truth works or if love works. We must resist a consumer mentality and the expectation the God will indulge my current desire no matter how virtuous or beneficial that desire might seem to me. God has a plan to effectively save souls and transform the world. Our roles are to preach the gospel toward the saving of souls and obey all Christ commanded toward the transformation of ourselves and the world around us.

This was a source of encouragement toward those heavily persecuted Christians in the first century. It is a source of encouragement for those paying the price for their faith to this current day – brothers and sisters throughout the world for whom we must pray and seek deliverance (Proverbs 12:6).

But it is not as if this verse is restricted to the severely persecuted church. In a couple of chapters Paul will admonish his readers to present their bodies as “**a living sacrifice**” (Romans 12:1). We fantasize that we would be faithful in the midst of dire conflict when daily we live as if our own life is the only one that matters.

Husbands, wives, children, parents, citizens, politicians, employers, employees, coaches, team-mates, friends, church members, church leaders must ever resist that un-Christian non-sacrificial disposition that seeks self-contentment and self-exaltation over and above the welfare of others and the glory of God.

Peter, Paul, Stephen and Jesus' Himself opened their mouths boldly when the glory of God was compromised (Matthew 21:13). But for the welfare of those He loved we read of Christ that...

**...he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his**

**generation? For his life is taken away from the earth (Acts 8:32, 33).**

It would appear that for the sake of Christ we will barely allow ourselves to be inconvenienced let alone regarded as a sheep to be slaughtered. May we aspire to the disposition of Paul, who wrote?

**But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24).**

## Questions for Study

1. The Christian faith is often presented as if it's a product. People say it "works" for you. How would you respond to the question, "Does the Christian faith work (pages 2, 3)?"
2. Do things only go poorly for the saints when they're behaving in an unfaithful manner? Explain (pages 2, 3)?"
3. Which kingdom will advance through history? What will that look like (pages 3, 4)?"
4. Jesus spoke of His followers receiving a hundredfold in this age and in the age to come. What did He also say they would receive (page 5)?"
5. What did Tertullian say of the blood of the martyrs? What does that mean (page 5)?"
6. What affect will the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ have upon the world (pages 5, 6)?"
7. Will the advancement of Christ kingdom always be smooth sailing for the believer? Why, why not? Discuss (pages 6, 7).
8. Define and discuss the nature of the relationship between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of Christ (page 7).
9. Are there things that belong to Caesar that don't belong to Christ? Explain (page 7).
10. Was Rome immediately transformed by Polycarp's faithfulness? Did he accomplish anything? Explain (page 8).
11. What do you do that resembles a lamb being led to the slaughter? In what ways can you be a living sacrifice (pages 9, 10)?"