

God's gift of Love
Romans 8:31-39
November 13, 2022

I've been giving a lot of thought to the topics of the last few Sundays and how God has rescued us from ourselves. The reality of God's gifts of His Son, His Spirit, His hope and His love are sinking more deeply into my soul. And it has led me to a question I want to ask you this morning.

Have you ever received a gift that left you speechless or caused tears of gratitude? Holding my newborn child is one of those moments for me. Who am I to receive such a gift as this? How can I respond in an appropriate way? If you have been there, then you know how that child becomes a new center of your focus. Your life is changed.

Maybe your life was saved by someone else. If not for another's intervention, you'd be dead right now. Every conversation you have, every hand you hold, every hug from a loved one is a precious moment. How should you respond to the extra time you've been given? You have a new focal center. Your life is changed.

When I think back over my life, there are not many of these life-changing moments of gratitude. As I ponder the last few Sunday's I've come to believe that the gifts we are talking about should be included in this list.

Romans 7. We are hopelessly stuck in our sin and need help. God gives us the gift of His Son. Romans 8, through the Son we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who now enables us to live a life that is filled with His joyful power rather than legalistic drudgery.

Through the Holy Spirit God gives us the gift of real hope. It is a certainty that God's goodness does exist side-by-side with our suffering as He uses everything to fulfill His purpose of transforming us into the image of His Son. And with this hope that cannot be shaken, we come to the final gift today—a love that cannot be lost.

Do you feel the impact of these gifts on your life? This is stunning, life-changing truth. But unlike the newborn child or extended lifespan, we don't always recognize these gifts for what they are and so our gratitude drains and we begin to drift from being rightly centered on what God has done and how His gifts change our lives. Perhaps today can become an opportunity to correct any drift we may have experienced.

So, ask the Spirit to help us all listen well to Him so that we might more fully embrace these life-changing gifts He has given. With that, let's walk through Paul's conclusion of this in the final verses of Romans 8.

Remembering how God has given us the gift of His Son, His Spirit and His unshakeable hope, we pick it up on verse 31

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

What, then, shall we say or how can we respond for these gifts we've received? God is obviously for us. If God is for you, who can be against you? He is for you. He is not on your side, giving you what you want. He has brought you to His side and gives you what you need.

He is for you. Like a loving father who gives of his time, energy and expertise to help a child excel, like a devoted mother who stays up late helping a child process pain or prepare for a scary day, God wants you to know His best in this fallen world. He is for you.

If you have any doubt, just look at the gift of His Son. If God gave us His Son—who opens the way for the Spirit who delivers to us unshakeable hope and allows us to experience eternal love—if He gave you the very best He had, what good thing would He ever withhold from you?

God is for you. In fact, He is so committed that He vigorously defends you. Verse 33.

³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

Imagine yourself in a courtroom. You are present as the defendant, accused of some heinous crime. As the prosecutor starts to rip into you with incontrovertible evidence against you, the judge interrupts the accusations, looks at you and says, "What are you doing here? Your crimes have all been paid for and you are forgiven. Go in peace."

God has justified you. By giving you faith in what Jesus has done for you on the cross, He has declared you to be like His son, as one without fault or blemish and able to enter into His presence. If the One with all power and authority has justified you, who can condemn you? Someone might try but no matter who they are, their voice means nothing.

The voice of that authoritative person in your life—the parent who berated you, the teacher who flunked you, the coach who benched you, the friends who belittled you—whatever that person is the voice that echoes in your mind today holds no sway with God. Since it is God who justifies you, who can condemn you?

Their voice does not influence God, but if it still influences you, then you have a choice to make. Who will you believe more? Will you believe what God says about you or what others have said about you?

There is one other voice of authority that seems to speak more loudly and carry more authority than all the others—our own.

We accuse and condemn ourselves. We know what we have done. We know what goes through our minds. We feel unworthy and unlovable, and we think we know how God will respond. But because of Jesus, there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1). The condemnation others lay on you, and even the condemnation you lay on yourself, is not true and does not stick.

And just to layer one amazing reality on another, Paul tells us that Jesus—the one who died for us and was raised to life for us—is at the place of honor, authority and influence with God. He has the Father’s ear and is pleading our case. I can hear Jesus saying, “Don’t listen to the accuser on this one, Father. I bought him with my blood. He belongs to me.” “This one has my life flowing through her. She is beautiful, pure and holy in my sight.”

The judge has declared you not guilty and your defense attorney has the judge’s ear and an unassailable argument in your favor. Don’t miss this gift: God is for you.

But not only is God for you. He is also with you. Look at verses 35-39.

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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.

God is with you and nothing can separate you from His love. We could easily add to Paul’s first list anything we want. Nothing can separate you from His love. Not poverty or shame or cancer or COVID or inflation or economic downturn or devastating loss....you can insert any suffering you want in there and it will not separate you from God and His love.

Now, the suffering can make us feel like God has abandoned us, but that is not the truth. That’s what Paul is saying by throwing in the “facing death all day long as sheep to be slaughtered” line. With these words he points us back to Psalm 44.

In this Psalm the psalmist declares that even though he trusts in God and follows God’s ways, he is suffering and so he cries out to God for help. Look at the last few verses with me.

²⁴ Why do you look the other way? Why do you ignore our suffering and oppression?

²⁵ We collapse in the dust, lying face down in the dirt.

²⁶ Rise up! Help us! Ransom us because of your unfailing love.

He knows that God’s unfailing love will have the last word in his situation. Paul points to that Psalm as a way to assure us that we are not alone and that God’s unfailing love will

overcome every struggle we have. We can be sure of this because it is part of His character. It is who He is.

God's unfailing love for us assures us that He will finish the work of conforming us to the image of His Son. And in the most amazing and mysterious way, He even uses our suffering to accomplish this purpose. It is possible for our suffering and God's goodness to exist side-by-side. If you missed David's message from last week, I encourage you to listen to it.

Romans 4 says that we believe in a God who calls things that are not as though they were. God calls us righteous, holy and victorious even though we don't feel like we are. He calls us that because He is looking at Christ's life in us.

Our Lord's holy, pure, indestructible life is fully ours and can't be taken away from us. We only experience it in part now because it is currently hidden in Christ. When Christ returns, our true life will be fully experienced by us and clearly seen by all (Col 3:1-4). As John says, "We shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is" (1 Jn 3:2).

God's love guarantees that He will bring this work to completion on the day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1:6). Nothing can stop it. In fact, He even uses the hard things in this world to fulfill the promises He made.

Because God is for us and God is with us, Paul says that we are more than conquerors through God who loves us.

No matter what we may face, we have already won, and no one can take God's gifts of the Son, the Spirit, His hope or love away from us. The Christian who languishes in a foreign prison for his faith has won. The loved one slipping away with dementia has won. The father being removed from the ventilator or the mother on her death bed have won. The business person standing who lost everything for any reason has already won.

Nothing can take away the victory from them or from anyone with faith in Christ. For I am convinced that that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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

God is for you. God is with you. God's love will not fail you no matter what your circumstances may be.

Pick up the little plastic chalice that contains a small piece of bread and a bit of grape juice. If you do not yet have one, just signal the person coming down the aisle and they will offer you one. If you need a gluten free option, just let them know.

Look at this. It does not seem like much, and this presentation is not that appealing. But for the next few moments, look past the form to the meaning that is behind it.

The bread...God is for you.

He who did not spare His own son but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also graciously give us all things? If God gave you the very best He had, would He hold back anything from you?

The bread, His body, broken so that His sacrificed life becomes a payment covering the debt you owe for the sin you carry. Have you accepted that payment on your behalf? Have you made this your own? God is for you. He wants you to have it.

He is not on *your side* giving you what you want. He has brought you to *His side* so He can provide what you need. And He will hold nothing back. In fact, *every* spiritual blessing is already yours in Christ Jesus. He holds nothing back because He is for you and wants you to know His best.

The cup, and the covenant it points to, assures you of God's forgiveness and binds you to God through Christ for eternity. The Father has justified you. The Son defends you. No matter what you may think, there is no condemnation for you now, no accusation leveled against you can stand.

God is not just for you; God is also with you. Nothing can separate you from His love.

This holy meal is intended for Christ's disciples, those who confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead. If you have yet to cross over that line in expressing Christ as your Lord, then we are so glad you are here. Rather than participate in this part of the service, I encourage you to simply observe what is happening. Listen to the scripture again and ponder how the Lord might be working in your life today. What might He be saying to you right now?

If you believe Christ is your Lord, no matter how small or faltering you feel your faith might be and no matter how unworthy or unlovable you may feel, please do not deny yourself this meal. Jesus intended for you to receive the tangible reminder of His gifts and the spiritual blessing that comes with this sacrament.

I invite you to hold the elements while I read some scripture. Then, after I finish and when you are ready, eat the bread. After we all eat the bread, I will read another portion of scripture before we take the cup.

One final word. Choose to put aside whatever distraction is pulling at your mind or heart right now. Let yourself be fully present to this moment. Listen to what the Spirit has to say to you and be open to the response He may be asking you to make. Please pray with me.

Lord, we know our failure and our weakness. Help us today to also know more fully your success and sufficiency for us. Through your word and this sacrament, would you help us to see how you receive us in love, your unearned, undeserved and unfathomable love for us. Help us take another step to more fully receive every gift you have given. Through your word and sacrament, help us receive from you the grace we need this day.

The bread is a reminder of how God is for you. "This is my body, broken for you. This do in remembrance of me."

Romans 8:31-34

³¹ What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? ³³ Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴ Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

God is for you. Eat the bread when you are ready.

The Cup is a reminder of how God is with you. "This cup is the new covenant made in my blood. Shed for the forgiveness of your sins." That forgiveness is what opens the way for God's gifts and presence to be yours forever.

Romans 8:35-39

³⁵ Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶ (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep." ³⁷ No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

³⁸ And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God is with you. Drink the cup when you are ready.

Benediction

What, then, shall be our response to all this? We know that answer to Paul's question. We are called to live a life of love. Love Jesus. Love His people and pour out His love on the world.