

When Life Is Tough - Part 7

Invariable Love In A Changing World

Romans 8:35-39

With no intent to curry any of your sympathy just got to tell you preaching is hard, it's really hard. I mean not the actual work of preaching or even the study, the hardest part is actually hitting the mark with those that listen to the preaching. As one of my old mentors said, you know, your job Mike is to comfort the distressed and to distress the comfortable. The problem is both groups show up at the same time. I mean really that is the problem. I have two services on Sunday and hoping maybe the distressed would go to one the comfortable would go to the other, but they don't! It's all mixed in every time so it is hard for me to preach a sermon especially like this one to a group where I know I've got folks that need to hear one thing and I've got folks in the room that need to hear something else.

And the prophets had this problem. I mean really there's a bit of a schizophrenia you look at in the preaching of Isaiah and Ezekiel and Jeremiah in particular. I think of Jeremiah he came on the scene and he starts saying this kind of thing all the time. He's bashing the preaching in Israel and he's saying, you know everybody is preaching peace peace when there is no peace. But you see the prophets got mad at that. Ezekiel same thing but by the time their books were over guess what they're preaching? Peace peace. You know that's hard because you know he had to qualify all that, and particularly they loved the word in the Old Testament particularly those prophets they loved the word a remnant. There's a remnant among you, to them they need to hear this message, because they got it right. They're the ones on the narrow path, the small gate that leads to life and few are those who find it, to quote anachronistically in Jesus the Messiah. I mean that's the group that needs to be comforted. Everyone else was going around going we got peace everything is fine, God loves us, it's wonderful. Particularly hard when we reach Romans chapter 8 verses 35 through 39 which are probably the most comforting verses in all of the scriptures.

I mean they're so comfortable they're like that robe that hangs in the closet at the Ritz Carlton when you check in. I mean they go all out with that and then your wife makes the mistake of actually putting it on while you're staying there. Only gone there because I was speaking at an event one time, I wasn't just hanging out there. But she puts it on and she says, "Ohhh, I like to have one of these!" Last time I saw one of those it didn't even have the price on it. And I thought to myself, this is a passage that's like the most luxurious comforting robe you could ever put on. And for some you needed to put it on this morning. See but don't put the robe on if you haven't had a shower. You know where I'm going with this? You get it? There are some people that I don't want you touching the robe because the robe is not for you. It's like let's pick on some of the twenty-something guys that want their girlfriend to feel really secure. They talk about you know their relationship, long term, forever, together forever, but the topic of engagement and marriage never comes up. Eventually these gals get frustrated, do they not? You can say, hey men, you young single gals if you like. I mean don't talk about security and life together if we're not going to talk about marriage, right?

And the thing about it is there is great comfort to be derived in Romans chapter 8 verses 35 through 39 but it's only for those of you that know that your trust is in Jesus Christ and have I made this clear through out this series? The Jesus Christ of the Bible, that your hope is in God, not god of your own imagination but the God of the Bible, that you are sure that your confidence is in the right God and you have the right gospel and you've responded in the right way to the biblical gospel because God has invaded your life. You've seen that work you have a testimony of a real encounter with the real God of the Bible and you're seeing God at work in your life. If that's the case, you know, here's the robe and it feels good and you need to have it on there because the difference between having this in your life and not having this truth in your life for real Christians is night and day, night and day. You've got Christians who never really ingest this truth

and they live with insecurity and they're anxious, they're not sure; they're always biting their spiritual fingernails and wondering about God. You need to get over that and this passage can do that. But of course as I've shared on other occasions one of my biggest fears as a preacher is giving people false security. I don't want to do that. That's all I want to say about it because I want to get to trying the robe on you but it doesn't belong on you if you are chasing a god of your imagination or you just want to feel good and have some god-talk in your life, this does not apply to you. You need to turn to God, the God of the Bible in repentance and faith and put your trust in Christ and say to him, "He is your God, Christ is your captain, I here to follow the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." That's what you need to do but if you've done that, that's a reality for you then take a look at these great, great verses.

Do you want to talk about security, things that will never change between you and God? Look at this, verse 35, Romans 8:35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake, we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." That's Psalm 44 verse 22. No, in all these things, what things? Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword, whatever might come our way; we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Why? Because that love is not going away for I am sure. Verse 38 now answers the question in verse 35. I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. If you are here today with a real relationship with Jesus Christ these are some really good words for you it provides what the writer of Hebrews says should be an anchor for our soul. It is something that is certain in a world filled with from our perspective, uncertainty.

I sat through another graduation ceremony this week. Did you do that? And as I sat there I just was pondering how fast the years roll by. I mean I was just going through my mind how quickly, you know I was pondering how quickly our kids grow up and I wondered often through the ceremony how much longer this ceremony would actually last as we baked in the sun and it droned on and on. And as the speakers were droning on and on with such confidence about the future and they do that. I thought to myself, you have no idea. I mean because I remember being in junior high and high school, remember those days? It seems like yesterday and I thought I had all kinds of plans and ideas and I had my future all figured out and I was going to do this that and the other and hopes and dreams and here we go. But as Proverbs 19:21 says many are the plans in the heart of man but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand. Because we don't get the privilege seeing much through the front windshield of our lives. God doesn't give us that, we don't get much info on the horizon of our lives and sometimes suddenly there appear things in our lives we never thought would happen. And sometimes I think I'm going to go this way in life and I end up going that way in life and sometimes I think I'll start a family and do this and infertility strikes or sickness hits or just grow old together and then divorce takes place and I'm going to save up and take this condo and parlay it into a house and then foreclosure takes place and you're in an apartment. Whatever it might be for you there are uncertainties everywhere you have no clue how the future is going to work out. But here's the great thing if you're a Christian, there is one thing in your life that is absolutely certain and it is the most important thing, it is more important than where you live, more important than your health, it's more important than anything in the world. It is whether or not you are in a covenant relationship with God that cannot in anyway be threatened or undone by anything in the universe and that is an anchor for your soul. And if you can live with that kind of confidence you can start to do things you never thought you could have done and the temporal things of life become very small and the eternal relationship you have with God become this power source in your life to be able to face the entire world with this phrase. It's great, verse 37, as more than conquerors and all that other stuff doesn't really matter that much because there's one thing that's certain. You looking for security in life? Here's the one thing you can hang your hat on for all of eternity, it's great. And you need to catch it.

Look again at verse 35 and the answer, really the ultimate answer in verse 39. I mean you got the question, who's going to separate us from the love of Christ? He lists all these things there's no

need for us to exegetically tear apart all this laundry list, he's trying to just in through this exclamation of all kinds of things, a variety of things, say well any of these things? And then he says in verse 38 and 39, well I'm convinced and he lists all these other things. You know what, nothing is going to be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord so let's just grapple with that simple truth and just write it down on our outlines. Number 1, jot this down, it is worth writing down for you and I to be assured. Number 1 on your outline; let's be assured there is no separation.

1. Be Assured There Is No Separation

No separation between you and God ever. There is nothing that could possibly do that to you and God. Now I know people on earth make all kinds of promises and commitments to one another and they say things like this but you know and I know and half the marriages in our country know that when it comes to a covenant like marriage they're broken all the time. This is one that cannot, will not, and won't ever be reversed, undone or in any way impinged upon by anything because the promise of God is there is nothing that can do that.

Now I've got on your worksheet a little different worksheet this week but do you see that line right underneath the fill in that you just filled in? It's says, because with God there are dot dot dot. Do you see that? Let's just think through that. We're talking about a God who is now listing all of these problems in life and he's saying no, none of that can in anyway separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. So let's think through why logically, biblically, textually, theologically why it would be the case and should put our hearts at rest that we can never be separated from this love covenant relationship with God. The first reason would be if you list all these problems and threats when it comes to God, jot this down two words, there are no threats.

A. Because with God there are no threats

There are no threats, because with God there are no threats. Because all of these things they may be enemies of God and they may be enemies of God's good but even death itself which is in the list, verse 38, and referred to in verse 35 by things like the sword. Even death itself is an enemy that is in subjection to and under the power of and under the sovereignty of the God who's made a promise and he says he's going to keep it. So with God there are no threats and if you want to think theologically this morning put next to that statement the reason there are no threats is because God is omnipotent. He's omnipotent. He has all power. His power trumps ever other derived power because his power is not derived. It is self existing sovereign power over everything. Now you're going to have things like in this list which we are not exempted from and that's the context of Romans 8 that are going to come at you and assault your life. And when they do you will be tempted, maybe it's tribulation there's the first thing on the list, maybe it's distress, maybe you're being persecuted in some lawsuit. Maybe you lost your job and you can't even afford groceries at the market or you can't buy the clothes that you need or there's danger or one day maybe someone is going to have a sword to your neck. Who knows what's going to happen to you but the point is this that whatever comes and tempts you to think, maybe God's favor is not on me anymore. You need to recognize all of those are subject to the overriding authority and power of an omnipotent God and that means in the end if God is purposed not to ever cast you away, if he is purposed to always be in a love covenant relationship with you then he's going to be because these are really no threats.

Now when those things happen you will be tempted to doubt just like Israel was tempted to doubt and I've already mentioned the prophets before the fall to Babylon of Jerusalem in 586 but I've love you to look at the 14th chapter of Isaiah at just one example of the prophet having to encourage them to say listen I know you're going to have problems and it was a huge problem. And it was the nation of Babylon and they were going to come in and destroy the city of Jerusalem and take people slaves and kill people. And he said, I know you're going to have those problems but do not think that those powers are somehow independently acting or are some way overpowering God's promises or in someway reversing his covenant love toward you just

because you're having to suffer, it's not true. So put yourself if you would in the position of Israel hearing about their enemies and God's power over them and just know God's got the same power over your enemies and whatever might threaten you to think that God maybe doesn't love me or doesn't favor me or maybe I'm not his favorite anymore, whatever it might be, here's the deal no you are favored in Christ, you are excepted in the beloved, you are loved because of grace. These things are true. Isaiah 14 drop down to verse 22. God states the power over the enemy that all of these people in Israel were tempted to fear and weren't afraid of frankly and he says, "No, no, no, just know this, I just promised you Babylon is going to come in and route you guys but listen I'm going to rise up against them. They're not some independent power. No, I'm the Lord of Hosts." Lord of Hosts, any time you see that, Yahweh of Hosts, that's the depiction of military strength, the hosts the armies of heaven. I'm the leader of the armies of heaven and I will cut off from Babylon name and remnant, descendant and posterity declares Yahweh. Verse 23, this is a funny statement, and I will make it a possession of, what does your ESV say? The hedgehog, read here rodents of unusual size maybe that'll help. Some of you caught that, thank you. That's all that is, big rodents, right? This will be the place of big rats and what does he say? Puddles, that's all it's going to be. I will make it the possession of rodents and pools of water. That's what's going to live there. And I will sweep it with the broom of destruction. I know they're foreboding and they stand there with the latest weapons of warfare on your borders and they've got sharpened spears and they've got iron swords and they're threatening to come and hurt you and there's going to be some bad times coming for you but just remember they're not any real threat to me or my promise of good in your life in the end. It's not going to change anything.

Yahweh of hosts, there it is again, anytime you see that phrase it's a statement of his strength, verse 24, has sworn. Now look at the intensifying language here. As I have planned, he says, so shall it be and as I have purposed, so it shall stand and he says, that I will break the Assyrian in my land. This is 586 when Babylon is going to go and route Jerusalem. Now this is in a time when Assyria had already come in 721 BC a couple hundred years earlier and they had routed the Northern Tribes. You remember your Old Testament history, right? Israel was split in two in 1 Kings and then in 2 Kings we have the fall of the Northern 10 Tribes to Assyria. Then in the end of 1 Kings where Isaiah fits in just before that happens the fall of the Southern 2 Tribes to Babylon. Now he writes the Assyrians have already invaded and they didn't go home. Matters of fact when the Assyrians came not only did they take people slaves and subject people they moved in and now we're living on the mountains and hills of Samaria and all through the northern part of Israel. And he says, now I know it looks like a lost cause for the 10 northern tribes, but look what he says, verse 25, I will break the Assyrian in my land, I know you think they won but listen it's not a big deal under my control I'm sovereign here, and on my mountains trample him underfoot. They're there but I'm going to take care of them, they're not my covenant people, I'm not in a covenant relationship with them, they're pawns in this big game here. And his yoke shall depart from them. The northern tribes are going to be free and his burden from their shoulders. Look at the compounded language; this is the purpose that is purposed concerning the whole earth. I know what I'm doing with the nations; I know what I'm doing with your enemies. And this, he says you can see him now lifting his hand the preverbal hand of God; this is the hand that stretched out over all the nations. I got all the power here to do what I planned. For Yahweh of hosts, if you didn't get this I'm the king of the armies of heaven, has purposed who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, who will turn it back? And here's what God said to us in Romans chapter 8, if he foreknew you, that means an intimate relationship with you before you were ever created, then he predestined you, he planned to save you knowing that you would be a sinner. And those he predestined he would call; he would bring you to a place face to face with the gospel. Those he's called he's justified, he would make you and declare you right and start your track of sanctification. And those he's justified he will also glorify, you will walk through the gates of the new Jerusalem as a prince or a princess of the King of Kings. You will be blessed and you're going to live in a place of prosperity and peace and pleasure and good things forever. That's the promise. Now in the mean time you got Babylonians and Assyrians so to speak in your life causing all kinds of pain. But the point is none of that is a real threat to God's plan. There is nothing that should make you doubt that God is going to work out his plan in your life to be your

redeemer and your king from now until the end of time. There are no threats to God because he's omnipotent.

Well, I know that may be true for now but I don't know there are things that happen and then I'm thinking that maybe God will change his mind. I mean maybe he just tried me out for a few years and I just haven't really worked out as a very good Christian so maybe the plan will be changed. Turn to Numbers please the book of Numbers. Fourth book in the Bible. Turn to Numbers chapter 23. Please know this about God, those he predestined he called, called justified, justified glorified, God is for us, he's our God, if that's true about us you need to know that he doesn't ever change his mind. He's not a wishy-washy person. He's not a junior high girl with a crush on you one week and doesn't like you the next and maybe she'll be back interested in you next month. That's not the way God is. He makes deliberate decisions in eternity past regarding you and nothing can undo that. Early in Israel's history before they ever had a king before the book of Kings before David and Solomon and Saul and all that we had a nation being led out of Egypt. God was their God they had no earthly king and they were opposed by the nations they heard about Jericho and all of that and people were scared but this little nomadic group of people they were growing they seem to have God in their court so they were a bit of a threat to folks like the Moabites. And the Moabites had a king named Balak. And Balak heard here comes Israel and they're going to march up here adjacent to our property and I got to stop these guys. And they keep claiming they got the God of the world on their side and that is kind of scary because they're sitting there over turning big fortress cities like Jericho with trumpet and lamps. I don't know but I need this thing reversed so I'm going to look through the Yellow Pages here and find you know spiritual guy for hire. And I found one and his name is Balaam and I'm going to call him and say I have a lot of money here if you can just go and work your little god thing and make these people stop being so successful because I don't want to go down. I got to protect Moab, I'm the king. King Balak of Moab. You know a little bit about that story there was a donkey in the middle of all this that gets a lot of press in Sunday School. But the bottom line is he does get swayed to go and kind of reluctantly goes and he's prophet for hire. Go cast a little spell on Israel. Well he goes and stands before God and of course God, maybe this is like the witch of Endor or whatever but God interrupts this guy little project and says, "Listen, you're not going to curse these people, you're not going to oppose these people, you're not going to do any voodoo on these people they're my people and that's just how it is." The scene is very dramatic right here in Numbers 23:18. Balaam is going to come and deliver the message that God gave Balaam. The real God gives Balaam a real message and now you got the princes and the leaders and Balak included the king there of Moab and he says this. Verse 18, And Balaam took up his discourse and said, "Rise, Balak, and hear; give ear to me, O son of Zippor. God, underline this, is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? He's not going to change his mind. Behold, I received a command to bless: that's what God said. Why? Here it comes. He has blessed and I cannot revoke it. There's nothing I can do. He's not beheld misfortune for Jacob. I mean there's going to be some tough times and way in the future Assyria and Babylon are going to come and be a big problem. This covenant thing, this blessing thing, this commitment to their well being as a nation, ahh you can't reverse it. He's got a good plan for them. Nor has he seen trouble in Israel. Yahweh their God, this is great, does this sound like Romans 8? He is with them. And here's an interesting phrase bracket this, and the shout of a king is among them. What did I say? They don't have a king. This is before the theocracy of the middle period of the Old Testament history. They are rallied around their invisible God as king. I mean I know they got sling-shots and they don't have iron spears but the shout of the king is among them. God brings them out of Egypt and, here it comes here's the exact language at least in Hebrew of Romans 8, and he is for them. He's for them like the horns of a wild ox. You think soccer is weird I mean what about this bull fighting thing that they do? Think about that? Pick on soccer for a minute. I mean that's crazy. Recently they've shown stuff on the news, these bull fighters being chased out of the ring by these big animals with horns. See it's not so much the animal, that's a problem they might knock you down, it's the horn that's the real problem, am I right? And that is the issue with Israel they have a protector; they have a defender, 36 times in the Psalms, O my rock and my fortress. God is for them their defender. God is the one accomplishing his purpose for them. This is a great line verse 23. There is, remember

the context Balaam is telling Balak, there is no enchantment against Jacob, that's another word for Israel. No divination against Israel; now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel, 'What God has wrought! Behold, a people!' I mean this is what God has said, these are my people, I made these people. I didn't pick them because they were numerous or great or smart or strategic, just because I laid my love on them. That's what Deuteronomy says. Behold a people! Verse 24, like a lioness it rises up and as a lion it lifts itself, it doesn't lie down until it has devoured the prey and drunk the blood of the slain." I know they're marching through the land here but you better just stand back because God is with them. You can oppose them you can fight them or whatever but I can't curse them God's got a plan and in the end his plan is going to win for these people. Take that and now apply that in our lives. God has a plan and he's says if he foreknew you he predestined you. If he predestined you he called you. If he called you he justified you. If he justified you he's going to glorify you. You think anything is going to get in the way of that? There are no threats for God because he is omnipotent and the second thing you can write down under this is there are no changes with God.

B. Because with God there are no changes

Because with God there are no threats. Bullet point 2 and because with God there are no changes. Why? Back up at that verse 19 he's not a man that he should lie or a son of man that he should change his mind. If he said it he's going to do it. I know sometimes we think maybe he's changed his mind, he hasn't. There's nothing there that would ever provoke a god who is not evolving or not changing not learning not growing to ever go back to an eternity past decision and change it. If you've had the experience of justification then you know before that he called you he predestined you, he foreknew you and you know in the future he's going to glorify you. Just the reality you can know that because when he speaks it he does it, he doesn't change.

By the way that verse we so often quote, so often quoted from Hebrews 13, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. Remember that very familiar verse? Do you know the context of that? It's about this sermon. It's about fear and uncertainty. He says this, if the Lord is my helper I will not be afraid." I'm not going to be afraid what man can do to me. Two verses later because Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. And in between if you think I'm skipping anything it just because, look at the leaders, look at your leaders how they trusted God. They're the same your leaders from the past and our lives now. Jesus isn't changing and his decisions that he makes and his love for us is invariable.

Be assured there is no separation because with God there's no threats, there's no changes. But here's the funny thing I'll still have people in my office they'll come to our counseling appointments they'll stand at the donut table and say, "Well yeah you know all that may be true." And they seem to have this problem they think that God maybe somehow is surprised by what happened in their life last Thursday. They really do think that. We won't take the time to turn there but at least jot down Psalm 139 and a third bullet point that says, with God there are not only no threats, and with God there are not only no changes but with God there are also no surprises.

C. Because with God there are no surprises

No surprises. There is nothing. Do you understand that? There is nothing in your life that happened this week that surprised God. Nothing. Psalm 139 you know that passage here's some great one liners out of Psalm 139 and I'll pick one individual from Israel. We looked at Israel as a nation, God's covenant love on them certainly not going to change because of an enemy. It's certainly not going to change because he's changed his mind. Well it's certainly not going to change because of something we do because we've done something and he didn't know we were going to do, of course not, foolishness, ridiculous. He says things like this in Psalm 139, David writes, before there was a word on my tongue you knew all that I was going to say. Knew it. He said you know what, everything that I do is in perfect prevue of you, even he says, all the days of my life before one of them ever came to be they were all written in a book. Before I was born you

saw my unseen substance, unformed substance. You knew me you knew everything about me before hand. There's absolutely no surprises with God.

If you really want to think theologically I said that there's no threats it's because he's omnipotent. If there's no changes we call that in theology immutability because he's immutable. And thirdly you know this Sunday School grads if there's no surprises it must be because God is omniscient. An omnipotent, immutable, omniscient God cannot in any way make a decision about loving you and then somehow retract it. Can't happen. You're stuck in this relationship with God but you'll raise your hand. But Mike, that's God, what about us? I mean it says here all these things can't separate us because God bigger than all that but maybe I'll separate myself, right? I'm not worried about God. God is really cool, real strong, real nifty. It's me I'm worried about. I might do something stupid. I don't know, I might do something real bad and mess up. Okay, do you see the other little line there I put there on your worksheet? You've got three bullets above it I hope, because with God there are no threats, no changes, no surprises. Look at the next line, because with us it is now let's just get broader in the book of Romans, let's get a little broader in our thinking, we've been through an entire book teaching us about the gospel, teaching us about the relationship we have with God. With us you might remember it, that is our relationship with God, bullet number one, is not based on deeds.

A. Because with us it is not based on deeds, performance or behavior

It's not based on what you do. It's not based on your performance. It's not based on your behavior. Just jot that down. With us it's not based on our deeds. Once you write that down please turn quickly to Romans chapter 3 the heart of the discussion on the gospel and get your pencil ready because you will need to underline some things here in your crisp new soon to be broken in ESV Bible. Romans 3 verse 21. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested, that is to be right before God I need righteousness that I don't have I got to be perfect before God because he's a holy and perfect person so the righteousness that comes from God it is been manifest, here it comes now, by keeping the law. Do you see that? Underline that phrase, by keeping the law. Is that what it says? No, it says apart from the law. Although the Law (capital L) and the Prophets (capital P) bear witness to it, that's the Mosaic way or the Jewish way of talking about the Old Testament, although the Old Testament bears witness to it. The righteousness of God is through being better than most people and trying real hard and loving God as best you can. No, the righteousness of God is through faith; it comes from trusting in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no distinction: for all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Doesn't matter if you're a bad sinner, super bad sinner or a colossal sinner, mediocre sinner, we're all sinners, we all fall short of the glory of God, therefore if you're going to be justified, verse 24, then we're justified by his grace, that means we don't earn it. As a gift, that means you don't perform to get it through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood. He satisfies the requirement of all the junk in my life, all the sin it's settled on the cross by his blood. And it is received because we were better than the other people the other people that didn't receive it. No, it was received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. He wasn't immediately punishing sins, verse 26, it was to show his righteousness at the present time, now it's come to a full clear picture on the cross, so that he might be just. I mean the cross was all about justice and the justifier, and as the recipient of our sin he is also the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. What then becomes of our boasting? Well there's not a whole lot. No, no, no it's gone, it's excluded by what kind of law? What kind of arrangement? By an arrangement or a law of works? No, but by a law of faith and trusting. I mean if this is something I could trust and get on the deathbed of my life being the worst sinner that ever lived which is why all your non-Christian friends look at your Christianity and when you preach grace to them, they don't like it because they say this, it's not fair. How can some jerk on death row at the last minute after raping and killing and pillaging, how can they get to go to heaven and some guy trying and giving money to United Way for all this time how come he goes to hell? That doesn't make any sense to me. That's why people start to fudge on the doctrine of grace. Oh yeah, you're right, that doesn't sound good, it doesn't feel good. It's not about how you feel, it's about whether or not your

righteousness has anything to do with it and the answer is, it doesn't, because all of our righteousness is as, help me now, so it doesn't count. No, verse 28, for we hold that one is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Here's the thing, with us we didn't earn our way into this relationship with God, therefore when you think you're not earning your keep, you can just forget about that whole arrangement because that's not part of the arrangement. Your relationship with God was not based on deeds to get in and it's not based on some earning, some standard, and getting some good deeds and brownie points in to keep yourself in. You don't do something to get in this relationship with God and if you think next Thursday you're going to do something to get yourself out of it then you're wrong because this whole arrangement from the beginning to end was based on the work of Christ not on your work. So we just got to get past the fact that well God may not bail on this thing but I can sin my way out it. Impossible, impossible. Now do people attach themselves to church and pretend to be Christians and then walk away, and as 1 John 2 says they went out from us because they were not really of us. If they would have been of us they would have remained with us. The answer is, yes of course. And if you need more on that you need to go to the Focal Point website and get the whole entire series for absolutely free called "Almost a Christian". We went through Hebrews chapter 6 and looked at all the ways people can come and attach themselves to church and never be converted so when all that happens there's a place for that a category in scripture. We don't get it and lose it. If we have it, it's because we were foreknown, we were predestined, we were called, we were justified and we will be glorified. No one gets justified and then stops and doesn't get glorified. The chain is linked and unbreakable set of links. The point is it wasn't about my deeds to start with.

Now is my life going to change if I'm a Christian? Yes. And will I sin less? Oh that's the path of sanctification. But I won't be sinless, right? 1 John 1 is all clear on that and because I am going to sin, now start I sitting around wondering if well does God still love me maybe not, I don't know maybe I lost my salvation. Stop it. Stop with that because it wasn't based on your deeds to start with and it's not based on your deeds to keep it.

Bullet point 2 because with us, now this is just to get us warmed up for next series, we're into chapter 9 now. We've left the cuddly warm Ritz Carlton robe and we're going to move into the difficult doctrines of God's work in evangelism. You got the flyer in your worship packet when you got in. Can we just skip ahead and preview something here in chapter 9 that will help you? If we are thinking about issues of permanence in my relationship with God, I know that based on God being an omnipotent, immutable, omniscient God there is nothing on his side. When it comes to us, my side, well it wasn't on my deeds so my deeds can't get me out. But I think back on my life and yeah but I did make a decision to follow Christ and because I made a decision to follow Christ I might decide when I'm 62 to decide not to follow Christ and then I guess he'll show me the door because I decided to get in and I can decide to get out. And it doesn't say that here I mean who can separate us, it doesn't say well you might decide to get out I mean it could be there, that could be the idea. Chapter 9, now don't throw any flags on the play or for our international friends don't pull the red card out of your pocket. It's all into soccer now I still don't understand that but, when you think about the problems with this passage I want you just to think about them next week. We'll study all this in the month of July. But for now can we just take what it says at face value and apply it to our issue here of whether or not my relationship with God is going to be permanent?

Verse 15 let's start there. After this discussion about Moses and Pharaoh he says, for he says, that is God to Moses, Romans 9:15, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. If I'm going to bless the Israelites I'm going to bless them, if I'm going to destroy the Egyptians I'll destroy them. I'm going to have mercy on whom I have mercy and compassion on whom I want to have compassion on. You want to apply that to our salvation. I give the forgiveness to whom I'm going to give it to and I'm going to give my mercy and grace to whom I'm going to give it to, that's my decision. So then, verse 16, it depends not on, underline this phrase, human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. For the

Scripture says to Pharaoh, for instance, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you", right? Because he was going to harden him and then he's was going to whack him and then it was going to be that his name might be proclaimed in all the earth. He's got a plan for that. So then he has mercy on whom ever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. Oh, you're reaching for the flag; keep it in your pocket. We'll throw the flag and deal with all the questions next month, can we right now at least see that if God is saying as he chooses to dispense the grace of his own salvation to people and sinners like us, it was his decision, now you're going to say but I did make a decision, I get that, you made a decision in time, he made a decision prior to time, and his decision was the one that counts and his decision is one that is the cause and reason for your decision. Therefore we say to be theologically correct my decision is predicated on his decision. Therefore I can say I made a decision to follow Christ, you're right, absolutely, right? Circle gets the square, you're in, that's it, but that decision to follow Christ was based on God's decision to show mercy and compassion on you and if that's the case, bullet point number 2 when it comes to us, or because with us it's not based on my decisions.

B. Because with us it is not based on my decisions

My relationship with God is not based on my decisions. And I know there's a tremendous hearsay it seems for the lack-luster church of the 21st century in western world but it is traditional orthodox long time Christianity through all the centuries of the church and it is what the Bible teaches. And the bottom line is this if your decision to follow Christ was based on God's decision to have you follow Christ, if it really was a situation that you didn't chose me, I chose you, or we did choose you, well we did, but you only chose me because I chose you. If that's a reality I'm quoting there John 15, then I'm not worried about my decisions at age 62, why? Well because my decision to follow Christ at age 18 was a decision induced by God's plan and his decision to have me follow him and therefore according to this text our covenant love relationship is never go away, nothing can separate us because it's not based on my deeds. I can't deed my way out of this by my behavior and I can't decide my way out of this with my volition. I am stuck.

Thirdly and I know that brings up lots of question but we've got a whole summer to grapple with Romans 9. Summer fun coming to a pulpit near you. It's going to be great. Do you need one more verse on that? You probably do. Let's just look at one because I wrote it down, John 1. Oh there's so many I want to share with you but we'll have some time next month. Just to read another, because some of you are looking at me like I just spoke in another language. John 1:10, some familiar words. He was in the world that is Christ, the logos, the word, the expression the revelatory human expression of God himself. God in the flesh. He was in the world and the world was made through him yet the world did not know him and that's ironic. The creator comes in human form and the world doesn't embrace him. He came to his own, he goes to the Jewish people he was born of the line of Judah and his own people did not receive him. They didn't embrace him. They had that thing on Palm Sunday I know but a week later they're saying, "Crucify him". By in large the nation said, we reject you, but to all who did receive him being that this was the latest gospel to be written and it was written to Gentiles. He's writing now this Gentile gospel saying, hey but all the rest of the Gentiles and the Sythians and where ever you're from it doesn't matter, Roman people, all who did receive him, who let's be clear who pisteuo who trust in his name he gave the right to become children of God. And in AWANA, Jet Cadets, Chappy Chipmunks, Boys Brigade, Pioneer Girls that's usually where you stop memorizing the verse. But we needed to memorize verse 13 since we missed that in Sunday School now we're in big church let's get verse 13, okay? I know all that, I've heard that, I've read that, those who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Who were born, because that whole born again thing is a big theme in the book of John. Born again chapter 3, got to be born again, born of the Spirit, it just blows and goes where it wants. Who were born not of blood, don't have a pedigree from Israel, don't need to be from the 12 tribes, nor of the will of the flesh (I'm going to decide), nor the will of man (I choose) but of God. It's a big statement. But to all who did receive him, verse 12, who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, not of the will of the flesh, not of the will of man, but of God. God's will. God's decision. That's why passages like Acts 13:48 when they seem so confusing, Acts 13:48, when it

says the Gentiles heard this message they began to rejoice, glorifying the Lord and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed, the point is there's something preceding this on God's docket, God's agenda, that when his agenda was to save these people they responded. It was a gift that God gave them to reach out and respond and decide for God. I mean there are certain desires and appetites you didn't really ask for. My desire to eat tortillas I never asked for that but the desire is there and I satisfy it almost every day. And it's there and I'm hungering for them and craving them, want one right now and so it's something I never sat around and said as a kid. I really need to decide to do this. It's just God gave me the desire for that and he gave me a desire to follow Jesus Christ and to decide to follow him. And in my decision to follow him I just need to know it was a decision that was predicated and based upon God's prior decision. More on that next month.

So if it's not based on my deeds, not based on my decision, I do read all those verses about persevering though and I think well it's got to be based on my strength. Jot that down third bullet it's not based on your strength.

C. Because with us it is not based on your strength to endure

It's not based on your ability to hang in there to the end. You will hang in there till the end. The guy sounds a lot like he believes we hang in there to the end. We do hang in there to the end but it's not based on your strength to hang in there to the end because here's the thing about the Bible it's not very bolstering of your self esteem. And it's not real good on making you feel like you're a real strong guy. You're such a stud, stud Christian here he is, look at him, he's going to endure to the end. No, you're weak but he is strong and what he does is he sends the strong one, the monarch of the universe, the third person of the God-head and he goes "blirp" I'm going to put him inside of you. And according to, here's some great passages, how about Ephesians chapter 1 verses 13 and 14 probably the best statement of this in all of the Bible. He gives us his Spirit this is a great line, this is the end of the thing, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire full possession of it, to the praise of his glory. You have a guarantee that you're going to be glorified and it's not based on your strength it's based on the strength of God and the strength of God it'll feel very synergistic like you're a part of this but the point is it is the Holy Spirit that is giving you the perseverance, the hupomone, the stick-to-it-tiveness to endure to the end, and you will.

What about all those people that come and go? They come and go because they went out from us because they were not of us. If they were of us they would have remained with us but their going out shows that they were not all of us. That sounds like Dr Suess but that is the Bible. Tongue-twister passage. 1 John 2. And we can hear a whole series on that, Almost a Christian, it's a series that may be helpful if that's a new concept for you it's different from dating Christ and being married. And some of you who were in that series remember that illustration that was woven throughout. Me and God are together. Why? Because as a real Christian there is no threats to God, no changes with God, no surprises with God, he's omnipotent, immutable and omniscient. And with me it wasn't based on my deeds to start with, it wasn't based on my decision really it was based on God's decision, it's not based on my strength to endure although that's a God-thing. So guess what? I'm a Christian and I'm going to continue to be, and the love relationship that I have with God is going to continue. Now that's the simple exegesis of the passage. 35 and 39 who's going to separate us? Nobody. Wasn't hard to understand but we wanted to dig down deep and figure out why because the character of God and the work of God in my salvation

Now sandwiched in the middle of that is verses 36 and 37, briefly on this. If we're to be assured that there's no separation, look at these statements in the middle of verses 36 and 37 as he quotes Psalm 44, calls us sheep, doesn't sound like a compliment but it is, we'll see that in a minute. And he calls us more than conquerors, look at it, he says, as it is written, verse 36 of Romans 8, for your sake we are being killed all the day long, or handed over to death, we're in trouble. But we're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things, he says, we are

more than conquerors through him who loved us. Now he's speaking to our resolve and our strength and all this stuff about who we are and God loved us and because of that we're different. Okay, that's the reaction to the truth, the question asked in 35 answered in 38 and 39, interlude now you know what's my response to that? Sheep and conquerors that's the picture. I've already said this; we need to be assured there's no separation. Number 2 on your outline we need to be reminded then there is now freaking out. Can you write that down?

2. Be Reminded There Is No Freaking Out

There's no freaking out. You can not as a Christian, freak out. There's no need for that. It's not allowed. Why, because your relationship is permanent. Stop biting your spiritual fingernails and wondering if this is ever going to get messed up. It is not. Will you suffer? Yes, you're going to suffer. There will be hard times and trials but God's permanent covenant love with you is never going to change and that is something that leads me to be calm even when I'm facing people that are being mean to me, people that are persecuting me or some guy who's got a sword to my neck going to cut my head off. You know what? I'll be like a sheep to the slaughter and that is a compliment although it doesn't sound like one because there's something about sheep that's different than any other animal when it comes to having a sword to its neck. If you go to kill any animal, go kill an animal, I'm not suggesting that. I don't care we had an old dumpy dog I grew up with. He was fun and he looked real mean but he wasn't, he just laid around like a lump. He was fun and he licked your face and all that. And here's my old dog but you know what? There were a couple times that I can remember when that dog felt cornered and he thought he was in danger and then I saw friendly little dog become like growling wolf pack angry I'm going to kill you now animal, because he has that instinctual fight when he's threatened. I mean that dog; I just I didn't know he had that many teeth. Grr. Go and try to kill an animal and you'll see that instinctually they will fight you except there is one animal that looks like he'd be plenty in size to fight back but he doesn't. Sheep. Go kill sheep. He sits there, dur, okay. One of the reasons they were examples of us and you know because of the stupidity and here it's an example of us because of the serenity and the tranquility of the animal. Like sheep to be slaughtered, they're just, dur, so they walk through the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil. To them they're just serene, peaceful animals.

But he doesn't leave it there thankfully. It's not just that we're calm in the face of the trials that we face, relational problems, marital problems, financial problems you know mortgage problems. It's not like you just have that serenity it's better than that. I mean you get persecuted for your faith he says no in all of these things we are, bracket these three words in English, more than conquerors. More than conquerors through him who loved us because of the foundation the anchor in my soul, knowing that God loves me and that's never going to change. I am more than conquerors. That's phrase that goes back to the Geneva Bible before the King James Bible was ever translated, because we didn't know how to translate this word. You all know the Greek word that translates conqueror or victor, victorious. A shoe company picked it up and it's the best selling shoes in the world, nike, that's the word. The Greek word for victor or victorious or victory is the word nike. That's the word here, conquer, nike but it's not the word because it's a compound word and there's an intensifier in front of it and it's the word hyper which is come into Latin and English and we use that all the time. Hyperdrive. Hyper-nike. The translators of the past how do we do that? Well, no in all these things we're hyper conquerors through him who loved us. Then in the Geneva Bible more than conquerors, more than conquerors, it's better than conquerors although that's the word it's got an intensifier in the front of it. You're hyper conquerors.

I taught my kids to play golf when they were young, my boys when they were 4 they were learning and swinging at the driving range, at 5 they were out on the course and I taught them to play golf. Now my oldest is 13 and my middle kid is 11 and now when I go out to play golf, not that I'm any great teacher but now I'm not teaching them to play, I'm teaching them to win, without cheating. I want them to win and that's a different mind set because they're good enough now to play, and they can play, now if they're going to win something needs to happen here, right? Something needs to happen here. Now I'm no sports psychologist but if you'd like to hire

me I'll come and work on your golf swing. But when they're standing over the putt I know how golf works because I play and I'm petrified over the putt and there's the whole and I'm thinking [errrr] and you know what we all say naturally, don't miss. I tell my kids, listen you never be a good golfer if you step up to the golf ball and you're fearful of missing. You need to be confident you'll make it. And I know nobody watches golf, but there are some of you that do secretly watch golf. You know the difference, do you not, between mediocre players and good players? The good players stand over the ball with a determination to make it. That's something shoes can't do for you. It's the hyper-nike mentality. I am not in any way scared of this putt or this drive or that sand trap, I'm going, I'm going to get out of this thing, in the trap no big deal, give me the wedge. I'm out of here. Perfect I'm going to put that right up there. That's the mind set when you're relationship fails, when your money is gone, when someone calls you jerk at work, when you lose the promotion because you're a Jesus-freak whatever the thing I am not swayed by that. I am more than a conqueror because of my unchanging, invariable love relationship with God. I'm not looking for us to survive the trials of life. This passage is calling us to be more than conquerors because the invariable and unchanging immutable relationship God has with me.

I've got three more things to say, you ready? I'll do them really fast. I know our temptation is to doubt his grace because you look at your sin and you say, "How could God love me look how bad I am, look at what I did". Don't doubt his grace because according to Ephesians chapter 1 you were saved to the praise of his glorious grace. That's what Ephesians 1 says, therefore turn those doubts, when you doubt that God really loves you, you're losing that more than conqueror, hyper-nike perspective can you say in your mind I'm going to turn my doubts of God grace into praise for God's grace? That's the biblical response.

Secondly we start doubting his wisdom. I doubt his wisdom. I'm picking a team I ain't picking me. That's how we start to think when we fail. When we were new Christians we think, if I were picking the team I wouldn't pick him because we see that guy became a Christian. Well, whatever. But when we grow in Christ we start to see the inconsistencies in our life and we see our sin and holiness is a passion and sin becomes even a bigger issue of frustration in our lives and we start to say if I were picking the team I wouldn't have picked me. Ephesians chapter 1 goes on to say he did all this his predestine plan it was all done to us, redeemed us it says. He did this all in all wisdom and insight. So when you're tempted to doubt his wisdom I want you to instead to trust in his wisdom. He knows what he's doing in building a team if nothing else to make you an example of his perfect patience and peace. That he is someone who can give to you peace and grace and forgiveness as Paul said, worst sinner of all but it was to show God's perfect patience in guys like me. We're tempted to doubt his grace, don't. Worship it instead. Worship him for his grace. We're tempted to doubt his wisdom, don't do that. Turn that doubt of his wisdom, why would he pick someone like me into a trust, a deepening abiding faith in his wisdom.

Thirdly and this is probably the most important that why I was forced to come back to this short little list. You need to stop fretting about your failures. I say that as loudly and strongly and firmly as I can. Stop it! Stop fretting about your failures. God has a solution for this one too. Stop fretting about your failures. I know you failed you did something you're ashamed of it you felt guilt if you go to God and just confess your sin then you need to get up off your knees you need to put your hand to the plow and not look back. Stop it! It's one of Satan's number one tools, it's like John 21. Peter sits there falls on his face, denies Christ, feels guilt, goes fishing when he should be preaching. Jesus has to show up, post-resurrection appearance, fix some broiled fish for breakfast on the shore send Peter over here, here he is, and he says, listen hey, Pete, what's going on? Do you love me? Well you know I like you a lot. Hey Pete, do you love me? Oh you know, I like you a lot. Hey Peter, do you like me a lot? Third time. I'm so sad you said that, you know all things. Pathetic, right? And by the way interlaced between all of those questions and answers here's what Jesus kept saying, feed my sheep, tend my lambs, feed my sheep. Do you see the connection? You feeling like a failure and fretting about your past here's what you need to do. Put your hand to the plow, a plow is for working, and don't look back. Peter I know you fell on your face and here's your mistake it's like just now you're discovering you're a loser. It's like you

should have known that. Of course you are weak; we've said it from the beginning. The spirit is willing the flesh is weak, you're going to fall. When you said I'll follow you even to death I told you no you're going to deny me three times before morning, come on. Why are you fretting about your failures? Feed my sheep, tend my lambs, you've got a job that prepared you to be a preacher now get out there and preach.

I don't understand those of you in our church that are not involved in serving. I just don't understand you, it makes no sense. You want to talk about a fretter looking for an opportunity to fret, it's you. Those of us involved in serving the body of Christ, serving for the name of Christ, we've got work to do. We don't have time to fret about the past we've got to put our hand to the plow and get to work. You need to do the same. Not that we're not going to have that thought you remember we quoted 1 Corinthians 15 a couple weeks ago, Paul says I am the least of all the apostles, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle. Remember when he said that? He said but I am what I am by the grace of God. He said in God's grace did not prove to be in vain in my life because I worked harder than all the other apostles, that's a great statement. You may feel the pang of frustration about your failures but parlay that please into a determination to work and get to work for the name and the sake and the kingdom of God. You are supposed to be secure in your relationship with God so that you are not doubting his grace, you're not questioning his wisdom and you're not fretting about your failures. Worship him, trust him, serve him. Did you catch that little mini outline? That was a sermon in itself right there, that third point.

1920s they were building the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco there. The pylons and the posts, the pillars that hung up this suspension bridge, 740 feet tall. That's big. The bridge itself, they go there to kill themselves today, 220 feet above the water. You fall off of that it's done, right? Few people survive that. Can you imagine being a contractor building this thing? And have you felt the wind in the San Francisco Bay there? Crazy, so they're building this thing in 1920s and guess what? Guys getting blown off all the time. Keep dying on the job. They're losing workers. So half way through the project they get this idea, here's what we'll do. We'll build like a big trapeze net you'd find like at the circus. We'll drape this huge net under all the parts where we're working on it. So they build a safety net. And guess what happens? Not only does no one die, they stop falling. They stop falling off. I mean they're thinking now, I fall off I got to climb all the way back up, be late for lunch, I don't know I don't want to do that. I mean they're weren't doing that. What they were doing is concentrating on their work and they weren't fretting or fearing that they might lose their life. When they didn't fear it, when they didn't fear that they were going to fall, they had it. I often think I've got a little curb by my office I sometimes walk out and try to like I'm fourteen. You balance on the curb. Which I've done and messed up and twisted my ankle and think what am I doing? But then sometimes I'm at a place like one of these outdoor malls or something where they'll have a strip of bricks that are just about the size even smaller than the curb. I can walk on that for a mile and not miss at all. But it's when I'm on a curb. Then I often think what if I'm on the edge of Hoover Dam or something? I'd never make it; I couldn't make two steps, why? Fear. Do you see the problem? Are you at perfect peace and total security about your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ? If you are you're going to be a force to contend with in this world for Christ. But if you're sitting around like so many Christians I know thinking it's based on your deeds, your decisions, your power. That God somehow could change his mind or doesn't know or didn't know you'd mess up like you did. You are going to be a mess. And you will fall off the beam a whole lot more than the Christian sitting next to you who is confident about the love of God. So enjoy that nice comfortable robe. It is a comfort to know that you and God are inseparable. Make sure you're a genuine follower of Christ, if you are its real good news. Let's pray.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, the sword. No, as it's written for your sakes we are being killed all day long and we're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No in all these things we were more than conquerors through him who loved us. I'm sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers, nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. God, let those

words and that truth sink deeply in to our hearts to be an anchor for our soul so that we're not driven and tossed around emotions, or our passing feeling of achievement or failure. God let us rest in the finished work of Christ and the immovable character of an omniscient, omnipotent, immutable God. Let us understand something about the grace of God that providentially and sovereignty saves us that we might be able to put our hand our hand to the plow without peeking over our shoulder. Please God give us that kind of resolute security that we need that we might be able to serve you with a kind of passion and kind of resolve and a kind of tenacity that we need in a world that desperately needs Christians to stand up and do something good for the cause of Christ. God we need to serve you we need to preach and proclaim the gospel. We need to build up the body of Christ, this congregation. Let our church not be a church of spiritual fingernail biters. Let's be standing up as hyper-nike, super conquerors, more than conquerors through him who loved us. We pray it in his name, Jesus Christ. Amen.