

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

Romans 8:18-39

Key Verse: 8:37

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”

In the last passage we learned that there is now no condemnation in Christ Jesus. It is because through the death and resurrection of Christ, our debt was paid in full. Moreover, God gave us the Holy Spirit. Now the Spirit leads us as our Shepherd and Counselor. He guides us according to his infinite wisdom and unconditional love. He makes us alive to God. He gives us peace in our hearts. He gives us assurance that we are God’s children and heirs of the kingdom of God.

Today’s title is, “More Than Conquerors.” We are more than conquerors through Christ. What? Many people feel defeated for one reason or another. Some would be happy with a stalemate in their spiritual struggle. Yet the Bible says, “We are more than conquerors.” Let’s learn how and why we are more than conquerors through this study.

First, we have the hope of glory (18-25).

Look at verse 18. “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Paul acknowledges that we have present sufferings. As God’s children, we suffer to carry God’s mission in addition to our basic duties as human beings. For example, Missionary Hosea Lee supports his family by working full time as a computer programmer. In addition, he carries out five one-to-one Bible studies per week with Northwestern students, and his wife Annie carries out seven. What a beautiful missionary house church! Yet they suffer much to carry God’s mission. Shepherdess Agi Toh studies hard at UIC to get good grades. She also carries out ten one-to-one Bible studies per week, sacrificing movie watching time. Dr. James Joung works hard in his pharmacy every day. Afterward he prays for and teaches the Bible to students, like Shepherd Adam, who is growing as a spiritual leader. Suffering for mission is beautiful and it makes people beautiful. However, there is another kind of suffering.

We also suffer because we live in the fallen world. Look at verse 20. “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it....” As Genesis teaches us, God cursed creation after man’s sin. God said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field” (Gen 3:17,18). This curse brought pain to both man and woman (Gen 3:16). This curse brought fruitlessness. This curse brought decay and death to the beautiful world God made. Now we have birth defects, SARS, diseases, stomach flu, allergies, and in our time, computer viruses. These afflict Christians and non-Christians alike. Of course, this curse was punitive. But it was also redemptive. It was to bring us to repentance and salvation.

Look at verse 19. “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.” The creation, including animals, plants and all things, has a hope. Sometimes animals are more spiritually enlightened than sinful man is. For example, God told Balaam not to go with Balaak to curse the Israelites (Nu 22:21ff). But Balaam went anyway to satisfy his greed. Along the way, an angel of the Lord appeared with drawn sword to stop him. To save their lives, Balaam’s donkey would not go forward. Balaam got angry and began to beat his donkey. Finally, the donkey had to explain what God was doing to Balaam. The donkey saw God, but his owner did not.

Creation has God’s hope for complete restoration. Look at verse 21. “...in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” The creation longs for restoration. In the meantime, it groans to endure the presence of men who do not know God. The creation groans to serve vile and ungodly men who do not know what they are doing. If a tree gives shade to an unbeliever, it cries inwardly. If a chicken is eaten by an ungodly woman, it becomes unbearably sorrowful. When the ocean waves have to support a shipload of wild, party animal people, they lament deeply. Yet, the creation has hope. It is the hope that God’s children will bring about a new era of glorious freedom. Then there will be no more curse. God’s rule will be restored. Creation will once again be holy and blessed to glorify God to the fullest extent. Therefore, when the children of God are revealed, the entire creation will rejoice.

Isaiah foresaw the restoration of God's righteous rule over man and the world. He prophesied to the redeemed, "You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the fields will clap their hands" (Isa 55:12). At a graduation ceremony, the graduates go to the stage one by one to receive their degrees. It is a moment of honor and recognition that acknowledges their status as graduates. As each one takes his or her diploma, parents and friends clap and shout with glad emotion. In the same way, the creation claps and dances and rejoices as the children of God are revealed.

Look at verse 22. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time." A woman giving birth endures excruciating pain. But she has hope, the hope of bringing a new life into the world. When the baby appears, great joy fills the mother's heart. One moment, she says, "Ohh!" and the next moment, she says, "Praise God!" We must have this perspective on our suffering in this world. Of course, it hurts for a while. But God uses it to restore his creation. Someday, only the men and women of God, saved by Jesus' blood, will be the stewards of the world. They will rule the creation for the glory of God. There will be no more ungodliness, pain, mourning, or death. There will be no more violence, injustice, or scandals in the news. There will be no more tragedies. Instead, there will be peace and righteousness. The words of Isaiah will be fulfilled, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them...They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:6-9). Think of it! All of creation will acknowledge God, live before him, and serve him gladly. How beautiful to see little children live purely before God and grow as shepherds for the world.

The creation has a great and glorious hope of liberation. In addition, each of us has a personal hope. Look at verse 23. "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." We have the firstfruits of the Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit puts to death our sinful nature and makes us alive to God. We are changing day by day, though sometimes slowly. Children like to sing, "My Jesus is changing me, little by little every day." Because the Spirit has begun a good work in us, we are happy. Still, we groan inwardly. Sometimes we groan because of our sins. We groan to be more like Jesus. Before knowing Jesus, one person felt good about himself, considering his selfishness a virtue. When Jesus came into his heart, he learned that selfishness is sin. So, he began to groan. God accepted his groaning and is gradually changing him into a sacrificial person.

We also groan inwardly because we have mortal bodies. We have backaches. We have sleeping disorders. We have mental problems. We have diabetes. When we face the limitations of our flesh, we groan. But God promises the redemption of our bodies. We will receive spiritual bodies that are imperishable, powerful, and glorious. Then there will be no more groaning. We will be perfect on the inside and on the outside, just as Jesus is perfect. We will bear the full image and likeness of Christ! Now, we are waiting for this; it is our hope. Someday it will be reality. Our bodies will be strong, healthy and powerful all the time. We won't even catch a cold. Our minds will be full of inspiration, creativity and imagination all the time. Our spirits will bear the full image of Christ. We will be as humble as Jesus. We will be as gracious as Jesus. We will be as compassionate as Jesus. We will be as holy as Jesus.

Look at verse 24. "For in this hope we were saved." God's salvation for sinners is more than the forgiveness of sins. God saves each person to fully restore us in body, mind and spirit to the image of Christ. God will make each of us a heavenly prince or princess who inherits the kingdom of God. This glorious hope gives us joy and strength as we live in this world. We have victory in the midst of sufferings. Praise Jesus!

Second, we have the Spirit's help (26-27).

Our hope in Christ is truly glorious and wonderful. However, hope is not always enough. We are weak. Sometimes we lose direction to the degree that we don't know what to pray. Our Lord Jesus taught us to pray, "Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." In UBF we pray, "May God make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. May God send 100,000 missionaries to 233 nations by the year 2040." We should pray with this prayer topic every day. But sometimes it seems too unrealistic. We get so bound up with our own petty problems that we become nearsighted. At that moment, we are totally useless. Then God gives us his Spirit to help us. Look at verse 26. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." The Spirit reminds us that God is the Sovereign Ruler of

all creation. The Spirit reminds us that Jesus has already won the victory over sin and death and the devil. The Spirit helps us to see what God is doing. The Spirit renews our souls so that we can pray.

Last Friday we heard graduation testimonies by Sister Eileen Lee, who finished a bachelor's degree, and by Missionaries Peter Kim and Paul Chung, and Shepherdess Marcia Lenthang, who finished master's degrees. They had a common factor. In the course of study, each met a limitation and could not go on in his or her own strength. Then God gave each one his Spirit and his word of encouragement and promise. The Spirit helped them in their weakness. The Spirit gave them victory.

Third, we know that God is good (28-30).

As we have studied, we have a great hope in God. We also enjoy the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Still, God has given us something more. Look at verse 28. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." In all things—that's right, in all things—God works for the good of those who love him. This is amazing, but it is basic Christian faith. No matter what happens, no matter how we seem to be doing, God is working for good. Someone may say, "I am going through a terrible relationship problem. I feel great pain, but there is nothing I can do." That may be true enough. But the Bible says that God is working for our good. It doesn't mean that every struggle has a fairy tale ending, or that we always feel good. How then is God working for our good?

Look at verses 29-30. "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." What God really wants to do is to conform each of us to the likeness of his Son Jesus Christ. This is a profound process that depends ultimately on the absolute sovereignty of God. It is for the glory of God. God knew those whom he would call, before the beginning of time (Eph 1:4). God destined them to bear the image of Christ. At his appointed time he called them, making a personal relationship with them. He justified them through the grace of Christ. He glorified them through the work of the Spirit to be holy like Jesus. It is interesting that this process is stated in the past tense. According to Paul, it is already done. It is finished. It has only to unfold in the course of God's good time. We must look up at God. God is carrying out the good work he began in us, and God never fails. God always finishes to the end.

Fourth, we have the absolute love of God (31-39).

Look at verses 31-32. "What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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?" We must remember the nature of God's love for us. God gave us his one and only Son as a ransom sacrifice for our sins when we were ungodly, powerless and wretched. At the very worst period of our lives, God was willing to exchange Jesus for us. God's love is deeper than our sins. God's love is unconditional and unchanging. God's love will sustain us and guide us to the end.

Nevertheless, the devil still tries to condemn us, working through the sinful nature. So Paul reminds us that it is God who justifies us (33b). God's word of justification is absolute. There was a common man who claimed to be a noble knight. But he could not prove it, so he was arrested and put in the stocks. The king wanted to rescue him. So the king declared that according to the royal historian, the man actually was a knight. Then he said, "This is my word as king, as such it is beyond question." From that moment, the man was a knight. When God declares us to be his children, no one can dispute it. It is God who justifies. In addition, Christ is interceding for us. Look at verse 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."

Paul himself had gone through many sufferings to serve God. He was not always stress-free. Sometimes he struggled hard to see God's purpose and to accept God's love. His conclusion is in verses 35-37. They say, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Paul found God's victory in every trial and agony of life without exception. He saw how God used all things to fulfill his world salvation plan and form the image of Christ in him. So Paul shouts in joy and victory in verses 38-39, "For I am convinced that neither

death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Amen.

In this passage we learn that we have a great and glorious hope that God will restore creation to its perfect state. We will bear the image of Christ in glorious spiritual bodies. God is good. God loves us. In the love of God, we are more than conquerors.