

God for Us

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[0 : 0 0] let's turn back together to the chapter in Romans Romans chapter 8 and we'll look for a few moments this evening on those final verses that Paul brings almost to this crescendo he's leading the people of God he's reminding them of the problem he's showing them the solution and he's encouraging them in the midst of their circumstances and if you think of it 2,000 years ago in the heart of the great empire of Rome the greatest empire that had ever been seen on the earth at that time there is a community of believers there is a group of Christians there from different backgrounds but they've come to know Jesus Christ as Lord and they've come to know him as Savior and the apostle Paul is seeking to build them up and to equip them and to strengthen them in their faith and if you're here tonight and a Christian that's exactly what God wants to do for you he wants to strengthen you he wants to encourage you he wants to equip you he wants to enable you to serve your community here and now to represent Jesus to represent Jesus well in your family among your friends and throughout the throughout the throughout your your your community what where you work or where you live and this small group of Christians now in the heart of the empire shows us that the gospel is powerful that the gospel is transformative and that the unexpected happened that this message concerning Jesus has now come to the center it isn't staying at the edges it's not at the periphery anymore but it's now at the very heart of the empire and that God is working in the lives of ordinary people transforming ordinary people and accomplishing his extraordinary purposes one of the great histories of the Roman Empire the decline and fall of the Roman Empire by Edward Gibbon now Gibbon himself was not a fan of Christianity but in his chapter on the rise and expansion of the Christian church he had two sets of explanations he said there is the supernatural explanation which he himself didn't believe but that people believe that Jesus was God and that lives are being transformed supernaturally but he said secondarily there were other reasons that the gospel advanced and those reasons he said one of the key reasons was this was the quality of the character of the early Christians that these were people who repented of their earlier sins they were sorry for what they had done but not only that but they were characterized now by a concern for their society for their culture for their family for the vulnerable for the weak and this set them apart they were different they acted differently their marriages were different their family relationships were different the way in which they engaged with the with with the government or with society with culture was different and Gibbon concluded that this was a major explanation as to why this unlikely message this unusual religion actually survived its first generation not only survived of course but now is thriving so that today we have more than two billion people on this planet who name the name of Jesus the gospel changes people's lives and changed lives are a powerful illustration and a powerful advertisement for the gospel you might think I'm just ordinary you might think I have nothing to say

I can't preach a sermon I can't write a book but maybe it's not a sermon that's needed to be preached and maybe it's not a book that needs to be written but maybe it's the kindness that you can show maybe it's the generosity maybe it's the hospitality maybe it's that word of comfort maybe it's that word of encouragement and maybe it's what God has given to you that gift that opportunity and what we find time and again in the pages of scripture and in the histories of the church is that ordinary people are used by God in extraordinary ways to accomplish his purpose and maybe tonight you're one of those ordinary people that God can use in an extraordinary way we come now to Romans chapter 8 and this church is not characterized by power this church is not characterized by strength the apostle Paul makes quite clear in 1st Corinthians that God does not choose the noble and he doesn't choose the mighty and he just doesn't choose the wise he says not many wise not many noble not many substantial but he chooses weak people and he chooses foolish people and he chooses insignificant people so that when we see the power and when we see the

transformation we recognize that this is God there's no other explanation for this than God is at work just to give you an illustration from the pages of church history one of the favorite figures that I have is a man called D.L. Moody

American pastor evangelist a man who had a third or fourth grade education he was educated to the age of 10 he was not well educated he had a very unique way of pronouncing words I mean he had the ability of pronouncing the word Daniel with one syllable but here was a man who had a passion for Jesus Christ he said as much he said I love Jesus and I want to do something for Jesus and he felt strangely that God was calling him to preach the gospel and that the gospel could reach the ends of the earth in his lifetime now he died in 1899 and there are still many people groups that are not yet reached by the gospel so that vision was not yet realized but God used this man who had very ordinary gifts to do extraordinary work in the service of God what's estimated is that on a one-to-one basis he pledged to himself he said every day

I want to tell one person about Jesus at least one person and it's estimated that he led personally 70,000 people to Jesus through one-to-one conversations sit down on a train meet somebody under a street lamp bump into somebody on the street and would just start a conversation it's also estimated in his evangelistic preaching that he probably reached over a hundred million people in person proclaiming the gospel but what was said of Moody was that he had a genuine passion for people he had a genuine love for people and this love for people transcended so here you have the American coming to the United Kingdom he preached in Oxford he preached in Cambridge he preached in Eton he preached in London he preached in the fashionable west end of London he preached in the poor east end of London and he just had a way of communicating with people because it became obvious that this man cared about people it became obvious 2,000 years ago that these Christians care about people there's something about their love for Jesus that translates into a love for people and that's a powerful witness and you might think that's insignificant but let's look to see what's happening in the lives of God's people and what Paul has to say to these ordinary people whose names are written in the final chapters of Romans but history has long forgotten these early Christians so he begins with a question what then shall we say to these things and I'll just have three brief headings and all of them are questions what shall we say

Paul is giving them the gospel and reminding them of the facts of the gospel and explaining what these things mean we read John chapter 19 a moment ago and John 19 and you know all the gospel accounts will tell us what happened they'll tell us about the betrayal and they'll tell us about the arrest and they'll tell us about the trials the civil trials before Pilate and Herod the religious trials before the Sanhedrin they'll tell us about the verdict guilty guilty of the religious crime of blasphemy guilty of the civil crime of treason they'll tell us of the mocking and of the scourging they'll tell us of the attempt of Pilate to release Jesus but instead Barabbas is released and the gospel accounts will detail those final moments and hours of Jesus' life where he's physically and verbally abused crucified, dead, and buried but the apostle Paul in his letters tells us that the word of the cross that the cross needs an explanation what does this all mean?

[9 : 38] what does it mean that Jesus died? what does it mean that Jesus rose again? what do all these things mean for us? and what shall we say in response to these things?

well the apostle Paul summarizes and he says if God is for us who can be against us? in the American Civil War President Lincoln was often asked Mr. President is God on our side? and undoubtedly the president of the Confederacy was probably asked the same thing is God on our side? and Lincoln replied often he said sir my concern is not whether God is on our side but my greatest concern is to be on God's side so Paul is saying that there are sides to be taken there's one side or another you can't really be on both sides if God is for us who can be against us? is God for you? are you for God? in the country of Korea there's what's called the demilitarized zone it's a line it's about two miles wide and 150 miles long and that divides these two countries it's a no man's land it's not part of the north and it's not part of the south it's an in-between part but with the gospel there's no in-between part you need to come down on one side or another you hear the message of Jesus you're confronted with the life and the death and the resurrection of Jesus and you really need to take a side is this what I believe?

is this my hope? is this my comfort? is this the foundation of my life? or is it not? you can't really have two feet in different camps or to be on different sides you can't really be neutral here because God isn't neutral we're told that if God is for us and what Paul is doing here is he's giving us what we call a conditional sentence and if then if this is the case then this is the case so how do we know

that God is for us?

[11 : 51] how do we know that he is with us? well I think the answer to that question is found on the Bible that's open before us God tells us God shows us God reveals his truth in his word but he also reveals his truth in our hearts and in our lives that we not only know what we read but we experience this newness of life this transformation of heart so we can recognize what Paul is saying he said God is now for you he's not against you God is not distant he's not remote he's not neutral he's not against you if you follow and trust the Lord Jesus tonight you can be in that category of those for whom God is on your side he's with you he wants to help he's there to comfort all the resources that belong to him now belong to you if God is for us the conclusion is who can be against us

God who makes the heaven and the earth God who sustains all things God who redeems for himself a people and who one day will redeem all things the new heavens the new earth the new Jerusalem if this God is for you who can possibly stand against you who could oppose you who could harm you who could destroy you I mentioned this morning those great enemies the world the flesh the devil these are powerful enemies that we are not able to stand against in our own strength but God is mightier by far than any enemy than any opponent than the evil one than the world and even ourselves our own desires so there comes a point where you need to make a choice you need to take a side you have the knowledge you have the information you've observed you've heard you've seen have you come down on one side or another that this is my gospel that this is my savior that Jesus is for me and I am for him it doesn't matter what your family might say it doesn't matter what others might think it doesn't matter what decisions others might have made but can you see the logic here and can you identify yourself in this category of the us if God is for us who can be against us and you see the apostle Paul is now identifying with this small group of believers in the city of Rome

God is for you God is for me put me and you together that's us it doesn't matter how long it doesn't matter how much you know it doesn't matter how clear your understanding is but if he's for you who can possibly stand against you all the power all the strength all the wisdom all the resources I remember watching I mentioned Abraham Lincoln earlier I remember watching the movie Lincoln and there was a scene where the president was exhorting his advisors and exhorting his workers that he needed two votes he needed two votes for the emancipation proclamation the emancipation proclamation freeing all slaves to become law and he stood up and he said I am the president of the United States clothed in immense power you will get these votes for me

God has immense power God has immense authority what he says he does what he purposes he achieves and this is the God who is now on your side all the resources are his all the strength is his and what he desires he will achieve but he will achieve it with you he will achieve it without you you won't thwart him you won't stop him you can't undermine what he will do but the great news of the gospel is he wants to do his work in you with you and through you that he wants to use you in this great work so the first question is what shall we say what can we say in response to these great gospel truths well a conclusion that the apostle Paul says is that God is for us and none can stand against us then there's a series of questions that I want to just sum up under the heading but what about and you see the apostle Paul is a great communicator a great teacher he's a lawyer by training and as a lawyer he brings up these points that are going through people's minds he's bringing up the questions that people are asking and he's answering them before they ask them but what about verse 32 but what about the charges what or verse 33

I mean who shall bring any charge against God's elect you see being a Christian in the first century was a difficult proposition there were many who were making allegations and charges these are people who are undermining the government these are dangerous people these are subversive people these are people who are perverting our religion what about what about these charges well he gives to us the argument that he gives is based not on us but based solely upon his son because you ask the question how do we know that God is for us verse 32 that linking verse says he didn't spare his son but he gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things if God has given Jesus his most precious that which is most precious to him his beloved son his only begotten son if he gives us

[18 : 13] Jesus how will he not give us everything else that we need everything else that we require anything else by comparison is less than Jesus so God is for us he says it God is for us he shows it but now what about the charges what about the accusations what about the opposition

what about when people say what about when people do what if they bring a charge against us well Paul again takes us right back to God and the gospel it is God who justifies he declares us righteous now if you have a choice so you have people making charges and making accusations and you have God who says I declare them righteous so whose voice do you hear do you hear the voices of those making charges or do you hear the voice of God declaring you righteous declaring you accepted in his sight declaring you accepted in his son because the apostle Paul as a lawyer is using this courtroom language to say that you

Christian though you may be charged though you may be accused though you may be despised you may be shunned by others in the courtroom of God God stands up and says they are innocent of all charges what's more they are righteous in my sight they are beloved in the son it is God who justifies but what about the condemnation and sometimes the condemnation can come from within sometimes we can condemn ourselves sometimes we listen to voices that are saying to us do you really think do you really believe don't you think you're fooling yourself or being fooled by others and there are voices that condemn from within and from outside but what about condemnation so there are charges but then there's condemnation in verse 34 Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that who was raised who is at the right hand of

God who indeed is interceding for us so the condemnation I'm too bad I've made too many mistakes I've let God down too many times I've let myself down the guilt or the shame or the disappointment or the regret or the condemnation of others you call yourself a Christian and you behave in that way you call yourself a Christian and you speak in that way you call yourself a Christian and you relate to people in that way and those voices of condemnation or the voice of the evil one who speaks to us and says you're just fooling yourself you're not fooling anyone else who is he that condemns well Jesus died more than that Jesus was raised to life more than that he's interceding for us so you see Paul is anticipating these questions he says what about those who charge us what about those who accuse us what about those who condemn us and Paul brings his audience right back to

Jesus Christ right back to Christ and him crucified Christ crucified dead buried and raised that's those are the facts of our gospel that he lived he died he rose again and what's more he ascended and he's now interceding for us how often do we judge or assess our Christian life and we might assess our Christian life and we say how often do I read the word how often am I in prayer how often do I do or how often am I let me ask you this the apostle Paul seems to be assessing our Christian well-being based upon the prayers of Jesus so the question isn't so much how much am I praying but how much is he praying and he's praying constantly he ever lives to make intercession for us the one who died and the one who rose is now seated at the right hand of God and is praying for you and for me so even if there is charge accusation condemnation what do we have we have the prayers of the risen living Lord

Jesus Christ and he's praying for us he's praying for you he's praying for me because if the measure of our Christian life was a consistency of our prayers the fervency of our prayers the fluency of our prayers I don't know about you but I'm sunk and you are probably sunk too but if the strength or the foundation of our Christian life is the frequency and the fervency and the fluency of his prayers oh wow that's another story we're safe now we're secure now why because he's praying maybe I'm not praying as I should maybe I'm not praying as often as I should maybe I'm not praying with as much faith as I should but I tell you what he is and he's praying for me and how do you know that Bible just says it he's praying for us he's not praying for the wise and noble he's praying for these this Christian community in Rome he's praying for this Christian community here in Garibust and Point okay the next question but what about okay we've had accusation we've had condemnation what about separation oh it's fine now but what about tomorrow it's fine today but what about next year oh you're here tonight but will you be here next week will you be here next month what about separation well well let's say troubled times come let's say bad health comes let's say this or let's say that ultimately will there not come a time where you and I will find ourselves oh we might not be accused we might not be condemned but we might find ourselves simply separated separated from Jesus who shall separate us from the love of Christ and the apostle Paul gives us a list and this list is kind of like a spoiler alert you know you get these news stories or you read about who wins a various competition and they say if you don't want to know the result look away if you don't want to know what the Christian life is really about you might want to look away now because Paul says that the

[24 : 37] Christian life is going to be filled with these things tribulation distress persecution famine nakedness danger sword he says psalm 44 has it pretty has captured it pretty well here when when the psalmist says for your sake we are being killed all the day long we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered so there are many things that we think might separate us distress trouble trial persecution opposition their Christian life is replete with these dangers with these trials and with these troubles so Paul is listing them he asked the question and then he lists the obvious answers who will separate us well tribulation that'll separate us what about distress that'll separate us what about persecution in 1949 when chairman Mao took over as chairman of the people's republic of China one of the first things he did was expel all western missionaries China is a atheistic country we believe in communism we want nothing to do with

Christianity that's a western religion at that point 1949 there were about a million Chinese Christians and the fear of course was if you remove the thousands of western missionaries they're going to lose their preachers they're going to lose their pastors they're going to lose their leaders they're going to lose their teachers and this church will ultimately crumble so you see Mao had it had it thought out get rid of the leaders get rid of the outside influence get rid of the money get rid of the missionaries and within a year all western missionaries had left China now the inevitable would be that this million full million strong Christian church in China would eventually over time with persecution with opposition that this Christian church would eventually die out and I can say to you today 2019 that there are no longer one million Chinese Christians there's a hundred million Chinese Christians persecution didn't do it opposition didn't do it tribulation didn't do it in fact it had the opposite effect you remove all the western support you remove all the the western leaders you know what China had to produce its own leaders had to produce its own teachers had to produce its own resources had to meet its own needs and the church in China multiplied it doesn't make sense but you know the gospel doesn't make sense on that level that one person dies he's buried he's raised to life and he now brings hope to the entire world and its people does that make sense but it actually works that's why we're here tonight because we believe that this one man died this one man was buried and this one man was raised to life and in fact this man is no ordinary man but he's Jesus Christ the son of God and that no matter what is thrown at you or me we're safe and we're secure why because in all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us what about condemnation what about persecution what about accusation the answer is Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus who died Jesus who was raised Jesus who is interceding the love of Jesus Christ is powerful and the love of Jesus Christ is persistent and this brings us to the final question that I want to ask given all of this given all that Jesus has done given all that we are facing who then are we really and the answer there was in verse 37 which I read who are we we are more than conquerors more than conquerors through him who loved us and this image is so vivid for the Romans you see Rome was the the nickname of Rome New York City is the big apple Rome is the eternal city a city that is characterized by glory even today you'll see the buildings and you see the buildings you see the rooms you think what a city it must have been and the idea of conquerors well of course there's a conqueror the conqueror is

Caesar and when the great processions were held through the city of Rome Caesar was at the front his generals followed behind the Roman legions followed behind and then the prisoners the vanquished the defeated so that all in Rome would see here is the conqueror and here is the defeated so this image was quite obvious but the Christians they didn't identify themselves with the victor they identified themselves with the vanquished where the poor where the weak were the vulnerable and Paul says you've got it all wrong you're you're not the conquered you're the conqueror and not even that you're more than conquerors you're at the head of the procession you're not at the back of the procession why because you're conquerors through him who loved us who loved you who loved me Napoleon near the end of his life had time on his hands he had two exiles one didn't last too long but the other was permanent at the last exile when he was sitting off the coast of

[30 : 13] Africa on a small island he reflected he said this I know men and I tell you Jesus Christ was not a man superficial minds see resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions that resemblance does not exist there is between Christianity and other religions the distance of infinity Alexander Caesar Charlemagne and myself founded empires but on what did we rest the creations of our genius upon sheer force Jesus Christ alone founded his empire upon love and at this hour millions of men will die for him we are more than conquerors

through him who loved us the love of Jesus is powerful the love of Jesus is persistent the love of Jesus is transformative the love of Jesus takes a hopeless situation and brings hope the love of Jesus takes a group of persecuted Christians and says to them no no no you're the victor you're not the vanquish you're the conqueror you're more than the conqueror and then he goes on to say who are you he says well look I'm telling you that death nor life angels or rulers and things present things to come powers height depth anything else in all creation he says you name it the powers the authorities the rulers the ways of this world whatever it might be the apostle Paul says you name it anything everything all these powers all these authorities he says nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord what is the heart of our message what is the foundation of our hope it's quite simply this for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life the love of God is powerful the love of God is personal the love of God is transformational and the love of God can never be thwarted never be defeated the separation that is suggested here can never happen because the love of God in

Christ Jesus our Lord lays hold of and continues to grasp and to grip you and me so this community in Rome is reminded that though they feel defeated they are actually the victors though they feel isolated though they feel vulnerable actually they are in the most secure position they can ever be sometimes we think that we might be few and that those against us may be many that the odds are stacked against us that it seems to be an unfair fight well actually that's true but it's the other way around you see with God even one can be a majority you might be the only Christian in your family you might be only Christian your place of work you might be a little only Christian in your community but if God is with us with you then you're in the majority you have all the power you have all the authority with you because of the love of Jesus that unites you to God that gives you security and stability and that you know that you are on the winning side not because of who you are but because of who you trust because of who is your hope and that's

Jesus Christ so this evening we're confronted with the power of the gospel we're confronted with Jesus Christ and I just want to close by mentioning D.L.

Moody again he said this because sometimes as Christians sometimes when you're teaching you can focus so much on the truths the doctrines that you lose sight of Jesus Moody uses great illustration he said doctrines are all right in their places but when you put them in the place of faith or salvation they become sin if a man should ask me to his house for dinner tomorrow the street would be a very good thing to take me to his house but if I didn't get into the house I wouldn't get any dinner now a creed is a road or a street it's a very good it's very good as far as it goes but if it doesn't take us to Christ it is worthless he said I've had a rule for many years I treat the Lord Jesus Christ as a personal friend he is not a creed a mere doctrine but it's he himself that he has that we have so we may we believe certain things and these truths are foundational to our faith but what Paul is saying is that you have Jesus that he is the center of your faith that he is the object of your worship that he is the foundation of your hope and that he is the security that you have the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord and when we have Jesus if we have nothing but we have Jesus we have everything but the sad truth tonight is that if you have everything and you lack Jesus you ultimately have nothing there's a side to take there's a choice to make there's a gospel that comes to you personally and a gospel invitation that comes to you urgently it's time to take sides are you with him or are you against him is he yours or would you rather not have anything to do with this Jesus it's not religion it's not a creed I'm not asking you to sign up to a series of propositions but I'm asking you about Jesus how do you respond to him to his life to his death to his resurrection if God is for us who can be against us amen