

“Homeland Security”

Romans 8:31-39

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This morning our attention is drawn to one of the most moving and inspiring passages Paul wrote. These words have much to say to all of us living in a dangerous world.

They were written by the apostle Paul to the Christians in Rome. Since Paul had never been to Rome, he wrote this letter to introduce himself to the believers at the center of the Roman Empire and to share his beliefs.

Writing letters was a common way for Paul to communicate with Christians. Most of the time, these letters were written to address specific problems or questions. This was true of his letters to the believers in Corinth, Galatia, Philippi and Thessalonica.

The letter to the Christians in Rome was different, though. Paul had never been to Rome and had no personal contact with the people who would read this letter.

He was, however, very interested in their work because, as the capital of the Roman Empire, Rome was considered to be the greatest city in the world. Paul knew what a strategic location this was for a Christian church. People from all over the world traveled to Rome, and the seeds of the gospel could bear much fruit there.

So, Paul wrote this letter as a way of introducing himself to the Christians in Rome and sharing his convictions and beliefs. In addition, he asked them to pray for him as he traveled from Corinth back to Jerusalem to deal with sensitive church issues.

This morning our focus is on the eight chapter. It happens to be my favorite part of this book because of its personal nature and powerful message.

It begins by telling us there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, and it ends by assuring us there is nothing or no one who can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Forgiveness and eternal companionship are the bookends.

Every time I read the eight chapter of Romans, I am overwhelmed with the goodness and faithfulness of God. I believe Paul must have had similar feelings when he penned these words.

If Paul was writing this letter to share his convictions and beliefs, what did he want the Christians in Rome to know from today's text? After pondering this question for some time, I came to the conclusion Paul wanted them to understand the role faith plays in accepting challenges and handling problems. If they developed and cultivated a close relationship with God, no challenge they faced would intimidate them and no problem they encountered would separate them from God.

The God they worshiped and served was merciful and always working on their behalf to bring good out of bad. At no time would they ever be outside God's care or separated from God's love. Even when they might lose sight of God for any number of reasons, God would never lose sight of them. God would always have their back on this faith journey.

Listen to the scripture in light of what I have just said.

“What, then, shall we say in response to these things? 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? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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.

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 accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 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.” (Romans 8:31-39)

Why did the believers in Rome need to hear this hopeful message? There was no shortage of challenges and problems that came their way.

Following Jesus in a culture that valued the love of power over the power of love was not easy. Living by the ethic of love Jesus taught and modeled was an overwhelming challenge among a people who far too often valued being served over serving, self-indulgence over sacrifice, deception over truth, exclusion over inclusion, greed over generosity, arrogance over humility, revenge over forgiveness and violence over peace.

Every day their faith was challenged, and they faced the temptation to adopt the culture’s values. At times they were ridiculed, belittled, humiliated, discriminated against and even arrested.

What were they to do? Was this challenge to be a change agent and usher in the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven too big? Was it time to throw in the towel?

Not according to Paul. Look to God and be strong, Paul told them. You are not alone and never will be. God is by your side, and “if God is for us, who can be against us?”

Why did Paul have so much confidence in God’s abilities and faithfulness? He was speaking from his heart based upon his own experiences. On many occasions, God had done for Paul what he was telling the believers in Rome God would do for them.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-27, Paul revealed that he had been flogged, beaten with lashes, beaten with rods and stoned. He had been shipwrecked and lost at sea. He had been hungry, thirsty, cold, naked and endured many sleepless nights.

In other words, he had experienced every miserable and dangerous condition he mentioned at the end of Romans 8. Without God's help, he would have stumbled and fallen. He would have lost faith and hope. He would have given up.

This is why he wrote earlier in Romans 8, "The Spirit helps us in our weakness." (Romans 8:26a)

It is also why he told the Corinthians in his second letter to them, "God's grace is sufficient for you; God's power is made perfect in you. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. This is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions and in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

At all times God worked on Paul's behalf to strengthen him and to bring good out of bad. Under every circumstance, God provided the wisdom, strength, stamina, courage and determination Paul needed to persevere.

What difference did God's goodness and faithfulness make in Paul's life? It brought him much comfort and gave him the confidence he needed to continue on this journey with God. It enabled him to be and do his best even when the circumstances around him were at their worst.

Is this the message you need to hear today? Are you facing an intimidating challenge or overwhelming problem? Have fear and despair gripped your heart?

Let Paul's testimony and encouraging words to the believers in Rome speak to you this morning. Embrace Paul's confidence in God's ability and faithfulness.

Draw close to God and allow God help you face your tomorrows. Let God fill your heart with courage as you walk down an unfamiliar road and help you to live one day at a time without fear or anxiety.

As one of my best friends told me a few years ago, "With God, everything works out in the end. If it hasn't worked out yet, it isn't the end."

Don't give up too soon.