

God Is For Us!  
Romans 8:28-39

*If God is for us, who can be against us?* A lot of things! And a lot of people! You heard the list: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. And just a few verses later St. Paul adds to the list more things that threaten us: death, life, angels, rulers, things present, things to come, powers, height, depth, and pretty much anything else in all creation. There are a lot of things and people that can be against us.

And when these things and people come against us it can shake our confidence in God's love and care for us. And they do come against us. No one here has been immune from one kind of suffering or another. All of these things are against us all the time.

Sometimes we get a little break. For some reason the attacks seem to subside for a while and we can enjoy life without any major problems. But sometimes it never seems to end. When it rains it pours. It's one thing right after another. It's one thing right on top of another! Both of these times in our lives are against us – the heights and the depths.

When things are going great and we don't have a care in the world we tend not to care about God very much. "I'm healthy, financially secure, things with my spouse and kids are great, who needs God? We tend to like the heights in our lives, but they are against us. It doesn't quite sound right, but it's true! It seems much more obvious that the depths are against us. None of us like suffering. And there are times we feel like what Paul mentions in our text: *we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered*. It's one thing and then another. Being separated from our loved ones physically by distance or death. Being

separated from our loved ones emotionally over unresolved conflict. Being too close to loved ones because you can't go to work or school or anywhere else for fear of getting sick. An unexpected expense that is going to make things really tight for a while. Words from the doctor that don't sound good at all. Our own struggle against sin – doing what we know we shouldn't and not doing what we should. All of it can weigh us down and drag us to the depths.

Paul's point in our text is threefold. First, and the one I will spend the most time on, is that suffering should not be a surprise, not is it always a bad thing.

We are called to humbly and dutifully we bear the cross just as Jesus did. Paul is not saying that our bearing of the cross saves us. Far from it. He puts us on the cross not as Saviors but as co-participants. He does not make our sacrifice equal to Christ. But He does bring us into participation in the sufferings in the body of Christ in this world – the church.

Our flesh does not like this, though. We want a Lord who will immediately solve all our problems. We want a Lord who make things easy and happy. We seek freedom from pain and want not realizing that these are often tools God uses in molding and shaping us. It shouldn't, but it does, strike us as odd that it was tribulation, distress, persecution, and all the rest that helped the early church find validation.

It is hard to forget the reaction of the apostles in Acts 5 after having been beaten for proclaiming Jesus as the Christ. The temple officials did not like it that that apostles were there every day teaching the people about Jesus. They had them arrested and put into prison. *But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all*

*the words of this Life" (21-22). And so they did. And it is no surprise that they got arrested again. The trial begins with high priest addressing them: "We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him" (28-32). You can imagine how well that went over. When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them (33). A respected member of the council, Gamaliel, has the apostles removed from the room then makes a speech encouraging the council not to kill them that day, but to take a wait and see attitude. They followed his advice. I've shared all of this to get to this part: *and when they had called in the apostles, they beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ (40-42).**

If we claim Jesus as Lord, we must also expect to suffer as He and the apostles did. Rejoicing in that suffering is going to take the work of the Holy Spirit.

That leads us right to the last two points: we are not alone in our suffering, and all of these things that are against us are not going to win. God's Spirit is with us and in us in the midst of our suffering, and in Christ we are more than conquerors.

Our text oozes with promises: *we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* And who has been called according to His purpose? You have! When it talks about those who have been predestined, called, justified and glorified, it's talking about you! Before the world was even created, He chose you to be His very own, He adopted you into His family in the water and word of your baptism. Every time you hear or read His word He calls to you again, drawing you ever closer to Him.

Jesus lived the perfect life we cannot, and offered Himself of the cross to justify you. Jesus' perfect righteousness has been credited to you. You are declared to be holy and perfect in God's eyes – someone He wants to be with Him forever in glory. A portion of the glory is yours now, even though it is often veiled from our sight. The angels of God look at you and say "Wow! Look what the Lord Almighty has done in her life! Wow! Look what He has done in that man's life!

*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?* Every good gift that the Father has to give is yours in Christ. Jesus' work of salvation was completed on the cross, but He continues to go to bat for you: *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. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And the answer is an emphatic "No one and nothing!"*

You are not alone in your suffering, and it will not win. You belong to Christ now, and you will forever! *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. Amen!*