

**Altavista Presbyterian Church  
Rev. Eduardo Soto, Jr.**

**“God’s Everlasting Love”  
Isaiah 50:4-9  
Romans 8:31-39**

**Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
August 13, 2017**

**Isaiah 50:4-9**

The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward. I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard; I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.

But the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame. He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. Behold, the Lord God helps me; who will declare me guilty? Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

**Romans 8:31-39**

What then shall we say 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 with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? 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? 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.”

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

**“God’s Everlasting Love”**

The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of the Lord remains forever. Friends, this is the Word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing and acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

This week we’re closing out our brief series on Romans chapter eight. Last week we talked about some pretty dense theology. The topics of predestination and election are weighty and complex, I, for one, do not fully understand the many facets of this doctrine. I do, however, want to summarize what we talked about. Those predestined are, in due time, called, as Paul says. They are effectively summoned through the gospel into saving fellowship with Christ. Note what Paul said in the Golden Chain: all of those who are called are also justified. If this is the case, then the call cannot refer to the outward call of the Gospel that people may reject. Recall Jesus’ Parable of the Sower, which appears in all three of the Synoptic Gospels.<sup>1</sup> He describes the seed that is sown as the Word of God and the different landscapes on which the seed falls are different levels

of receptive hearts. Jesus says that there will be some who hear the Word and receive it, but will be choked out by sin and corruption. Only those whose hearts are tilled will receive the Word and bear its fruit. The called whom Paul speaks of refers to the “good soil” in Jesus’ parable. It is an inward call of God, brought by the Holy Spirit, that accomplishes what God intends. All who are predestined are called in this way. Predestination includes God’s determination that a person will receive such an inward, effectual call and it is not based on God’s knowing beforehand how people will respond, but purely on his sovereign will. Just as the predestined are called, so the called are both justified and certain to be finally glorified. Paul’s use of the past tense “glorified” indicates that from God’s perspective, the work is as good as done. God will complete it as planned. Predestination and election were hot topics in Paul’s time, too. He addresses responses and critiques in chapter nine. Sadly, that is beyond the scope of our present series.

Starting in verse thirty-one, Paul now draws the entire argument, which began in 1:16, to a triumphal conclusion. He introduces a series of challenges to every influence that might thwart the church’s confident assurance of present preservation and future glory. This section falls right on the heels of Paul’s assertion that *all* things work for good for those who love the Lord. If this is true, if nothing in this world can rip us away from our blessing, if God is truly for us, who can be against us? Remember, Paul is thinking eschatologically, that is, he has our eternal future in mind, not the present or temporal future. There will certainly be opposition, but Paul’s point is that all opposition lacks the ability to destroy faith. Since God is for us, victorious spiritual survival is assured. Paul is looking ahead to the future glory that awaits God’s people. There’s no guarantee in this life that we will not be overcome in body or mind. But if death could not hold down Christ, then there is no way in heaven or in hell that death could hold down the children of God.

But before the good news of the resurrection could happen, Christ needed to go to the cross. This is why Paul says, God “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all.” Paul’s words here echo the ancient Greek text of Genesis 22:12. In loving allegiance to the Lord, Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac, his beloved son; but at the last moment, Isaac was spared the dagger. The patriarch’s covenant loyalty was a reflection of God’s infinitely more costly love, by which the Father *did not* withhold his only Son from death on a cross for our sake. Just think about that. If God is willing to send his own Son to die in our stead, that’s a love which is boundless and unfathomable. And that love is extended to us. That love is exhibited through the gracious gifts God gives to us. In the present, God supplies all that is needed to achieve his purpose to make us like Christ. Remember, the purpose of predestination is for us to be conformed to Christ. God’s gracious gift is the potter molding us and forming us to be and to bear the image of Christ. Sometimes God’s gifts don’t look very gracious to us. Recall Joseph’s journey from near death to Prime Minister of Egypt. All things and everything work for the good of those who love God. I need to say I don’t want you to hear me wrongly. I do not want to diminish the very real pain and suffering that afflict people. We need to mourn and grieve, we need to fight against injustice and the effects of our broken, sinful world. Nevertheless, both the suffering and the blessings in this life, are not worth comparing to the eternal glory that awaits us. Christians can, and must hold in tension and in balance the reality of our grief and the reality of our salvation.

Paul then asks, “Who will bring charges against God’s elect?” That one little sentence is so rich with dramatic irony, yet it can easily go overlooked. Who is Paul? Rather, I should ask, who *was* Paul? Paul, formerly known as Saul, brought many charges against Jesus’ disciples. He was there at the stoning of Stephen. He charged the first Christians with blasphemy, sedition, impiety, and probably more! And now, here he writes to the church in Rome, “Who will bring charges against God’s people? Who is there to condemn them?” No one. “It is God who justifies.” Our righteous Judge and Father has already dealt with all charges against his children in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Self-justification is futile, and the accusations of Satan against believers will be ineffective. As Jesus, the righteous Suffering Servant, could confidently expect vindication from God from the false accusations lodged against him, so, too, is the believer’s union with Christ so intimate and inviolable that we can be assured that his resurrection secures our justification as well.

Reaching the climax of this section, Paul asks, “Who shall separate *us* from the love of Christ?” That’s what this is all about. Predestination, election, salvation, sanctification, all of it is about Christ’s never-ending love. Who shall separate us from it? Tribulation? Distress? Persecution? Famine? Nakedness? Danger? The sword? No, none of it; nothing. This, my friends, should give us hope. This should give us joy. We should be shouting from the rooftops in the midst of our troubles, “Thank you, God, for your never-ending love!” I can only imagine the hope and joy Paul’s words brought to his readers, those Christians who were actively being persecuted. I fully believe Paul had certain people in mind as he wrote. The daughter who was abandoned by her family because she became a Christian. The man who lost his job because he became a Christian. The family who lost everything because they proclaimed the glory of the Lord Jesus.

Paul had to have these people in mind, otherwise he would have no reason to quote Psalm 44:22, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” His appeal to Old Testament Scripture indicates that suffering is not an unexpected novelty for God’s people. In the Forty-Fourth Psalm, Israel confessed that earlier generations had glorified God for giving them the Promised Land, and that the present generation likewise trusted not in their military resources but in the Lord. Despite their faith and faithfulness, however, they were suffering setbacks, and so they cried out in hope for future deliverance. In Christ, such sufferings become stepping stones on the pathway to glory. Which must be why Paul says, “In all these things, we are more than conquerors.”

This is one of many, many Scripture passages that make for easy memorization and great inspirational decor. But the strength shown in enduring the hostility of persecutors and the pain of circumstances is astonishing. Physical death becomes the means by which martyrs conquer their accuser through the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony. Death, the very last enemy, has had its sting, which is sin, removed by Jesus’ death and resurrection. Note, however, that we are more than conquerors *through* Jesus. We have no victory in and of ourselves. We are given and guided to victory by the love of Christ. The doctrine surrounding the effects of Christ’s love is known as the perseverance of the saints. The doctrine of perseverance does not rest on our

ability to persevere, even if we are regenerate. Rather, it rests on the promise of God to persevere us. Paul writes to the Philippians, “I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup> It is by grace and grace alone that Christians persevere. We have security because salvation is of the Lord and we are his craftsmanship. He gives the Holy Spirit to every believer as a promise that he will fulfill what he begins. God has likewise sealed every believer by the Holy Spirit. He has marked us with an indelible mark and given his personal down payment that guarantees God will finish the transaction when Christ comes again in glory.

God’s chosen people, the Church Invisible, may fall for a season, but never fully or finally fall away. You see, Jesus prayed in the upper room, “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”<sup>3</sup> Only Judas, who was a son of perdition from the beginning, whose profession of faith was spurious, was lost. Those who are truly believers cannot be snatched from God’s hand. So we, as beloved children of God, can, with Paul, assert 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 of creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let us pray. Most Holy God, you love this world so much that you sent your only Son into it to experience our pain, to preach good news, and to die for our sins. This love passes all understanding. This love empowers all believers. You preserve us by your providential care, and this should inspire us! Encourage us to be faithful disciples. Teach us to love with the love of Christ. Guide us on the path of righteousness so that we may be image bearers of our Lord and Savior. It is in his holy and blessed name we pray. Amen.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:1-15

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:6

<sup>3</sup> John 17:12