No Separation

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[0:00] My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. We are continuing this morning our series in the book of Romans. We're actually finishing it for a little bit. We're at the very last section in Romans chapter 8.

If you've been tracking, you know that next week we are going to start the story of Isaac returning back to the second half of Genesis chapter 25. So this is our last hurrah for a little bit. You'll remember that Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD.
You'll remember that Romans is called Romans because it is written to the churches in the city of Rome. And you'll remember that it is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' life and death and resurrection.
And now we're at the very end of chapter 8, which I've been telling you is arguably the greatest chapter in the entire Bible. And we're not just at that chapter, we're in the greatest section of the greatest chapter.
We're in the climax of chapter 8 and in a sense then the climax of the first eight chapters of the book of Romans.
[1:21] I was talking to someone yesterday, I said, you know, so I'm preaching from Romans 8, which is the potentially the greatest chapter in the Bible. And then we're at this section at the end, which is potentially the greatest section of the greatest chapter.

So no pressure. And the point is this, of this passage before us. If you belong to Jesus Christ, if he has chosen you, if you're one of his elect, no matter what happens in this life, you cannot lose what matters most.
If you belong to Jesus Christ, if you're one of his sheep, if your name is written in the book of life, no one and nothing can separate you from the love of God.
And so it's with that I invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter 8, starting at verse 35. You'll find it on page 7 of your worship guide. And as we come to this passage, remember that this is God's word.
Jeremiah chapter 23 tells us that God's word is like a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces, which is a way of saying that there is nothing so powerful that God's word is not more powerful still.
[2:42] And so that's why we read now Romans chapter 8, starting at verse 35. 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.
I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you this morning for your great mercy and grace to us.
Not only in sending your son to die in our place, but for giving us your word. For instructing us, for guiding us, for adopting us as your sons and daughters and promising us an inheritance.
[4:02] Father, for giving us something so sure and unshakable that nothing in this world can threaten it. We ask that you'd help us by your spirit this morning to understand your word.

That it would pierce to the center of our hearts. Father, that it would move our affections, it would shake our minds. That it would grow our love for Jesus Christ and our confidence in you.

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And so that we would be people who are filled with great joy. And we ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen. I have mentioned to you all before that my first time in the state of Colorado was in 2016.
It was my second year in seminary. And I took a road trip from St. Louis out to Utah with a bunch of other students. And it was a long drive, of course, from St. Louis to Utah.
But we decided we were just going to drive straight. So, you know, we're seminary students. We're young, poor. So we drove straight. Just took turns driving, driving, sleeping, sleeping, driving.
[5:12] We had two different cars. Neither of the cars were my car. So I could kind of switch off between cars depending on circumstances and people. And on this trip, I had with me a secret weapon.

My secret weapon was a book written by a man named Gary Poole called this. The Complete Book of Questions. A thousand and one conversation starters for any occasion.
So if you were in the car with me, or more appropriately, accurately, if I was in your car, you got to answer my favorite questions. And question 405 of 1001 is this.
If you were able to retrieve only one item on the way out of your burning home, what would it be? Survival. Explain. Now, item, by the way, means it's an inanimate object. So you are not allowed to name a family member. You are not allowed to name a pet.
[6:20] Those are not items. And the question, of course, reveals a lot. What sort of person are you? Are you a practical person? You know, you do say, well, I take my passport. Of course, that might not mean you're practical.

It may just mean you love to travel. Or are you a sentimental person? Do you say, well, I have to take the family photo albums that cannot be replaced, right? Or the letters that I cannot replicate. The question forces you to answer, you know, what is most valuable to you? What is irreplaceable? What can you not afford to lose?
Of course, it's hard because the question says one item, not three items. I don't make the rules. Okay. This passage before us this morning is about that same thing.
What is it that you can lose in this world? And what is it that you cannot lose? What matters more?
[7:19] What matters less? What matters the most? No matter what happens in this life, there's one thing that you want to keep. That's God's love.

The passage is telling us even more than that. It's not just that that's one thing that you want to keep. It is one thing that you will keep. It's the question Paul is asking in verse 35.
Is there anything that we can do to lose God's love? Is there anything that someone else might do to take God's love away from us?
That's what he's asking at the beginning of 35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? And then he lists some options. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword.
Now some people focus in on each of those items and try to figure out what's different between them. That's not wrong, but perhaps it misses the forest for the trees because Paul's larger point in having this list is to highlight the most extreme sufferings of this world.
[8:28] Whatever you go through, the worst thing that can happen to you in life, it fits into one of these categories. Paul then, in verse 36, goes on to help us understand he's not exaggerating.

Telling us in 36, hey, these things actually really could happen to you. And he does that by reminding us of the potential for suffering as a Christian.
Verse 36, as it is written, For your sake we are being killed all the day long. We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.
And Paul there is quoting from the Old Testament. He's quoting from Psalm 44, verse 22. And the psalmist is saying, Look, God, we are suffering because we belong to you.
The New Testament would put it this way. We're suffering because we're Christians. I mentioned this before. The New Testament repeats this in 2 Timothy chapter 3. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
[9:40] So the question is, hey, will we be able to hold up if and when persecution comes? Is God powerful enough to sustain us through that?

Is God so faithful that we will be able to persevere? Is verse 28 of Romans chapter 8 really true? Will God actually work all things, and we mean all things, for our good? Are verses 29 through 31 actually true?

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Does God actually guarantee that those he chooses, he elects, really go all the way to glorification? Can we survive the worst forms of suffering?
Or will they take us? Will they take us under? It's more, verse 37 gives us the answer.
[10:43] Will we mess it up? No. No, the worst suffering in the world, persecution for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ, is not powerful enough to separate you from God's love.

Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, and nakedness, danger, and sword are no match for God's steadfast love.
Paul tells us, though, it's more than a no. It's not that it just, it won't tank you. Actually, all of those things will result in you coming out on top.
Those things are actually going to work out really well for you. Verse 37 again, In all these things we are more than conquerors. Now what does it mean to be not just a conqueror, but more than a conqueror?
Well, it means that verse 28 of Romans chapter 8 is true. If all things work for our good, and they do, all of these things, all these sufferings, will result in our good as well.
[12:11] God will use them. God will use tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, and nakedness, danger, and sword. God will use them as part of your ultimate glorification.

So it's not just that these things can't separate you. No, they're actually going to be at work for your good. There's a concept that's become recent, popular in recent years called antifragility.
It's actually a new word coined by a man named Nassim Tlaib, who wrote a book by the same name. And if something is antifragile, it is the opposite of fragile, which is to say suffering actually makes it more powerful.
Hardship, if something is antifragile, hardship is for its benefit. The classic example is the muscles in your body. If you lift heavy weights, you get micro tears in your muscles, and what happens? You get stronger. So your muscles are not fragile, they're antifragile. Suffering and hardship make them greater and better.
[13:21] Paul is telling us the same thing is true of the Christian life. When we encounter suffering, when we encounter tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, and nakedness, or danger, or sword, it grows and increases our faith.

It works for our good. Those things increase and multiply the fruit of the Spirit in your life. Those things mean that your eyes are more easily fixed on heaven.
Those things mean our trust in God grows and grows and grows. So those things, they're not, it's not just that they're not going to separate you from the love of God.
They're actually going to make you more than a conqueror. They're going to make your faith stronger than ever before. By the way, when Paul says more than a conqueror in the Greek, it basically means you're going to be a super winner.
You're not just a regular winner. You're a mega winner. Okay? To be a Christian is to be antifragile. It's more than winning. It's actually a net positive.
[14:30] All those things are going to end up for your good. In 1967, the pastor, Richard Wurmbrand, published his book called Tortured for Christ, and it told his story of 14 years in a communist prison, or communist Russia, and he had suffered there for his faith in Christ.

He was a pastor. He was sharing the good news of the gospel, so they threw him in prison. And in it, he tells the story of a woman named Veria. Veria converts to Christianity. She becomes obsessed with her new faith, and she is sharing it constantly.
And so because of that, she gets thrown into a Russian labor prison. Okay? She's in a slave labor camp. While she's in this slave labor camp, under communist Russia, she writes a couple letters that Richard records in his book, and there's an excerpt from one of them on the back of your worship guide.
She's drawing here from Romans chapter 8. Who can separate us from the love of God in Christ? Nobody and nothing. Neither prison nor suffering.
The suffering that God sends us only strengthens us more and more in the faith in him. My heart is so full that the grace of God overflows.
[15:59] At work, and when she says at work, that's a euphemism. She's saying in my slave labor camp under communist Russia, okay, at work, they curse and punish me, giving me extra work because I cannot be silent.

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And what is it that she's not silent about? It's not her love for marinara sauce. She can't be silent about the grace of God in Jesus Christ.
And when she refuses to be silent about the grace of God in Jesus Christ, they curse and punish her, giving her extra work. I must tell everyone what the Lord has done for me.
He has made me a new being, a new creation of me who is on the way of perdition. Can I be silent after this?
No, never. As long as my lips can speak, I will witness to everyone about his great love.
[17:05] And that's verses 36 and 37. Verse 36, she's suffering for the name of Jesus Christ. Verse 37, that suffering doesn't separate her from the love of God.

In fact, it does something even more. It makes her more than a conqueror. Her faith is greater than it was before. She's a super winner. God is using her as part of his mission.
By the way, that was the last letter she sends. And Warren Brand goes on to tell us she was never heard from again. Baria was more than a conqueror through him who loved her.
That's Paul's next statement in verse 37. He answers the question, how or why is it that this suffering actually increases our faith, grows our faith? It is through him who loved us.
Now, commentators make a big point of the fact that loved is in the past tense. Could have easily said him who loves us currently, right? Which is true. God does love his people currently.
[18:28] But the past tense is to emphasize what God has already accomplished through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul's reminding us he's presenting the greatest act of God's love, which is what Jesus did for us on the cross.

That's the love that we don't want to be separated from. That, by the way, is how Paul defined God's love earlier in the book. Remember, Romans chapter 5, verse 8, God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
So this is not touchy-feely love. This is not abstract love. This is not vague love. It's not love as an idea or a concept or a philosophy. No, Paul's saying you know Jesus' love because of what he did. You know it because of what he did in the past. And Romans chapter 8 is now cataloging the consequences, the effects, the impacts, the benefits, the privileges of that love.
So when we say that we cannot be separated from the love of God in Jesus Christ, we are saying this. It means that you cannot lose what Paul taught about in Romans 8, verse 30.
[19:43] You cannot be separated from glorification. You will have a perfect body and you will be sinless in the presence of God. It means you cannot be separated from the reality of verse 28.

You cannot lose the fact that all things in your life work together for good. It means you cannot lose what we talked about last week, verses 32 through 34, your protection against successful accusation and successful condemnation.
Nothing can take that away from you. It means you can't lose verse 18, that your glorious future in heaven, remember the future against which it is not worth comparing the present, can't be lost.
It means that no matter what comes, verses 26 and 27 are true for you, that God's Holy Spirit is groaning for you, praying on your behalf to God the Father with groans too deep for words.
That is the love that you cannot lose. It means that verses 14 through 17 of Romans chapter 8 are true and cannot disappear, that you are God's child who's been adopted with a glorious future and inheritance.
[21:01] That is what it means that you cannot lose the love of God. All the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Because that's what chapter 8 is. Remember, chapter 8 is life in the Spirit, life basking in the love of God.
Life lived with all the benefits that come with being a child of God. Now, Paul has listed persecution and suffering.
He then goes on to list everything else. This is verses 38 through 39. 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.
Now, commentators love to talk about what is the difference between height and depth and angels and rulers and what kind of rulers are these? And when we think about things present and things to come, like how do we distinguish between those?

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[22:15] The point is not to hyper-focus on any of those obstacles. The point of Paul is to capture everything. Paul's goal here is to be comprehensive.

You think of something that can separate you from God, it's on the list. Whatever you come up with. You know, I was a school teacher for a while and you have kids raise their hands and just say the craziest things.
Yeah, but what if such and such and such? It doesn't matter. Anything, everything, whatever you think of, it cannot separate you from God's love. And just in case Paul thinks he might have missed something, he adds at the very end, verse 39, nor anything else in all creation.
Okay, that's Paul being a really good lawyer. Okay, you think you can find a loophole? Well, I got the anything in all creation clause. So you're done, okay?
You think you can find something that can separate for you from God? I've covered it all. This contract is watertight. It's impenetrable. I am the best lawyer you will come up against.
[23:30] No, nothing, nothing that you imagine, nothing that you fear will get in the way. Now, this passage lists a lot of bad things.

And it doesn't say that those things won't happen to you. It doesn't say you won't have persecution or tribulation or trials. It says they won't thank you.
It says that no matter what happens, no matter what you lose, you can't lose what matters most. No matter what someone in this world can touch in your life, they can't touch this.
Whatever happens with artificial intelligence or the stock market or Iran or your marriage or your kids, none of it will separate you from the love of God.
Verse 39, Paul gives us a clarifying category. He says we'll be able to separate us.
[24:43] Us is not everyone. Us is Paul's audience, that is the Christians in the churches in the city of Rome, and by extension, Christians throughout time and around the world.

So the promise is for those who love God and follow him in faith. Is that you?
Do you want the type of security that Paul speaks of here? Do you want to know that no matter what you come up against here, now, or in the future, and no matter what you fear from the past, God's love cannot be lost?
If you want that, you can have it. But it is for those and only those who follow Jesus in faith. It's the great inheritance, blessing, the promise for Christians.
Romans is the fifth gospel. And whatever Paul teaches, Jesus taught first. John chapter 16.
[26:12] I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. It's a promise, by the way. People like to talk about claiming the promises of God.

Never heard someone claim the promise that they will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world. Jesus has overcome the world.
Nothing can separate you from his love. Romans is the fifth gospel. What Paul teaches, Jesus taught first. John chapter 10.
My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand.
My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all. And no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
[27:18] I and the Father are one. I started out this morning by telling you about question 405.

If you were able to retrieve only one item on the way out of your burning home, what would that be? Explain. Praise God.
It is not our job to rescue God's love out of a burning building. Instead, the very opposite is what is true. It is God who rescues us.
We can't lose it, no matter what comes. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you for the greatness of your love in Jesus Christ.
We ask that you would help us to understand it, to comprehend it, to see it, and that it would change our lives from the inside out. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.
[28:26] Amen.

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