

A Sermon about Nothing!

This is a sermon about nothing, not one thing. I want you to remember nothing, I hope you'll talk about nothing afterward. But as Paul will help us see in Romans 8:31-39, this nothing is really something.

CONTEXT: WHAT SHALL WE SAY TO THIS.

However, before we get to nothing there is something we have to understand. Paul starts v31 with "What then are we to say about these things?" Paul has been talking about something.

The end of the previous verse, v30 which speaks God glorifying those who has called. Paul is coming to end of a long argument or story, which I have been characterising as the tale of Team Adam, Sin City and Team Jesus, Grace United. In so doing he is telling our story but also a much bigger story of the whole creation. It is a story of how the championship is won and what the impact of that victory.

It is the story how God in his great, enormous stupendous love will glorify those who as part of Team Adam refused to give glory to God (1:21) and likewise fell short of God's glory. For those who come on to Team Jesus we now have the hope of the glory of God. (5:2) For those who are called on to the team, God calls them his children, justifies them and will glorify them. It is so certain from God's perspective that Paul puts it in the past tense.

That is the personal side of the story but there is also the cosmic story. Due to the defeat, or fall of Team Adam the whole of creation has been frustrated and blighted and Paul pictures it as groaning waiting for that defeat to be turned around "obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." 8:21. The victory of the Team Jesus, which is one way of picturing "the glory of God"; is not just good news for the those on the team it is wonderful news of liberation and fulfilment for the whole of the created order. That is what God's love is achieving and will achieve. It is both a personal and cosmic and it is unstoppable.

The Christian hope is not simply that we have hope for a future, there is hope for a hope filled future. God will do what in his love he has always promises and rescue and restore all his creation blighted by Team Adam through the victory of Team Jesus. These are the "these things" that Paul wants us to consider, and I hope you can see they really are something, and I hope you will see the lead to our nothing.

IF GOD IS FOR US WHO CAN BE AGAINST US? (31)

Paul responds to this something by asking 5 questions, the first 4 of which I have grouped under the first, if God is for us, who can be against us?

The image that this brings to my mind as I think about the question is a school playground, there are a bunch of boys picking on the smaller boys and they start heading towards one boy who seeing them approach runs off. The older boys start to laugh but are then surprised to see the little boy coming back with another, larger, much larger, boy. This boy has a remarkable resemblance to Arnold Schwarzenegger and Claude van Damme combined, he doesn't say anything he just stands behind the little boy who says, "If my brother is for me, who can be against me?"

Will he not give us all things? (32)

Paul's next questions shows how much God is on our side: he gave over his own Son for us. Stop for a moment, consider what the cost, he gave over his own Son. Is there anything more he could give? We are treasure in the field, we are the pearl of great price, God has given all he has for us. (Matthew 13:44-47)

Going deeper at the beginning of the letter God had given over rebellious humanity to impurity and degrading passions as an outworking of his judgement. But now on behalf of this sinful humanity lost in its own depravity he gives over his Son.

Having given his own Son will he not give us all things, not the grand sweep. He will give us all that humanity was supposed to have, eternal life, ruling over creation with God. That is our sure hope based on what God has given us. Will he not finish what he has started, he has already made a fairly major investment in us, To slightly misquote a recent U2 song, God's love is bigger than anything it is way.

Into court

Paul then uses a courtroom image to further drive the point home. Paul loved law imagery, he often uses it, but this is a courtroom with a difference.

Who will bring any charges? (v33)

It doesn't matter who brings charges. It is God who justifies, that it is God who is the Judge, and we know that he is for us. In fact at the start of chapter 8 we already know the outcome of the court case, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. By use of the phrase of "God's elect" we are further reminded that the court is already firmly in our favour.

Who is to condemn? (v34)

This question has already been answered in the previous verse, but Paul drives home his point. Not only is the Judge on our side, but so is the prosecuting counsel. Jesus Christ, who knows what we have been through even to the point of death has been raised to the right hand of God and is putting our case for us.

To put it bluntly the court is utterly and complete bought, it is in the pocket, our situation is secure. The judge has not only declared the verdict in advance but also demonstrated it to be true in the raising of his son. Again, this is really something.

WHO SHALL SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST?

This is important as move into the next section, where Paul asks his final question. Considering the death-defeating love that God has already shown and that the heavenly judge has found in our favour who shall separate us from his love in Christ?

Paul then lists a number of possible contenders. "hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" (Romans 8:35).

You may think that Paul has said enough but he has one last salvo to make his point in v38. He tells us that he is convinced (for language lovers he uses the perfect passive form, really, really convinced) that 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. Nothing and note the cosmic nature of the list. Nothing in all creation.

It is difficult to think of a more comprehensive list and there is comfort in every phrase, each one of these can be the cause of great insecurity. Are you worried about death, it cannot separate you from the love of God. Are you worried about the sickness of and in this world. Nope. Are you worried about dangerous world, Nada. Spiritual attack, nicht. Think of anything that worries you, makes you feel insecure. It cannot separate you from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord. Not one thing. Nothing.

That is why this is a sermon about nothing, because I really want you to grasp nothing, nothing can separate us from the love of God. From this sermon I want you to remember nothing!

Here we see the wonderful triumph of love. Roman's started by showing the absolutely certain fact that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Now

there is the equal certainty of sharing the glory of God. What has changed the death and resurrection of Jesus and our unity with him. In the love of God there is true security. God's love is bigger than anything in its way.

WHAT THEN ARE WE TO SAY ABOUT THESE THINGS?

In response to this nothing there are somethings we can say.

Victory in suffering

Firstly we need to be clear Paul is not saying there will not be hardship, distress, persecution or peril, Paul should know the list is a bit like a mini autobiography of his suffering for the gospel. Rather when these things happen, we are to realise this does not mean that God has abandoned us. His cosmic rescue plan is still underway.

More than that it can be through those trials that we play our part. I have skipped over the famous saying by Paul that "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God". We need to read the context for understanding what Paul means by "good" which is "to be confirmed to the image of his Son."

Paul has found in his own experience and what he wants us to grasp is that we have victory through suffering as it was for Jesus. It is in the midst of trials and tribulations that we are made more like Christ and prepared for glory. I pray this will change your view of the trials of life but also remind you that as we pray in these times Romans 8 tells us that both the Spirit and Jesus intercede, that is pray with us. Something should come out of these tough times, they should make us more like Jesus. Things don't happen for nothing.

Through all things that happen to us God is helping us be a better play for Grace United and into the glory which awaits, and nothing will stop that victory and so nothing now or then shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Love is bigger than anything in its way.

Are we convinced?

Which leads to the final and most important question. Are you really, really convinced that nothing can separate us from God's love? It really, really would be something if you were and nothing should stop you being so convinced.

How can we be convinced? Firstly we look to Jesus, our team captain and risen Lord. Without the resurrection we have a vague hope, a speculation. Christianity might be a message of be nice to one another and things might just work out but little else. Such a message in our world, particularly now, simply will not do. But in the resurrection of Jesus we know that the verdict has been given, there is no condemnation, a new creation is coming, we know that God is for us, we know that God loves us, and if he is for us who can be against us.

Secondly we have the witness of the Spirit that we are God's children adopted alongside Jesus. Paul said in the middle of the Chapter When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:16-17)

Here are the somethings that leads us to be convinced about the nothing.

It is the objective reality of Jesus' resurrection and the subjective reality of the Holy Spirit which leads to the emotionally charged certainty that God's love for his world and for us is bigger than anything in its way.

How do we know that we are convinced, joy, joy joy joy down in our hearts.

The one thing you can't really do in response to this sermon about nothing is to do nothing. Surely it must move our spirits, lead us to worship, fill us with joy for this nothing really really is something.

Let us pray for God to give us a clearer vision of Jesus and work in us by our hearts to assure us that we are his children. The We should be convinced that nothing can separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing.