

The Thorns of Romans 8

By Pastor Arthur L. Watkins

Verses 35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This part of Romans 8 is the hard part. What we read in verses 1-34 is pleasant and appealing. Verses 1-34 are like a soft pillow for the head of weary Christians, especially Romans 8:28. These verses make us feel good and we love to read them and memorize them. But salvation is like a bed of roses and as beautiful as roses are they have thorns. I had a rose bush in my yard that was beautiful to look at, but it had branches full of thorns that would cut your arms and legs if you didn't handle it right. Salvation is as beautiful as a rose, but roses have thorns and in Romans 8:35-39 we see the thorns. These verses describe the pain and suffering of salvation.

Every thorn found in these verses has been experienced by Christians throughout church history. Today we are not exempt from any of the thorns of Romans 8:35-39 either. Being saved from sin and hell does not save us from pain and sorrow and these verses are proof of that.

In Romans 8 God gives us the total picture of salvation. He shows us the bad along with the good. He shows us both the pleasure and pain of salvation. He does not leave out the bad to make us feel good. Any man God calls to preach must preach both sides of salvation. Not just the pleasures of verses 1-34, but the pain of verses 35-39 also. A pastor has the duty of giving Christians both sides of the story. If he doesn't they will become weary in well doing when trouble and sorrow comes into their lives and sooner or later it will. Many Christians throughout history have become bitter and even mad with God when they suffered tribulation and pain in their lives because some preacher led them to believe that those things

would never happen to them. I have even heard some hyper dispensationalists say that such things as tribulation, famine, distress and the sword *belong to Israel and not the church!*

The Thorns of Salvation

Tribulation

In John 16:33 Jesus said: ***These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.***

In this verse are two promises. Peace and tribulation. We like the promise of peace, but what about the promise of tribulation? They are both promised. As a matter of fact, the promise of peace is given to those who suffer tribulation. Those who suffer tribulation are the ones who need peace the most and in this verse the Lord promised us peace in the midst of our tribulation. He never said he would save us from tribulation. What he promised was his presence and his peace in the midst of it. (Hebrews 13:5-6)

In Acts 14:22 it says that Paul: ***Confirmed the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.***

Between now and the coming kingdom of God the forecast is tribulation. The prospect of entering into the kingdom of God is glorious for then we will enjoy a new body and new heavens and a new earth, but we must remember that tribulation precedes it. The road that leads to the kingdom of God is *Tribulation Boulevard*. If you are a true Christian, you cannot escape tribulation. Paul never said we would escape tribulation. Over and over again he told us that tribulation is in our future. Paul said to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 3:4: ***When we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.***

When people were converted under his ministry he told them up front they would suffer tribulation and so should we. Many preachers today have led members of the church to believe that they will not suffer tribulation. Tribulation is a dirty word in many churches, especially American churches. They don't want to hear it because it makes them uneasy. But if you read the Pauline epistles you will see he warned the church over and over again that we will suffer tribulation.

Distress

In 1 Thessalonians 3:7 Paul wrote: ***Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith.***

The word distress means; affliction, calamity, and misery. Distress affects the mind more than the body and sometimes it can be worse than physical pain. Distress is being perplexed, not knowing what to do or where to turn for help in a time of great need. It's a feeling of helplessness. It is being in such a bind that you do not know what to do or who to turn to. Christians throughout history have suffered distress from their trials and persecutions. Paul said he was plagued by; *fightings without and fears within* in 2 Corinthians 7:5.

Persecution

2 Timothy 3:12 says; ***Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.***

In these days of apostasy most Christians believe that health, wealth and prosperity are signs of godliness. If someone enjoys health, wealth and prosperity people say it's a sign they are godly and God must be blessing them. But Paul said just the opposite. He said that persecution is a sign of godliness. This is totally foreign to what most Christians are taught today. Persecution is a dirty word in the church today especially in the American church. But persecution is a way of life in most nations like North Korea, China, Viet Nam and the Muslim nations where Christians are routinely persecuted for their faith in Christ. Persecution has been the experience of believers in both testaments.

See Hebrews 11:35-38

Famine, nakedness

In 1 Corinthians 4:11-13 Paul wrote: ***Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you.***

I have heard people say that God will not allow his people to go hungry, thirsty or without clothes or shelter. But these verses say otherwise. Being saved did not exempt Paul from all these things. Are we better than he? If we claim to follow Paul should we expect better treatment than Paul?

Should we expect to be treated better than all the believers throughout history who have suffered these things? There were 10's of 1000's of Christians who starved to death during WW 2 in Russia, Japan, Holland, Poland and Germany. What makes us think we are somehow exempt just because we live in the USA?

Perils

Perils are dangers, risks, hazards, jeopardy, and being exposed to injury, loss or destruction from any cause whatever.

In 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 Paul wrote: ***Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.***

The next time you think you have problems read these verses again. There are people today who boast about following Paul and at the same time think they are exempt from the perils he suffered. They think God will not allow these things to happen to them even though they all happened to the man they claim to follow. People who believe such nonsense are living a dream world.

Sword

In the Bible the sword represents death. Verse 36 defines what Paul meant by the sword. It says: ***As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.*** This is a quote from Psa. 44:22. This verse tells us that when we got saved we became like sheep for the slaughter. In other words, we became a target of the enemies of God. It says: *we are killed all the day long* which means our lives are in constant jeopardy. We are marked for death.

This is nothing new for suffering death has been the common lot of the saints of God in all ages. In John 16:15-20 the Lord told us: ***If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world***

hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.

One of the ways they persecuted Christ was with the sword. He was killed by the sword of the Roman government. And the Lord said that if they persecute me, they will persecute you. When you become a follower of the Lord you inherit his enemies as well as his friends. His enemies will treat you like they treated him. The servants of Christ cannot expect the enemies of Christ to treat them better than Christ their Master. If they killed our Master with the sword, they can kill us his servants too. And how did they kill him? They crucified him and if crucifixion was the method used to kill him can we expect better treatment? The crucifixion of Christ shows us what God will allow to happen to the servants of Christ. That's a sobering thought isn't?

Throughout history the followers of Christ have suffered at the hands of ungodly men including the sword of death. Every Christian ought to own a copy of the book Foxes Book of Martyrs and read it from time to time to remind them selves of how God's people have been persecuted and killed throughout church history. Reading that book will make you weep, but it will open your eyes to how God's people have been treated throughout the history of the church. Every Christian ought to sign up to receive the monthly magazine sent out by the Voice of the Martyrs ** and see how Christians are being persecuted throughout the world today. Millions of Christians throughout the world today are familiar with the thorns of Romans 8 for they suffer them every day of their lives.

A blessing in the midst of thorns

In the midst of these thorns there is a blessing promised those who suffer them. Verse 37 says; ***Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.*** As bad as these thorns hurt, they do not conquer the Christian. Why?

(1) These thorns do not conquer us because none of these things can separate us from the love of God according to verse 39. When bad things happen to God's people, they should not think they are separated from the love of God. Many times when bad things happen to God's people they have a tendency to doubt the love of God and blame God foolishly. They say; *God if you love me why do you allow me to suffer these bad things? If you loved me you would not allow these things to happen to me.* Sound familiar? But what we must remember is that the Prophets, Apostles and

Christians throughout history have suffered these things and that Christ himself suffered them too.

(2) These thorns do not conquer us because death to the believer is the entrance into eternal life in heaven. How can you threaten someone with heaven?

(3) These thorns do not conquer us because God will reward us for suffering for him and the glory of the reward will exceed the suffering according to Romans 8:18. See also 2 Timothy 2:12

(4) These thorns do not conquer us because all things including the thorns in verses 35-39 work together for our good according to Romans 8:28. God can take the lemons in our life and make lemonade out of them. Christ died a horrible death, but we have life, eternal life as a result of it. Many Christians have been encouraged in their trials and tribulations by the testimony of other Christians who have suffered like things in their life. Remember you will never be a comfort to anyone who is suffering unless you suffer yourself. See 2 Corinthians 1:4-7

The Thorn We Will Never Suffer

Even though we are not exempt from any of the thorns found in Romans 8:35-39 there is one thorn we will never suffer as Christians. In Romans 5:8-9 it says: ***But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.***

As Christians we will never suffer the wrath of God. We may suffer the wrath of man and of Satan, but never the wrath of God. Why? Because Christ suffered God's wrath for us on the cross. God's wrath against our sins was poured out on his Son on the cross. We did the crime, but he paid the fine. When God raised him from the dead he declared he was satisfied with the payment Christ made and now he offers sinners salvation from his wrath if they will repent (Acts 17:30, 20:21) believe and call on him to save them. (Rom.10:9-14)

What God Hath Promised

God hath not promised
Skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways

All our lives thro';
God hath not promised
Sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow,
Peace without pain.

God hath not promised
We shall not know
Toil and temptation,
Trouble and woe;
He hath not told us
We shall not bear
Many a burden,
Many a care.

But God hath promised
Strength for the day,
Rest for the laborer,
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials,
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.

Annie Johnson Flint

** Voice of the Martyrs - www.persecution.com