MORE THAN CONQUERORS

Romans 8:18-39
Key Verse: 8:37

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

In last week’s passage, we learned that in Christ Jesus, there is now no condemnation. We have been freed from the obligation to sin. Instead, we have an obligation as sons, to share in the sufferings of our older brother, Christ Jesus, as shepherds of God’s flock, so that we might also share in his glory. No condemnation in Jesus is indeed the foundation of a new and glorious life as a child of God. It is ours by faith. In today’s passage, Paul compares and contrasts our glorious hope as the children of God with our present reality. It is easy to be impatient for this present reality, with all its groaning and moaning, to pass, and for the glorious future in Christ to come. But we must continue to be patient as we remember God’s undying faithfulness to those whom he has chosen. Those who remember God’s love and grace through Christ Jesus will be recognized as more than conquerors over the present hardships. May God bless us to learn the secret of how to become “more than a conqueror” through a life lived for Christ.

I. Hope for glory (18-27)

First, frustration and hope (18-23). As we studied in the first part of chapter 8, we who are led by the Spirit are Sons of God. Once, we were slaves of our sinful desires. Even if we did our best to live by the truth and serve God’s kingdom, we were powerless to live for righteousness or bear fruit for God’s kingdom. Instead, we bore fruit for death. But now, because of Christ’s sacrifice and death for our sins, we have become sons. We were slaves. But we have become sons by grace. Verse 17 expresses the nature of our sonship in Christ. “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in
his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.” Children are heirs of their parents’ estate. So, as God’s children, we are heirs of God’s riches of eternal life and heavenly glory. Children also have an obligation to participate in the work of their family. So, as God’s children, we have an obligation to participate with our elder brother Christ Jesus in carrying out God’s world salvation purpose. This means that we must be ready to suffer in our lifetime as shepherds of God’s sheep (John 21:15-19), even as Christ suffered death on the cross to take away the sin of the world.

Therefore, as God’s children we are heirs – heirs of suffering and heirs of glory. This is the meaning of being united with Christ in his death and resurrection. But what comes first? Just as death precedes resurrection, so suffering precedes the glory of Christ’s kingdom. For those who have the mind of Christ, the assurance of glory in the heavenly kingdom far outweighs the suffering of the cross. So, Paul confidently declares in verse 18, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” In other words, Paul is saying, “Suffering? What suffering? You call this suffering?” There is no comparison between the temporary and real sufferings of serving God in a world ruled by sin and death, and the eternal and very real glory that will come to those who lived by faith from first to last. This is the promise of Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. This is why Jesus is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). In Jesus, there is an end to suffering, but there is no end to the glory of his kingdom. St. Paul confessed in 1st Corinthians 15:31, “I die every day – I mean that brothers – just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Paul willingly shared in Christ’s sufferings as a shepherd of his flock, because of his sure hope in the crown of glory that was his to claim. Let’s read verse 18 together. “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Nevertheless, Paul, as a practical man, understands the agony of the flesh. In particular, our flesh is painfully aware of
our finite existence in the world. We have only a limited time to live in this world, to bear fruit to God, to enjoy the blessings of God. For a few, brief moments we can forget that our lives will pass, and we can feel that we are alive and free. But they pass like a summer breeze, and then the pressure of time and of our decay and approaching death makes us anxious. As a result, we become impatient, and then groan in the realization that death is coming too fast, while we are moving and growing so slowly. This is not our fate only, but the experience of every person, and indeed of all creation. Look at verses 19-23. “The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Verse 23 emphasizes, “we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for the redemption of our bodies.” Against the frustration of living in a world bound by decay, there is the hope of redemption and the glorious freedom of eternal growth and eternal life in God’s kingdom. Look at verse 24a. “For in this hope we were saved.”

Second, patience in prayer (24-27). Look at verses 24b-25. “But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.” Here, Paul reminds us of the meaning of hope. Hope is not based on what we already have. Hope is based on what we look forward to seeing in the future. What we have is a physical body with a limited strength and time to live here on earth. What we hope for is the redemption of our physical bodies. When we live for our hope, we cannot fix our eyes and thoughts on what we have or do not have. Instead, we must fix our eyes on what is to come, and work for and wait for it patiently. Just like a college student who must take four years of classes before he can graduate or get a job, so the people of God must understand
that it takes a lifetime of preparation before one can inherit the glory and freedom of God's kingdom.

Still, we are weak in our natural selves, and quickly become impatient or frustrated by our limitations. What should we do? Look at verse 26. “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” Perhaps Paul is talking here about praying in tongues. But mostly, we can understand from this verse that God has given us a precious gift in his Spirit. Generally, there is no one who can really understand or appreciate our struggles and agonies while living in this world. But God has given us a companion and counselor in the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-23). If in our frustration we turn to God and humbly welcome the presence and control of the Holy Spirit, he becomes our dearest friend and closest confidant. What we cannot even properly express in words, he interprets and expresses for us to God when we pray in him by faith. This is our greatest privilege as sons, while we are still on earth. We can pray in the Spirit, and by him call out to our Father God, “Abba, Father.” (Ro 8:15) Jesus urged and cajoled his disciples to take advantage of this privilege in John 16:24, “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.” We must learn to pray to God in our weakness, until the mind of the Spirit is what rules and overrules our hearts. Then we can know the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (Ro. 8:6,27; Ph. 4:7).

II. More than conquerors (28-39)

First, God is good (28-30). Ultimately, our problem of self-pity and impatience is a faith problem. We groan and complain at our present situation, because we lack the faith to look up at the Creator God. We need to know more and more the goodness of God in whom we have believed. Look at verse 28. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” This is the faith
of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. This is the faith that enables men to overcome the world. We know the story of Joseph. He was such a good boy. He was a man of noble dreams. But his brothers hated him because he honored God more than their fragile egos. So they conspired to get rid of him, and sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. The brothers tried to cover up their crime by blaming a wild animal for Joseph’s death. But their guilty consciences tormented them for what they had done, until they couldn’t bear to look another day at their grieving father, Jacob. Joseph, on the other hand, was all alone in a foreign land, sold as a slave to the captain of the guard, Potiphar. But Joseph was not helpless in spite of his situation. Joseph looked up and saw the hand of God at work in his life. So Joseph decided to work for the glory of God as a slave in Egypt. Then God blessed everything that Joseph did, until he was exalted and became the chief servant of Potiphar. Potiphar’s bored and lonely wife wanted to enjoy Joseph when no one was watching. But Joseph didn’t think that he was alone. He knew that God was watching him. What is more, he did not calculate why God had made him serve as a slave in Egypt when he could have married and had kids if he had remained in Canaan with his father. Joseph trusted God who is good. So he did not covet what God had not given him. And he would wait patiently on God rather than live to please his sinful nature. Joseph’s spiritual attitude really made Potiphar’s wife feel like a dirty rag. In her spite, she falsely accused Joseph, and had him put in prison. But Joseph continued to wait on God. Even in prison, he worked hard until God led him to interpret the dreams of Pharaoh’s chief cupbearer and baker. Finally, he got his chance to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams about the 7 years of plenty and of drought. But he did not think that it was Pharaoh who could set him free from prison. He said, “I cannot do it, but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires” (Ge 41:16). Pharaoh was amazed by Joseph’s faith. He said, “Since God has made all this known to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you” (Ge 41:39-40). Look again at verse 28. “And we know that in all things God
works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” When Joseph held on to this simple faith, then God made him second in command in Egypt, and a good shepherd for the whole world.

Students are often afraid of being called on or chosen, thinking that they don’t want to be shamed, humiliated or burdened with additional responsibilities. They think that to not be called is to be free. But God’s calling is not like that. Look at verses 29-30. “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” God’s choosing is not frightening or fearsome, like we might think. God’s choosing is our best and only hope. God’s choosing is the assurance of God’s favor upon our lives. God’s choosing is the promise of God that what he has begun in us will certainly be carried out to completion. John 15:16 says, “You did not choose me, but I choose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.” We must not despise God’s choosing and purpose for our lives. We must thank God for God’s choosing, and for God’s good purpose which he is carrying out in our lives. May God use us as instruments here on campus, until all WIU students may know that God has chosen them for his good purpose and glorious hope to be kings and priests in this sinsick and adulterous generation.

Second, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (31-39). Many people are convinced by their hard lives that God is against them, and does not want to bless them. But God’s gift of the Spirit, and the evidence of his choosing in our lives convince us that God is not our enemy. Rather, God is our defender in a hostile world. And if God is on our side, what have we to fear? Look at verse 32. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?” As a young man, I worked at a gas station for a boss that everybody loved because of his fair treatment and
hard-working spirit. As a result, we were willing to do anything so that he should not have to do the menial or trivial tasks of running the station. Such a good boss should not have to clean up after our messes or failures! Our Creator God made a beautiful world with so many kinds of creatures and plants and so many beautiful things to look at. He created us, not for a lowly purpose, but to be stewards and rulers of the world that he had made. But we loved our sinful desires more than God, and so ruined God’s creation, causing him to bring it under a curse instead of the blessing he intended for it. This lovely God did not deserve and should not tolerate such treatment from his creation, man. But God in his great mercy did not merely tolerate man’s sinfulness. God did not spare even his own Son so that he might take away our sins and justify us for the sake of his holy name. God had to watch his beloved Son die for the sake of his ungrateful and sinful creation. If God gave us his best in the time of our greatest weakness, then there can be no doubt that he will give us all things as we grow and conform to the image of his beloved Son. Let’s read verse 32 together. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

There will be many who will challenge our faith in God’s calling and love for us (31, 33, 34, 35). There will be trials and difficulties in our lives of faith. Look at verse 36. “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” In fact, the closer we draw to God and to his kingdom, the more we live to fulfill his purpose for our lives, instead of gratifying the desires of the sinful nature, the more opposition we will face from the world. But we cannot be sorry. For God makes us more than conquerors over all these things when we hold firmly to him in faith in his love. Look at verse 37. “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” What is more than a conqueror? Worldly conquerors fight to advance their selfish ambition. And what they gain they eventually lose. Jesus’ people do not fight the worldly battle to advance their selfish ambition. Jesus’ people fight the spiritual battle to conform to the likeness of God’s Son in the
face of the fierce opposition of our own sinful nature and the power of sin and death at work through the devil. But when we fight this battle not with our own strength, but trusting in God’s love, God gives us the victory, and we grow in a godly character leading to eternal life. We can be more than conquerors when we fight and win the battle to know and show God’s love by faith, to the end. After washing Judas’ feet and sharing his bread, Jesus watched Judas go out into the night to betray him to the chief priests and the elders. Then Jesus prayed, saying, “Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him” (John 13:31). Jesus loved Judas to the end. In this way, Jesus showed that he loved God more than his own life, and he became more than a conqueror as the Messiah of the world. May God bless you to know and practice this love.

Let’s read verses 38 and 39 together: “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither 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.” May God bless us to remain in God’s love patiently, until our hope in God is realized, and we and our nation are transformed into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.