

“God Is For Us”

Sometimes it seems impossible to believe. Jesus’ own disciples were in a boat once when a huge storm whipped up on the Sea of Galilee. They knew that Jesus, who happened to be sleeping in the same boat, was their Lord and Savior. But sometimes it seems impossible to believe. Their voices were filled with despair and terror as they cried out for help. When Jesus awoke, what seemed so impossible happened right before their eyes: he spoke, and the winds and waves stopped.

Back in Old Testament times, Abraham found himself in what seemed like an impossible situation. He had God’s promise that from his dearly beloved son, Isaac, the Savior would be born. And he had God’s instruction to him: take Isaac to a certain mountain and sacrifice him. It seems impossible from a human perspective that God could carry out his promise and at the same time make this request. Abraham is a shining example of what faith should look like, because he simply assumed that God would do the impossible. He would find a way that Abraham could sacrifice his son and yet have that son be the Savior’s ancestor. Abraham assumed, the book of Hebrews tells us, that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

Sometimes it seems impossible to believe, or that we’re being asked to believe the impossible. Seventeen students get shot down at their school. A whole community, really a whole nation connected to it, mourns. Yet the Bible tells us that God is in control, that he is loving, that he will use everything to serve the good of his people. But it seems impossible to believe!

And then we look into our own hearts and lives. And no, we haven’t taken a gun to fire on innocent schoolchildren, but we see and know the evil that comes out of our hearts: the hatred and jealousy, the lies. We know how we get into petty arguments and how we have deep dark secrets that we will never tell anyone else about. And yet God asks us to believe that he loves us. And it seems so impossible. We feel that the only people who could possibly love us are the people who don’t know us as well as we know ourselves. But God says he knows us even better, and he loves us still!

Our sermon text today from Romans chapter 8 is an amazing promise of God that seems too good to possibly be true. It seems impossible to believe. But it’s not just a promise. God has stood behind his Word. He’s proven it to us. He loves us. He is not our enemy. He is our friend. God is for us!

Our text uses that little word, “If.” **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** What is implied by that statement and made explicit later is God certainly is for us. He has our best interest in mind. He wants to do good to and for us. He is on our side. These words from our text come shortly after that amazing promise of God that he works out all things to accomplish good for the people he has called to faith (See Romans 8:28). These words build on that promise. They drive home the point. No, we don’t deserve to have God on our side. We haven’t earned his friendship. We haven’t done enough in our lives to convince him that we’re worth loving. In fact, it is quite the opposite. And you know it. If you are honest with yourself, if you judge yourself the same way that you judge other people, you know that God should be your enemy and not your friend.

But this is God’s love: that in spite of what you have done, God is for you. And he proved it by sending his Son for you. Think about what that means. Did you put yourself in the shoes, in the sandals, of Abraham in our First lesson? Did you think about what that must have been like to hold a knife in your hand and to aim its sharp point and its razor edge at the throat of your own child? Can you imagine the mental and emotional anguish? But that’s what God did. He sent his Son into a world of evil and suffering and sorrow. And he pointed the weapons of his anger at Jesus. He allowed him to suffer the anguish of hell that the sins of the world demanded. He did it so that those weapons would never have to aim your direction.

And if he did all of that for you, what good thing would he possibly withhold from you? Look again at Abraham in our First Lesson. If he was willing to sacrifice even Isaac his Son, then it was clear that God was above all things in his heart. There was nothing that he wouldn't offer to God. How much more will God who loves us graciously give us everything that would serve our best interests!

But the devil and the world still tell us otherwise. Our own hearts still think at times that we know better than God does. God must be keeping things from us. He doesn't let our lives turn out exactly the way that we want them to turn out. He doesn't let us be happy all the time. He leaves us to struggle through difficult times, to wrestle with hard decisions, and at times to battle fierce temptations.

But look at how much he loves us! Look at Jesus his Son battling with Satan in the wilderness. Look at Jesus struggling against temptation and overcoming it! This is what he does for you and for me.

And that work of Jesus follows us into God's courtroom. **"It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one."** To justify is a courtroom term. It means to declare not guilty. And it's talking about us. We stand accused. We know we are guilty. But there is Jesus. "I have taken their guilt on me," he says. "I have suffered the punishment. I have done it willingly. I did it for him and for her and for all of them. There's nothing left to punish. There's nothing left to condemn. There's no one who can make another charge against them." And so the almighty judge pounds his gavel and declares you not guilty! And you can look around the courtroom, and you can wait for someone to appear to say, "But I saw this and I know that." And even your own conscience is burning to accuse you of sin. But God says no. Not guilty. You are free to go.

You are free because Jesus died for you. And he rose again. And he stands in the courtroom of God's justice to plead your case based on what he has accomplished. This is what it means that God is for us! He put this whole plan into action. He is going to see it through.

And that's why the rest of our verses simply pile on descriptions of the amazing extent of God's love. They describe how firmly and how fully that love encompasses our lives. These words tenderly reassure that God loves us not only now, but forever. They declare the absolute certainty that nothing can ever separate us from that love.

Not trouble or hardship or persecution. Are you going to have bad days? Sure. But never so bad that they are beyond the comfort of God's love that sent his Son for you! Not famine or nakedness. Sure, you may lack something in this life in this sinful world, but never to the extent that you lack God's love and his provision. Not danger or sword. There are Christians still in our world today, just as there have been from the time of Jesus' apostles, who face real, life-threatening dangers because they are Christians. But not even the enemy's sword is enough to sever God's people from God's love in Jesus Christ. Still today Christians can confess with the Psalmist, **"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered"** (Psalm 44:22).

And the list goes on of those things that we may and will face that cannot separate us from God's love: **"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."** There is absolutely nothing that can get in the way of God's love or force it away from us. This is what it means that God is for us. This is an eternal assurance.

Not even death can separate us from God's love. In fact, because of what God has done for us in Christ, death now brings us closer to him. It brings us out of the dark world of sin, where promises like these are nearly impossible to believe, and brings us into the full light of God's glory where everything will be seen as it truly is. And we will know once and for all, and forever, that God is for us.

The Text: Romans 8:31–39 (NIV)

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.