

“More Than Conquerors”

Romans 8:1–17

The challenges of life

The struggles we face. When we became a Christian we share Christ’s victories. We share in his victory over death and we share in his resurrection from the dead. But, seriously, I’m still lumped with all the problems of living in this world and then church is added on for good measure.

Do you feel like a conqueror?

I didn’t feel like a conqueror when Janette had to call the ambulance. My pericarditis story. I didn’t feel like a victor.

I know a pastor who was attacked at a church so he moved to another one. And they chased him down and he ended up taking his own life. There are Christians in many countries who meet in secrecy in fear of their lives. We walk through hardships in life. Our bodies will perish like the rest of those in the world. Are we really victors?

Jesus and Paul. I wonder if Jesus felt like a conqueror when the Spirit led him into the desert and he ate nothing for forty days throughout the pain of his temptations (Luke 4:1-13).

I wonder if Jesus felt like a victor when after he read from the Isaiah scroll in the synagogue the people grabbed him and tried to throw him off a cliff (Luke 4:14–30).

I wonder if Jesus felt happy when he descended from the glory of the mount of transfiguration into a world filled with chaos and then he healed a demon-possessed boy (Luke 9. 28–43).

I wonder if dying on a cross was a “feel good” good bucket-list thing to do? In 2 Corinthians Paul describes aspects of his Christian life. Here’s an extract,

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. (2 Cor 11:25–27).

To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. (2 Cor 12:7–9)

So in what sense are Christians conquerors?

The whole of Romans was written to answer this question. In the first four chapters Paul brings us to the conclusion that only through trusting in Christ can we be forgiven and declared righteous before God. That alone makes us more than conquerors. Then Romans 5 to 8 unravels the life the believer can expect to live.

In chapter 8, Paul outlines the great privileges we have in Christ. He assures us of eternal life in the Spirit. But he does not leave behind the tensions of this world. The apostle relates our sufferings and our pain to the glory which is to come. Paul does this three ways:

- (1) He looks at the Spirit who gives life in verses 1 to 13. He looks at the life we have in the Spirit apart from the law of sin and death;
- (2) Paul looks at the Spirit which adopts us into God's family in verses 14 to 17. We can affectionately call God our Father because we belong to his family;
- (3) Lastly, in verses 18 to 30, Paul looks at the Spirit who one day will glorify. Until that great day the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses.

The Spirit gives life (v. 1–13), the Spirit adopts us into God's family (v. 14–17), and the Spirit helps us as we await our glorification (v. 18–30). Today we are looking at verses 1 to 17, and the remaining of the chapter we will leave for next time.

The Spirit of life

A new life. Verses 1 to 13 of Romans 8 introduces us to the Spirit who gives us life. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death".

When we are justified by faith our legal status changes. We are no longer condemned by God but acquitted by him. We are set free from the law of sin and death. We are free to walk out of the courtroom. But the gospel is more than a legal transaction. It is a relational transaction. God gives us his Spirit who brings us into relationship with him.

Our legal standing before God. Our new relationship with God. Not given to us by the law which is powerless, but by the cross of Christ which is powerful. Verse 3, “For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering”.

The Lord Jesus offered himself for you. He gave himself for you. In February this year, the program “Insight” on SBS had an episode, “A Stranger Saved my Life”.

Tham Lu was 51 and she was reluctant to donate her sister’s organs after she tragically died. But she eventually gave consent. Five years later, in the SBS studio, she met for the first time the recipient of her sister’s lungs. It was 51 year old Tracey Slatter who said to Lu, “I hope you get comfort knowing that what you did has saved my life, it made such a difference to my family. My kids have their mum back. My grandson has got a grandma, and it’s all because of you”.

Jesus didn’t give you his lungs, he gave you every organ. He gave you his life. He saved your life. You can never be the same again. They mocked him. They beat him. They drove nails into his hands. And then his Father in heaven stepped back and the Son cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”?

The price was paid and the Spirit was given. Jesus donated his life and can never be the same again. Ever. Jenny Brockie cried that night and she apologised. She didn’t need too. Giving someone life is an amazing act of love. Jesus came and he gave his life and he gives you his Spirit.

We cannot dare for one moment ruin what has been given to us.

The Spirit-led person defiantly rejects a life which satisfies the sinful nature. One cannot be a Christian on Sunday and someone else through the week. The cross of Christ is the line in the sand. My life before Christ—my life after Christ. My life in the realm of the flesh—my life in the realm of the Spirit. Before

the cross a life controlled by the sinful nature and destined for death. After the cross, a life lived according to the Spirit.

We're not there yet. At the present time our bodies are still subject to decay because of sin. Verse 10. We still battle with our sinful natures even as the Spirit gives us life. But it won't always be this way. What we know to be true is not yet fully seen. There is hope for the future. The Spirit within us testifies to the promises of God.

Even though we still wrestle with the remnants of our sinful natures, God promises that this time will come to an end. We think things we don't want to think. We do things we don't want to do. Our bodies get sick, really sick, and prefer this not to happen. And Paul says don't be like the rest of the world and live without hope. Verse 11, "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you".

If you are justified by faith, you have the Spirit of God within you, and this Spirit will give life to your mortal bodies. Paul moves on to explain more about the Spirit in verses 14 to 17.

The Spirit adopts us into God's family

Adopted into God's family. Once we were "in Adam", belonging to the wrong family. The family of sin and death. Then we were declared righteous and given the Spirit of life. Yet the Spirit gives us more than life, he gives us life in the context of "sonship" and "daughter-ship".

Imagine being adopted into a really rich family. Instant wealth. Hugh Jackman and his wife (slide) adopted Oscar Maximilian in 2000, and Ava Eliot in 2005 when they were both infants. *People* magazine reported that when meeting with the adoption official, they were asked which race of child they were hoping for, and they selected mixed-race. Evidently mixed-race children are the hardest to find families for. The Jackman's were determined and they chose to adopt Oscar who is of mixed race. The couple are worth an estimated \$US100 million.

Two children went from not having a future to having love and riches. And Oscar and Ava did nothing to merit their new found family. Someone reached out to them. God reaches out to us and gives us his riches and brings us into his family. His Spirit is the Spirit of life and his Spirit is the Spirit of sonship.

Look with me at verse 14,

... those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 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.

The Holy Spirit not only changes us but gives us a new standing before God. We are in God’s family. We are children of God. We are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. We can call God most affectionately, “Abba, Father”. (Not “Abba” the singing group, but “Abba” as an intimate term expressing close relationship with God).

The path of suffering. God grants us the full rights and privileges of sonship in his family. But we do not yet experience the full benefits of our adoption. Right now we are sons and daughters of God. Right now we are led by the Spirit as we wrestle with our old selves. But we are yet to receive our inheritance. This is our hope for the future. And Paul puts it very plainly in verse 17, “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”.

Why does Paul introduce the idea of suffering at this point? It comes suddenly and unexpectedly. But it is the ordained path to glory. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:17–18, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

There are two basic things to remember about suffering.

First, suffering is necessary. Most of us don’t experience that kind of suffering we call persecution. But we all know suffering. We suffer when we lose a husband or wife or other family member through death. We grieve when life itself or our friends or children disappoint us. We groan under pain, trauma, and sickness. We are hurt by prejudice, poverty, or sometimes a lack of rewarding work. The list is endless. Honesty did not allow him to talk about our inheritance without at the same time acknowledging that the path to glory involves a cross.

Second, although suffering is necessary (and has value), suffering is not the end of the story for Christians. Glory is! If suffering were the end, the gospel would be a form of masochism, suffering for suffering's sake. Since it is not the end, since suffering is the path to glory, the gospel offers genuine hope and effective consolation.

In our troubles we can be pushed two ways. We can get angry and resentful and call into question God's goodness. Our suffering can push us away from him. Or our suffering can produce perseverance, and our perseverance character, and with godly character we long for the time when this world will end and the whole of creation is glorified.

So let's hang in there! And let's encourage one another as we run the race and fight the long battles.

Through the sufferings and pain of life, do you feel as though God has let you down? Philip Yancey once wrote a book called, "Disappointment with God". And another writer, James Montgomery Boice, reflected on this title. How could any Christian possibly be disappointed with God? (slide)

Disappointed with God? When he sent Jesus Christ to die for us so that we might escape his just wrath and condemnation?

Disappointed with God? When he sent his Holy Spirit to free us from our own sinful and debilitating natures and join us to Christ?

Disappointed with God? When he has made us his very own daughters and sons, with all the privileges that come from it?

Disappointed with God? When he has drawn us into a great cosmic drama of redemption, in which even the heavens and earth have a part?

Disappointed with God? When the Spirit intercedes for us, conforming our ignorant and incomplete prayers to the good, pleasing, and acceptable will of God?

Disappointed with God? When he has fixed such a lasting love upon us that nothing in all creation can separate us from it?

Disappointed?

Brothers and sisters, whatever are we thinking of? Or is it that we are not thinking? Or thinking only of ourselves? Perhaps our disappointment (if we have it) means only that we are unhappy because God has not done exactly what we wanted him to do when we wanted him to do it, regardless of the fact that he has a much better plan for us and is actually working it out day by day, and will until

the end of time. The only sure cure for our unseemly disappointment is getting our eyes off ourselves entirely and onto God, who has done these great things for us.

Conclusion

The moment we believed in Christ our peace with God was assured; the moment we believed in Christ, God declared us to be holy; the moment we believed in Christ, God set us free from the burden of the law; the moment we believed in Christ we were assured of our glorification.

The glory we inherit in Christ is assured but not brought to completion. We are more than conquerors.

But God assures us that nothing can tear us from his hands—even death. We have the Spirit of life and the Spirit of sonship, and whilst we groan now the best is yet to come.