

First Sunday in Lent – February 22, 2015

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

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We've Got the Questions – God's Got the Answers

Romans 8:31-39 (NIV)

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.

Dear children of God – who have been called, justified and glorified;

How's this for a sign of the times? (*Hold up "Question Mark" sign*) It seems we're living in some rather uncertain times – and uncertain times often raise lots of questions. We might wonder, "Is there anything we can be sure about?" (*Put sign down*) By God's grace don't have to question our salvation so we can put this sign away. In the verses before our text Paul has carefully explained everything that God has done for our salvation: He wrote: (Romans 8:28) **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.** (Romans 8:30) ... **those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.**

(*Hold up sign*) But after telling us this Paul raises a question: **What then shall we say in response to this?** God planned your salvation from eternity – that's a truly comforting thought in the face of the many questions which confront us in our lives today. Let's examine our text a bit more closely using the thought

We've Got the Questions – God's Got the Answers as our theme.

Our text is filled with questions – questions that are on our minds, questions that God asks, questions that may be posed by others. The first question asks: What shall we say in response to all that God has done for our salvation? What impact does this have on our lives? How is this of value to me? How does this fit in with the uncertain times that we are confronted with today? These are some of our questions. Now God, in his inspired word, asks some questions which really become answers to those questions. God's questions are intended to help us find the answers to our questions just like a teacher will ask students questions to help them learn. God's first question to us today is: **If God is for us, who can be against us?** (*put sign down*) God has shown that he is for us by bringing salvation to us. Now since God is for us who could possibly be against us? The obvious answer is: "Absolutely no one! With God on our side no one can be successful against us not even Satan himself. With God on our side – working on our behalf nothing will be impossible for us. Now God has another question for us: (*hold up sign*) **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?** That's a good question but God has the answer. (*Put sign down*)

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus makes this promise: **But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.** The fact that God was willing to offer his Son for our salvation assures us that he will also along with him graciously give us all the spiritual and temporal necessities of life. That's part of God's plan for those he has loved and saved. Jesus is our guarantee for blessings in this life and for the life to come. His sacrifice gives us the right to be God's beloved children. This Lenten season we will be reminded again of that great sacrifice that Jesus offered for us. Christ is the answer to those challenging questions of life. The Lenten message that God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all provides confidence for this life and for the life to come. Christ's sacrifice has removed the sins that separated us from God. He was tempted in every way – just as we are. He's faced the same problems, the same challenges, the same difficulties. He's confronted the same questions we do – and he overcame them all without sin. He has opened the path to God's throne for us. (Hebrews 4:16) **Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.**

(hold up the sign) We've got the questions – God's got the answers. **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?** *(put the sign down)* Once again, God's got the answers. **It is God who justifies.**

Who or what could accuse us before God? God has chosen us to be heirs of salvation. God is the one who has declared us not guilty. Yet there are those who may speak against God's people, shaking our faith, causing us to doubt our faith and our Savior.

The Roman Christians were assaulted by unbelieving Jews and Judiazers who condemned them for not following the OT ceremonial laws. The worldly philosophers and scholars of that day took them task for their foolish beliefs. Even the heathen governors allowed them to be persecuted.

Today Christians enjoy a “legal” status in our country – yet our faith and our values are challenged just as Jesus said would happen: (John 15:18-25) **"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19) If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20) Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21) They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me. 22) If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23) Whoever hates me hates my Father as well. 24) If I had not done among them the works no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. As it is, they have seen, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. 25) But this is to fulfill what is written in their Law: 'They hated me without reason.'**

But Jesus words of encouragement in (Luke 12:32) also apply: **"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."**

The devil and our own consciences try to raise all kinds of questions concerning our salvation. Because of our own sinful nature, we often reflect more on our sins and the punishment that we deserve than we do about God's grace and his forgiveness. We are often our worst accusers, thinking we ought to suffer rather than to hear God's decree of not guilty. When we feel the burden of questions regarding our salvation, God's got the answers. Christ and his saving work on our behalf silence those questions and doubts.

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. The accusations that we should be condemned for our sins would carry a great deal of weight in any courtroom if it were not for three things:

1. Christ Jesus died to pay for those sins; the debt no longer remains.
2. God the Father has accepted his payment as proven by the fact that he raised his Son on Easter morning.
3. Christ is now seated at the Father's right hand pleading our case on the basis of his own merits. And the Father has deferred judgment to him!

With this kind of an attorney pleading our case and in light of these facts there is no way an unfavorable verdict will be rendered against us. God sets aside any questions we might have regarding our salvation – he silences the devil's charges against us.

However there are still more questions: (*hold up sign*) What about the wear and tear of Christian living? Isn't it possible, perhaps even likely that we'll grow weary and lose heart over the long haul? What about persecution and hardship? How will they affect our relationship with God and our salvation? These are serious questions! Who has the answers? God has the answers!

Paul puts the questions this way: **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."** (*put sign down*)

Our situation is exactly like the one Paul speaks about as he quotes from Psalm 44:22. We're like sheep being led to the slaughter. Our life is filled with crosses and burdens that we carry because of connection with Christ. Christ has never promised that we will enjoy heaven on this earth. God's people have always and will always face hardship and disaster yet Paul assures that in all these things we are more than conquerors! **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.**

We will not be overcome – we will be the conquerors – super conquerors is the way our text puts it. But the victory is not accomplished or brought about by anything that we do. It isn't the result of our love or devotion to the Lord. It's the other way around. Remember – we're the ones with the questions, the problems, the troubles. God's the one with the answers, the solutions, the rescue. His love for us will carry the day so that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from him in Christ Jesus. No evil forces like death or demons and no dimension (height or depth) could offset or counterbalance the love God has for us. Wherever we go and whatever the circumstances, God's love is there to protect us as we are reminded in Psalm 139: **You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. 2) You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. 3) You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. 4) Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. 5) You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. 6) Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. 7) Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8) If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9) If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10) even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.**

The blessed resurrection of our Lord assures us that there is nothing in this life or beyond it, no being – good or evil – in the spiritual realm, no time in the present or future, no place so high or low, nothing at all in all creation that can separate us from the love of God which he has proved to us in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are more than conquerors in the face of suffering because God's plan was that the suffering of Christ would bring salvation. That means that our suffering brings maturity, purity, and blessings as Jesus reminds us in the Sermon on the Mount where he promises blessings to the poor in spirit, to those who mourn, to those who

hunger and thirst after his righteousness, to those who are persecuted, insulted and slandered. Christ and his love turn hardships into blessings.

(hold sign) We can be sure that we'll have lots of questions as we go through life. But God has called us, he has justified us, he has glorified us and he has the final answer to all those questions: *(crumple the sign)* So what's God's final answer to all of the questions which we will be called upon to face in our lives. His answer is the unfailing love of Christ who has promised: (Hebrews 13:5) "**Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.**" That's his final answer: Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. Amen.