

Location: First Baptist Church, May 28, 2023
Title: Together Forever
(Theme: We are Never separated from the love of Christ)
Text: Romans 8: 31-39

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ[a] who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor 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.

What a magnificent portion of Scripture we have heard in this morning's reading. Many beautiful passages of Scripture bring us hope and comfort, but it isn't easy to match the grandeur of what this expresses.

We all love the thought of being together with those we love throughout our lives. We miss our loved ones when time and circumstance require us to leave each other, and few things can compare to the joy of being reunited with them when opportunities arise.

Spouses even promise to have and hold each other until death parts us. That is how much we value being with someone we love deeply. But that very phrase involves something that we cannot control. Death will part us all, husbands and wives, parents and children, and even families and friends. Death remains a constant presence in this world that we cannot deny and from which

we cannot run. We have all experienced the painful touch of death that has taken loved ones away, leaving us to continue as best we can. Our hearts long for something that can traverse the Gulf of Death and move us beyond death's ultimate challenge to human beings, and the good news is that there is something that can conquer this last enemy.

The love of Christ is not simply constrained to the limits of this world and life. The apostle Paul speaks here about something that is even greater than death, which can crush death's power. Paul encourages us to celebrate that nothing in all of creation can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ.

Yes, we all have experienced the sorrow of losing those we love, yet even that is temporary for the believer. Indeed, God promises that we, too, shall share in Christ's resurrection and glory. Even as we struggle with the pain of separation now, we receive Christ's promise that he will see us through our present suffering, death itself, and the glory to come. There is nothing we can experience where Christ will not be with us, through which he will not help us.

What an amazing promise from an amazing God! Death is an ever-present reality for all who remain outside Christ's grace. But to those who believe, we have his Word: ***"Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die."*** (John 11:25-26).

Think carefully about that for a moment. Even though your body may die, you will go on living in his presence. As you live in his presence, you will never die. You have become untouchable by death.

Physical death is and will remain a challenge to us all, but life and death are so much more than we can imagine. There is a spiritual and permanent death, but you, as a believer, need never fear that. Death, for us, is a temporary thing. Yes, it is a time of grief and sorrow, but it is a sorrow that can be overcome. The death we know in this life will end someday soon; we will live again (or should I say still) with those we love and, most of all, our Savior and our God.

Indeed we say with Paul, ***"Death has been swallowed up in victory."***
"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15: 55-56).

As you think about your life before God, May the God of peace assure your heart that you will be together forever with him and all you love who have gone before you. ***Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*** (1 Cor. 15:57) Amen