

Conquerors

Romans 8:26-39

INTRODUCTION

There is a legend surrounding the Battle of Marathon in 490 B.C. As with any legend, there are many variations to the story. My favorite one goes like this:

The Athenians were greatly outnumbered by the Persians. Despite their pleas for help from their fellow Greeks in surrounding city-states, no other armies rallied to help the army of Athens. In fact, one neighboring city used the convenient excuse that it was a religious holiday, so the gods prohibited participation in any killing activities.

Since the Athenians were outnumbered 200,000 to 9,000, they decided that their best chance to avoid slaughter was the element of surprise. So, one morning before the Persians could get organized, the Athenians ran the length of the plain, striking the Persians on the front and sides.

Because of the surprise and suddenness of the attack, the Persians had no alternative but to flee to their ships. The battle of Marathon was over quickly. But now the Athenian army was worried that the Persians would opt to attack Athens by sea. They needed to warn the city. And since using their cell phones was not an option, a messenger was needed.

A man named Pheidippides was selected as that messenger because he was the fastest runner in the army. And run he did. He ran the entire distance from the plain to the city, a distance of slightly over 26 miles. It was this event that was the inspiration of the modern-day marathon. Of course, this was not a task for which Pheidippides had trained, and as he entered the city he collapsed in total exhaustion. And sadly he died.

But before he died, he was able to deliver his message to the leaders of the city. It was one word long: Victory. That's the English word. He spoke Greek. You might recognize the Greek word:

NIKE

Throughout this summer sermon series I have been highlighting one word from our lectionary text that best describes the church Jesus created to carry on His ministry once He ascended into heaven. We have used the words CALLED, SENT, ALIVE and ADOPTED so far. Today's word is NOT Nike! But it is Nike-like, found in one of the most loved of all Scripture verses:

No, in all these things we are more than **conquerors** through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

Our word for the day is:

CONQUERORS

Let me make three observations:

#1: IN ALL THESE THINGS

Look at our verse:

No, **in all these things** we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

A devotional writer named Glynda Lomax wrote this insightful piece:

Opportunity may only knock once, but adversity has a lot more patience. It can knock for years.

One day life seems fine and everything is normal and the next thing you know, it throws you a curve ball and you are knocked completely off balance. How do you face each day now? How do you get up tomorrow morning and walk through each hour in agonizing pain and still function? Will you always feel this way? Will the pain ever end or just continue forever?

Few of us can bear the thought of living the rest of our lives in such torment. Those facing a divorce, the loss of lifelong dreams, the loss of a loved one, or a debilitating illness have stood and stared at the giant question mark face to face. How do I get through this? Can I get through this?

In other verses within this text the Apostle Paul listed some of those adversities that come in his category of “all these things.” You heard them read once, but let me share them again, this time in the words of a more modern paraphrase:

Do you think (that any adversity) is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture... None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely *nothing* can get between us and God's love... (Romans 8:35-59, The Message)

I like how that translation captures this text. The good people that publish modern translations of the Bible have never approached me about creating the “Tom version.” If they did, here is how I would translate our memory verse:

No, **in spite of all the stuff we are going through** we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

What a great truth that is. In spite of all the stuff in my life, I am more than a conqueror. The church is a conqueror.

#2: WE ARE MORE THAN

We go back to the way Paul wrote the verse:

No, in all these things **we are more than** conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

I learned something a couple of weeks ago that I don't remember learning in Greek class. But when I heard it I filed it away for this sermon.

- I have already told you that the word for conqueror in this text is Nike.

Nike is the most complete, ultimate word for conquering. There is no higher word.

- In our English language we can always find a word that ups the level. When Karen asks for my opinion on the new recipe she just served for dinner, I can answer "It's good." Good? Very good. But still in the good category? No it's wonderful. It's amazing. It's awesome. It's superb. It's fantastic. It's incredible!
- I'm searching for a word that is the peak of all words, the ultimate in awesomeness.

When you are speaking Greek and it comes to the idea of conquering, Nike is as high as you can go.

There is nothing more than Nike.

Sounds like a commercial. With all apologies to anyone working for Reebok or Adidas who might be listening ...

There's no such thing Nike-er or Nike-est.

So the Apostle Paul is saying that in the midst of all that adversity stuff you are facing, you are going to Nike it – to overcome it. It can't beat you. You won't win by whisker. You will more-than-Nike it.

But when that adversity stuff is surrounding you, it's hard to see that isn't it? Remember what I read just a few moments ago?

Do you think (that any adversity) is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture...

But how is that possible? Observation #3:

#3: THROUGH HIM WHO LOVED US

What does the verse say?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors **through him who loved us.** (Romans 8:37)

Now please understand this text does not teach that Jesus eliminates all of our problems. If they were eliminated there would be nothing to conquer.

You can't conquer a foe that doesn't exist.

By the grace of God, some enemies will disappear and you won't have to fight them.

- There is a great story in 2 Kings 7 about a disappearing army. You need to read it.
- A big problem, but God took care of it and the people had to do nothing.

But some won't disappear. The key point is that the ones you have to fight are conquered THROUGH HIM WHO LOVES YOU.

One of the old commentators says this:

It is only *through Christ that loved us*, the merit of his death taking the sting out of all these troubles ... His grace that strengthens us and enables us to face them with holy courage ... Thus we **are** conquerors, not in our own strength, but in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. We are conquerors because of the victory won by Christ Jesus. He hath overcome the world for us (Jn. 16:33), both the good things and the evil things of it, so that we have nothing to do but to pursue the victory... (Matthew Henry)

In other words, you don't need to be strong. Jesus is.

- You don't need to see clearly what to do next. Jesus does.
- You don't even need to feel like there is hope at the end of the darkness. Jesus is your hope.

The way through every adversity we face is ... through Jesus. He won for us. And that makes us more than conquerors.

APPLICATION

I want to close by telling you about a friend of mine who lived out this text in a way that makes for a perfect closing sermon illustration. His name is Dan Kopp.

Dan and I were in the same college graduating class. We were both ministry majors and both headed toward being pastors in the United Brethren Church. Together we formed the Brodbeck-Kopp comedy team and were the reigning champs for three years, a reign ended only by our college graduation.

About four years ago, Dan went into surgery to have his gall bladder removed. Routine surgery. It during that procedure doctors discovered Dan had cancer in his bile duct that was already at stage 4.

All the normal chemo and radiation treatments began. None of them worked. Dan enrolled in a few trial treatments, but again nothing worked.

Six months after his diagnosis, the battery in one of their cars mysteriously exploded while the car was parked overnight in the garage of their house. The garage, all of its contents, including both cars, were a total loss. Smoke and water damage to the rest of the house made it unlivable.

Dan and his wife Jane stood in the front yard of their home, watching helplessly as firefighters did their duty. And when the fire was finally extinguished, Dan went to each firefighter to thank them and pray for them. And as he did, he held onto his bag of chemotherapy.

Six weeks after that fire Dan died. It was his 65th birthday. And through it all Dan's faith remained vibrant and his testimony was strong.

Some people might look at Dan's situation and wonder how he could possibly endure all of that without growing defeated. I will tell you how. Dan knew that ...

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)

Dan was a conqueror. And so are we. Because we are the church.

Amen