

More than Conquerors
Romans 8:31-39

Brothers and sisters, it is my prayerful hope that what we have learned, over the past three weeks, about God's love from the scriptures... has changed our tendency to define Love against judgment.

If you remember the first week the scriptures taught us that God's Love means that He is kind towards us – in order that we might be lead to repentance.

Then we learned that God demonstrated His love for us in a very specific way - through Jesus' death on the cross – while we were still sinners.

And then last week we learned how judgement and condemnation are different, though we often confuse the two – but that God's love means that for those IN Jesus Christ - there is no more condemnation.

So these are three biblical examples of what God's love is about and all of them encourage us to change our way of thinking so that we start to understand God's judgment as an expression of His love and we are able to both correctly understand AND communicate to others what it means when we say - God Loves You!

So now the question is “is that it?” We correctly understand what it means that God loves us - we know and believe that... so we go on our way and live happily ever after - right?

Well brothers and sisters I wish it were so – but hearing and understanding that God loves us is just the beginning, this is the start of a love story between God and us and the plot still has to play out throughout the remainder of our lives.

And like any good love story the plot revolves around the questions of will this love survive? Will this love thrive? And will it lead to living happily ever after?

Now – if you are familiar with love stories, especially romantic movies, and you have seen the greatest romantic movie of all time – The Princess Bride - then you know the answer to those questions is “IF... it is **TRUE** love, then it will survive and thrive and lead to a happily ever after.”

But that kind of begs the question - how do we know if it is **TRUE** love?

Well in the books and the movies **TRUE** love is distinguished by its ability to survive and thrive in spite of the challenges, opposition and obstacles that it faces, and these trials reveal that there is and has been something qualitative about that love which makes it **TRUE** love, and thus by the end of the story it can be proclaimed *“true love conquerors all!”*

But the catch is that we can only find this out by going through the trials and the tests.

We might think that a particular love is the REAL thing at the start - it seems so pure, so intense, and so authentic – but will

it last? Will it survive? Will it thrive? Will it lead to happily ever after? We can't be certain until it's faced the test of time, and as the rock band Van Halen so profoundly sings *“only time will tell if we stand the test of time.”*

Which may leave us wondering if this how God's love for us works as well? Do we only know for certain that God's love for us was real and true and will survive through the remainder of our lives...when we finally stand before Him in eternity – so that then... and only then can we confidently say *“God's Love conquers all!”*

Well brothers and sisters the good news this morning is that scripture shows us God's love is a love that can survive and thrive lead to a happy ending and we can be confident of that right from the start - because it comes from God.

As 1 John 4:16 says *“God is love”* – but that does not mean that Love is God. In other words it's not “love” in and of itself that is able to “conquer all” because its “love” - rather it is as the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:28 *“that in all things **God***

works for the good of those who love him” It is God at work that enables His divine love to conquer all.

The ideal that true love conquers all is actually shown to be false by the reality of what Paul means by “all things:” the realities of hardship, suffering, economic downturns, political unrest and war. In the face of such things our love often comes up short and does not survive.

Friendships break apart, marriages come to an end, we lose compassion and empathy for our fellow human beings, love grows cold and life becomes hard when circumstances are not conducive for love.

You see that’s why we love romantic stories and movies so much, they suggest that in spite of what we see going on around us that maybe it is possible after all to find TRUE love that can survive and thrive and lead to a happy ending and conquer all.

But the truth is brothers and sisters that our love does not often survive the reality of sickness and disease, mental illness, addiction, abuse, betrayal like it does in the movies... and if it does survive... does it ever really thrive afterwards?

Statistically speaking there is not much support for the notion that “true love conquers all” and leads to a happily ever after ending.

But, brothers and sisters – maybe we are looking for love in all the wrong places? You see if we are in a love story with God we need to learn how to go through the realities of this life with His divine love – not with some idealistic notion of true love that we find in movies and books.

And in order for the scriptures to hold up the superior nature of God’s love to survive and thrive and lead us to a happy ending – we first needed see that the ideal of a “true love” comes up short in this regard.

So now let's take closer look at how and why God's love makes us more than conquerors and what it means to be in a love story with God.

Now as I mentioned earlier, the plot of any good love story revolves around the question of "will the love survive?" And it is no different in our own lives.

We might understand correctly what it means that God loves us – but it can be hard to believe that God will always love us and it can be even more difficult to believe that we will always be able to love God.

What if we screw up really badly? What if we can't get past some of our bad habits? What if we keep giving into temptation with a particular sin that we struggle with? Will God still love us? Will his love for us survive?

What if something really terrible happens in our life – a bad accident, a terrible disease, a horrible tragedy? Will we still be able to love God – will we still believe that God loves us?

Brothers and sisters listen to what Paul says in vs. 31 *"If God is for us, WHO can be against us?"*

Brothers and sisters what we believe about God's love reveals what we really believe about God himself because his Love comes is from who He is.

So do we believe that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, that He is exists beyond our capacity to fully know and comprehend Him? That He always was, always is and always will be? Do we believe that God is God and that God is good? And that this God – as Paul says – *"did not spare His own son but gave Him up for us all"* (vs. 32)

So brothers and sisters, if God himself is for us – WHO can be against us in such a way that God's love for us will not survive?

No one – not even ourselves! Who are we to stand against God once God has decided He loves us and He will save us?

Now maybe we can believe that God will never stop loving us – but what happens if we are not able to love God?

Well brothers and sisters the good news continues – since God already gave us his only son, Paul says *“how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”* (vs. 32)

And brothers and sisters, all things... includes the ability to love God as well – as Paul says earlier in Romans 5:5 that God’s Love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. Think about that – the Love you have for God does not come from you, it comes from God.

The superior love of God has been given to us and thus we now have a divine love in us that can love God in return and it will survive whatever we may go through in this life.

But brothers and sisters – in a good love story, the love must not only survive... it needs to thrive.

It’s not enough to simply persevere through the trials of life only to be drained of the passion and vitality that your love once had.

In a good love story the challenges and obstacles you face actually draw you closer together, they forge bonds of connection and shared experience which makes your love grow deeper, more intense and profound.

Now brothers and sisters – because God has given us His Love and that enables us to continue to Love God back through the storms and hurricanes that life can throw at us – when it comes to having our love story with God thrive... we bear some responsibility for that.

And responsibility is just simply that we are now able to respond – and so we should. We need to respond by being willing to take on the consequences of being in love with God, with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

I mean we can see how this works all the time when it comes to human love. How many of us had fallen “in love” with someone whom our parents or our friends just didn’t approve of – especially when we were teenagers, right?

But did we care what other people, especially our parents, thought – no! We would endure and suffer their disapproval because we were “in love.”

And so brothers and sisters when Paul asks the question in vs. 35 *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?”* He’s not talking about the kind of random trouble or hardship or persecution that comes from living life in a world under the curse of sin.

He’s talking about what we are willing to choose and suffer and endure at the hands of others who disapprove of our love for Jesus Christ – because we are full of God’s Love.

He’s talking about us responding to Jesus’ plans for us in Acts 1:8 where Jesus prophesies *“you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

Brothers and sisters, in our love story with God – if God’s Love for us is going to thrive we need to respond and willingly endure hardship and more to be Christ’s witnesses – which incidentally the word for in the Greek is “martyr.”

And there are two reasons for that. First – and this is a big part of any romantic movie – this is how we test our love to make sure it is actually God’s love in us – and not just our human love that loves God because of what He can do for us. Do you know what I’m talking about?

In the love story there’s always someone who wants to make sure the other person loves them for who they really are and not just because they are rich or pretty or powerful or famous.

Secondly we just need to know that if we want to love Christ more – if we want to deepen and strengthen and make our relationship with Christ more profound – it's no great mystery on how to do that - make a decision to sacrifice and give something up for Him.

We can see how this works in ordinary relationships right? You love someone and so make a sacrifice to you move to another city to be with them. When we profess our love to marry someone – we forsake all others to commit exclusively to our husband or wife.

When we have children we scrimp and save and sacrifice our own needs so that our children can go to a good school or play sports or learn to play music or we can take them on an amazing vacation.

And these are hardships and sacrifices that we are willing to endure and they deepen and strengthen our love with our spouse and our children. In fact I don't think there is a parent or a spouse here who wouldn't reflexively put themselves in

harm's way and risk their life because of the love that they have for each other.

Brothers and sisters – the love, God's Love, that He pours into our hearts through the Holy Spirit enables us to respond and choose to suffer and sacrifice for Christ – and.... This will be ironic for us – this actually makes God's love in us thrive.

But where is this all going? Sure God's love survives, and if we respond and willingly endure hardship it will thrive – but what is the end result? And what if God's love leads us - like it did for Paul – to endure some very difficult circumstances, like jail and beatings – even death?

So we have our final question of the love story – does it lead to a happily ever after ending?

We might not think it does - if we are facing the possibility of persecution, or if we consider that we might be asked to risk our lives for the sake of Christ like our brothers and sisters in China are doing right now.

What sort of a happy ending is that? It's not a happy ending at all by what we would normally see in the books and romantic movies – right?

Well – maybe not, sometimes in the movies it kind of looks like someone may have died and love is lost... but then they recover – like in the Princess Bride we find out that Wesley is only mostly-dead but not all dead so Miracle Max can make a magic pill to bring him back to life.

Now I know that sounds a bit fantastic – but isn't that the power of true love in the movies?

Now the good news brothers and sisters is that the power of God's love is even more miraculous in real life than true love is in the movies.

In reality death cannot stop God's love and Paul lets us know that in vs. 34 when he declares *“Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God...”*

Isn't strange how we can entertain the fantastic notions of what true love can do in the movies but we forget and become shortsighted about what God's love can do and has actually done in real life?

We forget and lose sight of the fact that there is more than just our present reality and this life – the resurrection of Jesus Christ points us to eternal life and the new world that is yet to come.

So in vs. 38 Paul concludes with a joyful outburst - that not only proclaims the victory of God's love over all things – but it also collides with our shortsighted worldview and pushes it up and out and expands it – look at vs. 38 with me...

Brothers and sisters there is more to life than just the physical – so Paul references angels and demons. There is more to life than time – so Paul brings up the present and future. There is more going on in reality than what we are able to affect with our own agency – So Paul alludes to the Powers that exist, and God's plan is about far more than just our own little corner of

the world – so Paul marks off the dimensions of the height and depth of all creation.

So now that we are looking beyond and above let me draw your attention to the significance of what it means that Jesus is in heaven at the right of God.

This is the happy ending brothers and sisters – because Jesus has taken our humanity into the very presence of God at His right hand – an exalted and powerful position (*which is essentially equal to God the Father without confusing the persons of the Father and the Son*) we can know for certain that God’s love brings about a happy ending for us.

Because Jesus took our humanity there – we are guaranteed a honored place there too – in the very presence of God.

God didn’t say “Oh Son, welcome back to heaven – just take off that nasty human nature you’re wearing and leave it outside before you come in please...” No – in fact when Jesus

takes our human nature into the presence of God He glorifies our human nature.

Brothers and sisters the good news is that we get more than a happy ending - as Paul says “we are more than conquerors!” We don’t just get to be resurrected back to life – its not just the promise of and eternal life - we will also be glorified.

Now we don’t talk much about being glorified – we talk about being saved, about being sanctified but glorified... not so much. But remember when Jesus Christ took Peter, James and John up the mountain and while they were up there his face began to shine like the sun and his clothes were as white as light – this transfiguration was a hint of what it means to be glorified. This is what will happen to us.

Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 15:3 that “*the perishable must put on the imperishable and our mortal bodies must put on immortality*” and wow brothers and sisters – that is going to look and feel absolutely incredible!

You see this is what God's love ultimately means for us, and we can be confident of it because it's happened to Jesus Christ and thus is it guaranteed for us – for those who are IN Christ Jesus.

So does God's love lead to a happy ending? Yes... and no – it leads more than a happy ending! We are more than conquerors – we are glorified with Jesus Christ and nothing can ever separate us from this ending in God's love story.

Brothers and sisters – if you are not certain that you are a part of this love story, just pray and ask Jesus to make you a part of it by extending God's love to you.

Thank Him for his kindness that has lead you to repentance, believe that Jesus died to forgive your sins – while you were still a sinner – and trust there is no more condemnation because you are now IN Christ.

Then as that love story plays out through the remainder of your life in world - trust and believe and have faith that IN Jesus Christ, God's Love conquers all!

Brothers and Sisters – God Loves you! Amen