

“Leaving it All on the Field”

Romans 8:31-34

May 17th, 2020

His name means “My God is Yahweh.” He hails from a small town in the territory of Manasseh. His first appearance in Scripture reveals him proclaiming to an evil King that God was going to withhold rain from the land. This was a direct challenge to Baal, the Canaanite storm god, and the drought would question Baal’s ability to control the weather.

God speaks to the man, telling him to go into hiding, where the Lord would take care of him.

Fast-forwarding, the scene is another confrontation between our friend, the prophet Elijah, and the evil king Ahab in one of the great events of the entire Old Testament. Ahab greets Elijah with these words in **1 Kings Chapter 18:17** – “Is that you, O troubler of Israel?”

Elijah replied, “I have not troubled Israel, but *YOU* and your father’s house have, in that you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and have followed the Baals.” Elijah challenged the king to call for his 450 prophets of Baal. A crowd gathered. Elijah spoke to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the LORD; but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. The battle lines were drawn – the ratio was 450-1.

You know what happens. 2 bulls are prepared for offering on 2 different altars with no fire lit under either, one for the prophets of Baal, and one for Elijah. The prophets would call on their god, and Elijah would call on God, and the One who answered with fire is the true God.

The prophets of Baal went first. From morning to noon, they called on Baal to send fire. Nothing. At noon, Elijah mocked them saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god, either he is meditating, or he is busy, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is sleeping and must be awakened.” The prophets intensified their efforts. They prophesied all the way until the time of the evening sacrifice. “No voice, no one answered, no one paid attention.”

Now, it was Elijah’s turn. Elijah’s altar consisted of 12 stones, one for each tribe of Israel. He dug a trench around the altar and put wood under the sacrifice. Three times he had four water pots of water poured over the sacrifice, and the wood, so the trench was filled and the altar soaked.

Elijah then called on God. Here’s **1 Kings 18:38**, “Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench.”

Though he stood alone against King Ahab and the prophets of Baal, Elijah could stand tall because God was with him. As Frederick Douglass once put it, “God and you make a majority.”

And, that is clearly part of the message for us as we come to the concluding paragraph of **Romans Chapter 8. Verses 31-39** make up what one commentator calls “the most wonderful parts of a wonderful epistle.” (Morris, 334) “Commentators have called these verses a ‘hymn of assurance,’ ‘a triumph song,’ ‘the highest plateau in the whole of divine revelation.’ This is a mountaintop paragraph. It is the (Mount) Everest of the letter and thus the highest peak in the

highest (mountain) range of Scripture.” (Boice, 951-952) As I said recently, we are standing here upon holy ground!

I’ve split this concluding paragraph in two parts. In the first half, verses 31-34, we see that “Paul is concerned with the impossibility of any charge against the believer being sustained before God. The second half, which we’ll examine next Sunday, Lord willing, (verses 35-39) Paul is concerned with the impossibility of anything separating us from God’s love.” (Morris, 334)

Romans 8:31-34:

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.”

Paul asks 5 questions in these 4 verses (2 in verse 31; 1 each in verses 32, 33, & 34). They are rhetorical questions, meaning their answers are obvious. We don’t ask rhetorical questions to get an answer, but rather we intend to emphasize a point.

The last five chapters of the Old Testament Book of Job are jam-packed with rhetorical questions that God asks – some 77 of them that Job is unable to answer. Here are five of them:

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? (**Job 38:4**)
“Who determined its measurements or who laid its cornerstone? (**Job 38:5**)
Can you send out lightnings, that they may go,
And say to you, ‘Here we are!’ (**Job 38:35**)
Who has put wisdom in the mind?
Or who has given understanding to the heart? (**Job 38:36**)

The first question Paul asks his readers is verse 31 – “What then shall we say to these things?” *Well, what ‘things’ would Paul be referring to? Could he be referring to the two verses preceding this final paragraph that we studied last Sunday (29-30)?* Yes, they would be included – the golden chain of salvation is laid out there – foreknown, predestined, called, justified, and glorified. But, *what about the entire 8th chapter of Romans, couldn’t Paul also be including all it teaches and we’ve been unpacking for now 9 Sundays?* Yes, ‘these things’ would include all of **Romans Chapter 8**. But, maybe you’re wondering, *isn’t it also possible that Paul is including all the good things mentioned in this entire letter?* Yes, it is possible, and that is likely what Paul meant when he mentions “these things.” “These things” embraces the whole display of free grace to lost sinners in the letter thus far.

That takes us to Paul’s second question in verse 31, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” *Dear one, I ask you, who is God for? Well, verse 31 says He is for ‘us.’ But, who is the ‘us’?* It would include the human author of this letter, the Apostle Paul, and his reading audience, the Church at Rome. Again, since the Bible is God-inspired scripture, it is timeless in its application.

It applies to the church today in Aledo, and whatever location where you may be participating in this service of worship.

So, if God is for believers in Jesus Christ, then who are those against Him? It follows that those whom God is against are the evil one (Satan), all his minions, and unbelievers in Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches there are two kinds of people – those who believe in Jesus, and those who do not. There is no third, or middle category. Jesus said so Himself, in **Matthew 12:30** – “He who is not with Me is against Me...” Oh my – how this should make each one of us consider our standing before a Holy God! Do all that it takes, friend, to make your calling and election sure. If you’ve not surrendered your life to Jesus, both in the here and now and for eternity, then do what it takes to make sure your fall under the covering of Jesus Christ.

The third question Paul asks is in verse 32 – “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”

Jesus is the greatest thing God had to give. We must constantly look at the cross and understand what God did for us in sending His own Son, Jesus Christ from heaven to earth in order to die in our place. *Since God freely gave us Jesus, is there anything that He might withhold from us?* No, there is not. What is God’s is ours, if He has claimed us. We have no reason to worry about our needs, physical or spiritual. God’s got this!

God’s over-the-top generosity in giving us Jesus should reflect in God’s people also being generous – with our time, our talents, and the finances with which He has given us. Generous even in a time of quarantine - no strike that - especially so in a time of quarantine. It appears just the opposite happens, though. *Isn’t this due to a flawed view a person may have of God?* People become stingier in times of hardship probably because they were that way before the time of suffering hit.

In addition, I submit we should also be generous with our encouragements given to each other. How important Godly encouragement is in times of difficulty such as we are enduring now. Having said that, though, I’ve heard people who profess to walk in faith saying discouraging things to each other. They’re teammates in the contest before us, the same side, same church, and same family. We have an obligation, first to the people of God, and then to others. *If we can’t be encouraging with each other, then what makes us think we can be encouraging to those on the outside?*

The fourth question Paul asks is in verse 33 – “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.” This question points to the proceedings of a courtroom. The charge is an allegation; an accusation. The name “Satan” means “accuser.” Accusing God’s people of wrongdoing is the devil’s arena.

The key word in this question is the answer – God is the Justifier. God has punished Christ so that He might justify us. Justification is the act of God where He declares an ungodly man to be perfect while he is still ungodly. This is the reason why no one can lay anything to our charge.

Satan militates against the Christian's assurance of salvation. He is the one who whispers in our ear, so to speak, telling us we are worthless in God's eyes because of the sin that affects negatively our thinking, our speech, and our behavior. His charge is that people who do what we've done, whatever your sin is, cannot be Christians. Such people, he emphasizes are spiritual failures.

But, Satan doesn't have the last word. God does. Jesus' resurrection from the dead is God's final word. Jesus Christ risen from the dead! Hallelujah!

The fifth and final question Paul asks is found in verse 34 – "Who is he who condemns?"

We're pretty good at self-condemnation. Our hearts may condemn us as we read in **1 John 3:20-21** – "For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God."

Even so, Jesus' death removes the condemnation for those who are in Him. Unfortunately, it's a lot easier for a person to condemn others than it is to build them up; to realize that each of us is flawed, and we all must love each other, especially within our families, and our church.

At the beginning of this 8th chapter, Paul opened with a salvo across the bow of condemnation – **Romans 8:1** teaches that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! Six chapters from here – **Romans 14:14-23** – Paul will again touch on condemnation. Paul was there addressing foods being consumed by Christians. He said in **Romans 14:15**, "...if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love." Today, we might replace "food" with the word "mask." "If your brother is grieved because of your mask (or lack thereof), you are no longer walking in love." Paul went further with the end of the 15th verse when he wrote, "Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died." Again, replace the word "food" with "mask" – "Do not destroy with your mask (or unmasked face) the one for whom Christ died."

A point of personal application, if I may. I'm not a fan of these masks. They cause my glasses to fog up, they muffle my voice, and I can't see others' nonverbal behaviors when their face is covered. But many people I love and who love me – many hearing my voice – eagerly wear a mask to protect themselves and others. Though they are my brother or sister in Christ, I have asked myself if I will insist on exercising my freedom not to wear a mask when their scruples are different than mine. We're talking an hour or so in every 168 of the week. *Can I not subordinate my desires for that short of a period of time to love my spiritual siblings? Is it right for me to condemn them for differing with me when God has sent Jesus to live and die for them?*

Jesus didn't depart the arena of this earth without leaving all He had on the field, to use a sports euphemism. Sporting euphemisms are many. Consider such pearls as "He gave 110%" "Take it to the next level," and "We just wanted it more." I suggest they should be some of the ways that we love each other – with more than we seem to be able (110%), to be lifted out of the depths and put high upon a rock, and to desire the very best for each other.