

Sermon 91: Romans 8:31-32: The Unanswerable Questions That Seal our Salvation

OUTLINE

The question of the power of God

The question of the love of God

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of this letter to the Romans Paul spoke about being a happy slave of the Gospel who delighted in preaching the gospel to all nations. His eagerness to preach the gospel came from his confidence in the Gospel as God's power to save Romans 1:16, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.' Paul is a willing martyr to get this message that saves so well out. He embraces the persecutions that dogged him knowing that his sufferings brought the message to others that would finally transport them out of this sin infected life into the new creation. When Paul thinks of the Gospel he doesn't think of a gospel tract, he thinks about a God of eternal love who has provided His prized Son to come and accomplish what we could not do, offer a perfect payment for the guilt of our sin, as well as live a perfect life to make us righteous with. He sees the gospel as God's power in calling us by His Spirit in the new birth, to faith and repentance, to irreversible justification and adoption, to a life of progressive sanctification and final freedom from every vestige of sin in our glorification, the judgement and the new heavens and the new earth. He is bursting at the seams to speak about this salvation. He is not a salesman who is not convinced his customers need what he is selling, he is a man who realizes that the message he is a steward of is greater than any other thing there is, that this is the only thing that ultimately matters. This is the effect this grand salvation is to have upon us. We are supposed to see its power and feel totally overwhelmed, and once we have got over the fact that we are so certainly saved and it begins to dawn upon us that others can be saved too, it is then that we get the same eagerness as Paul to want to tell others, to be willing to suffer that others might hear. Let me put it to you this way, if you aren't as eager as Paul you don't understand it as well as Paul, for the better you understand, the more willing you will be to, even if it means to give your life that this grand and glorious gospel might be heard for the glory of God.

As we come to Romans 8:31-32 we are coming to an important point in Paul's argument. He begins by saying, 'What then shall we say to these things?' What are the things that he is talking about? Is it only the things of v28-30, or chapter 8? No he is reflecting on the big story of the gospel that he has been telling since the first chapter. He is come in his argument to the point of proving how utterly powerful the gospel is to save. The gospel is not the power of God to merely make salvation possible or to save in part, or for a little while and then you can fall away, it is not some china doll that can easily be broken. No all those who God has foreknown He has predestined that they will be called, justified and finally glorified. The gospel is God's vehicle to truly and totally save sinners. Paul has just

proven this by rehearsing the unbreakable chain of redemption, he has come to the very climax of his argument. He has proven based on God's plan and power that glory is certain for God's children. After having argued at length that we will be saved he asks a series of unanswerable questions.

Having made his arguments he now wants to cause us to reflect on these truths. Paul the master teacher asks a series of questions, a series of questions that are rhetorical, a series of questions that in light of the things he has just said can have no answer. His opening question is Paul's typical way of asking a question when he is arguing a thing out (Rom. 6:1, 15). Here are the five unanswerable questions, each one is intended to reaffirm the power of God to save us. 'If God is for us who can be against us?' 'He who did not spare His own Son how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?' 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?' 'Who is to condemn?' And, 'Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?' There is no one stronger than God; there is nothing more valuable to God than His Son; there is no one who can point to one unjustified sin in us; there is no one to condemn, and there is nothing that can separate us from God's love. The Gospel is the power of God for salvation, we are more than conquerors through Christ. We are as much conquerors as He is because we are united to Him.

These five questions bring into focus four aspects of God and His work, God's power to save, God's unchangeable love in salvation, God's unassailable work in justification and God's faithfulness in suffering. Today we will be looking deeper into God's power and God's love.

The question of the power of God

'If God is for us, who can be against us?' Sin makes God your greatest enemy, and He is more powerful than any other, there is no one who can compare. God's wrath is against us as sinners and He must judge us. However, God sends His Son to be the wrath removing sacrifice that we need, and when we trust in Christ we receive His righteousness put to our account and our criminal record is accounted as paid for by His death. We are then moved out of the enemy category and made children of God. We who were once at war with God are now at peace with Him and now He was against us turned against His Son while He was dying on the cross that He could now, without violating His justice be for us.

He is not simply a buddy, He is your eternal Father, your Shepherd, your rock, your hiding place. He is the army of One who will fight on your behalf. His power is your support. He is eternally friend not foe, and has pledged Himself to be your God, and all that that means. This single question is probably the best one line summary of David's confidence in God. Go and read the psalms and everywhere you will find David confident before impossible odds, not because David is a winner and winners are always confident, no because he trusted in the God who cannot lie, the God who created all things and is all powerful, who had pledged Himself to David, to be for him. It is this confidence that lies behind the phrase 'steadfast love'. God is steadfast in His covenant love to His people, He will not and He cannot fail.

This can be illustrated from many of David's psalms, let me quote from just one. Psalm 18:1-6, this psalm was written as a summary of David's life and written after all his enemies had been defeated. Notice the use of the word 'my' and how God answered prayer.

'I love you, O LORD, my strength.

² The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

³ I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.

⁴ The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction assailed me;

⁵ the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.

⁶ In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.'

The psalm ends with God's steadfast love.

We are no longer the enemy, we no longer need to hang our heads in shame, we no longer need to expect that God will not hear our prayers. He has made us His children we are friends, He is for us. The devil is not stronger, death is not stronger, sin is not stronger, there is none who can compare to Him. There is no one who can change His eternal plan, there is none that can stop His hand, there is none who can frustrate His purposes, and He is for us, to save us.

The question of the love of God

If Paul had stopped there it would have been enough, that first question on its own has no answer. However, Paul knows the searching way in which we try to doubt our salvation, he knows the anxious way in which we try to overturn our salvation to see if it will stand, so he continues on with a second question. V32, 'He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things?' There are not many who would put a question mark over God's strength, however, there are many who would question God's love. Paul has been arguing that God has loved us from before the foundation of the world, that nothing can separate us from God's love, but what if God's love were to change, what if He changed, how could we know that His love will not fail? How would you answer this question of whether God would change His mind about you?

There are several ways to answer this.

Paul could have spoken about the immutable nature of God's decree. God does not make mistakes in His planning, He does not resort to a plan B because plan A failed. God does not get surprised by anything, there was no sin that He did not anticipate that would make Him change His mind about saving you.

Paul could have said that God is not a liar, and He has promised that anyone who believes in Him they will inherit eternal life, that He would not cast out any who come to Him, but they will all be raised up on the last day.

If these had been some of the ways that you have answered I think that these are good answers, but Paul has something better, something more convincing that proves God's willingness to save you. Paul makes an argument for God's trustworthy love by arguing from the greatest to the least. If God is willing to give us His most precious possession for you, what is any other thing in God's hand compared to this? Imagine a Father willingly allowing His Son to marry a woman is there anything more precious in all the Father's house than His Son? All of heaven is not worth the equivalent of Christ, all of the new heavens and the new earth, and an infinite amount of them would not be equal to the value of Son, yet it is the Son that God has given to save us. Are we so foolish to think that God would pay so dearly only to make His Son suffer for nothing by not saving us? Would He be willing to give His Son to be tortured by His enemies only to change His mind so that all of Christ's suffering eventuates in a cruel game? If you doubt God's love towards you, that it one thing, but do not doubt God's love towards His own Son. Remember the words at His baptism, 'This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' Know the true delight that the Father has in the Son and know that out of love for His Son Christ would not suffer for nothing, but that His sufferings would most certainly save all those who He lays down His life for. Would God waste His Son on you by not finishing the work of saving you?

This argument is similar to the one that Paul made in Romans 5:10, 'For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.' If God is willing to give His Son to save His enemies what will He do for His friends? This too is an argument from the greater to the lesser, the greater deed of giving Christ to die in order to secure the justification of an enemy is done, glorifying a friend is a smaller affair.

This promise has been called the Mount Everest of promises. If Romans 8 is the Himalayas for the heights it reaches, this is the highest point, and the greatest demonstration of God's love in saving us, the surest place for us to rest, and there is no greater token of His love that we can find. If this verse does not prove to you that God is committed to saving you with a never dying love, that God will not change His mind, that the giving of His most precious Son is not enough, then I have nothing better to offer. Those who cling to doubt after hearing this are more committed to believing a lie than the truth.

This verse reminds us of two important portions of the OT, the first is the Abraham being called upon to sacrifice his son.

In Genesis 22 we have one of the most disturbing stories in the bible, the story of a man who God commands to kill his own son as a sacrifice to God. This command is given by a God who removes the various Canaanite tribes from the land for doing this very thing. This is a command for Abraham to kill the son of his love, the promised one, the son of his beloved Sarah. However, this was all a test, and through it God shows us exactly what He did in giving His Son. The hardest thing in the world would be to kill your own child, this God does. God provides the sacrifice and Isaac is spared, ironically the God who provides,

provides His own Son in order that the sinner may live. Luther's wife was reading this portion and said to Luther, 'I don't think God would command anyone to kill their son.' Luther replied, 'God not only commanded it, He did it.'

Although Isaac was spared Paul tells us that God did not spare His own Son. Christ was not spared but Paul tells us that God 'gave Him up.' What does this mean? If you are a Christian you will never know, these are the words of God's judgement and curse upon sin. All the guilt of the sin of God's people laid on Christ's shoulders, all the wrath of God unrestrained in full vent against our sins poured out upon His Son, all the satanic attack that would have accompanied a state of being purely abandoned by God. This is what Christ felt on the cross this is what He suffered. We see it in the words, 'My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?' We see Him in Gethsemane sweating blood and pleading that if it is possible that this cup would not have to be drunk. But there is no other way. Sin has to be paid for and there is none that can bear the weight but Christ. Isaiah 53 tells us that it was God who killed Jesus, 53:10, 'Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief.' God proves His love and His commitment to save in giving His Son in this fashion to save us. To doubt God's willingness to save you is to imply that God giving His Son is a little thing. The question 'how will He not' can have no other answer but that He will.

We must notice the important word 'graciously'. The source of God's gift of His Son was His grace and the finishing of the work of our salvation so that we are not only justified but also glorified is also by grace. This word itself should convince us that God will not change His mind. He did not choose to love us and give His Son for us because we were good, nor that we were going to be good. He did not save us on the basis of our merit but the basis of His grace. He will finish His work in saving us not on the basis of merit but on the basis of grace.

Next we need to consider the words 'all things'. What does Paul mean by all things? Well, we can begin by asserting that this is not a verse that supports the prosperity doctrine. Paul is not referring all of a sudden to worldly wealth. No the all things are the things that relate to our salvation. Paul is referring to our glorification, our adoption, the receiving of our inheritance and the new heavens and the new earth. If we were to put all the things that we will receive in full salvation, if we put them in a big pile, and then on the other side we have Christ. Christ is infinitely more precious to God and Paul is telling us that if God is willing to give us Christ what is it to Him to give us full salvation? It is nothing, He has given the best and the least is nothing but the logical consequence of this greatest gift. It is folly to think that God would give His Son and then not finish the work by fully saving you. He would never waste the suffering of His precious Son in that way.

We will have to draw our thoughts to a conclusion now. We have rehearsed Paul's arguments for why we will be saved, we have looked at the unanswerable questions, at the issues of God's strength that if God is for us who can stand against us and succeed? We have looked at God's unchangeable love that is demonstrated by God giving His Son for us, heaven's best for earth's worst. And I would like us to end by really grappling with Paul's opening question. Let me ask you, 'What then shall we say to these things?' Are you still

arguing that God is not strong enough to save, are you still arguing that a Christian can fall away into everlasting judgement? Paul is arguing in such a fashion that the only answer we should be giving is silent agreement, the only answer that is appropriate to these arguments is tearful, joyful, hopeful praise. Lay down your opposition. The gospel is the power of God to save. Let this truth sink deep down into you. Let this truth dispel all your fears. Let this truth set you free in prayer and to approach the throne of God in confidence because of Christ's righteousness. Let this teaching cause the sweetest and deepest gratitude and worship well up in you to overflowing. Let this message grip you with its intensity and its total ability to save and let it drive you to want to tell others. Let this beautiful gospel of salvation from sin cause you to hate sin, to live for where you are headed and seek to be pure as He is pure. But do not attack the cross, do not claim it cannot save, do not make little of God's sacrificing of His Son and His willingness to save. And friends of there are any here who are not Christians, hear the message of God's giving of His Son to save His enemies, see the provision of a sacrifice that can take away all of your guilt and make it so that if you will lay down your arms and resistance, put away your sins and cling to Christ for cleansing and as Lord, God will adopt you taking you out of the enemy camp and put you into His family.