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SERMON TITLE: Be Strong in God's Love During Opposition
SCRIPTURE: Romans 8:31-39
DATE: June 23, 2019
Check out the service at www.fpcd.org.

Read also Isaiah 50:7-11

We have been talking about being strong, living into the Promises of God. We've talked about the people getting ready. As they stood at the River Jordan, all were ready. In fact, their words to Joshua were this:

"We will do whatever you command us, and we will go wherever you send us. We will obey you just as we obeyed Moses. And may the LORD your God be with you as he was with Moses. Anyone who rebels against your orders and does not obey your words and everything you command will be put to death. So be strong and courageous!" (1:16-18)

They are enthusiastic and willing to step up, to try new things. How are you doing in your willingness to step up? Our men who sang last week did a new thing. We were blessed.

Did you catch Isaiah's words about faith? *"Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore, I have set my face like a stone, determined to do his will. And I know that I will not be put to shame"* (50:7).

God's will is the safest place. God said to Joshua, the people, to people in the New Testament and to us:

If you fear and obey the Lord and you find yourself in darkness, trust in and rely on the Lord. But if you do not; if you live in your own light and warm yourself by your own fires, watch out! What you will gain from God is great torment!

You might be a little uncomfortable with Isaiah's message. It contains both blessing for those who love God and curse for those who do not—reward vis-à-vis threat of torment. It's hard to sell good news and bad news, even to a bad person.

Can you remember back to the first time someone was mean to you? Possibly it was junior high. That's when kids get mean. I remember my first boyfriend in 7th grade. He called me daily and I was allowed to talk on the phone for ten minutes. What my parents didn't know is that my best friend and I would saddle our horses after school and ride over to his house.

One day he wrote a note to his best friend in which he said he didn't really like me he liked my friend. And he called my horse a nag. His friend gave the note to me. I was heartbroken. My boyfriend and my girlfriend had something going and I didn't know! I was deceived. Worse, my mother

found the note in my school bag and was so upset that I had been riding over to his house that she grounded me for years.

She and my father were even more upset about him calling the horse a nag.

So I learned there are evil, deceptive people in the world. C. S. Lewis says, "A moderately bad man knows he is not very good: a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right."¹ This is the world's reality. The people of Israel would encounter this as they entered the land. Isaiah experienced people who were against God. Paul also experienced it as he shared the gospel. So do we.

Yet it is still our mandate as Christians to bear the Good News to good and bad alike. We are not to worry about that, we are called to help people seek God. Our job is put Jesus at the center of our lives as a witness. That validates our words.

This will sometimes—well, often—make you a target of evil powers and people.

Keep that in mind as you listen to Paul's words in Romans 8:31-34a:

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one-- for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one-- for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love?

Reading between the lines, you can hear what Paul was dealing with: people against him; accusing him; people who said "your way of faith can't be the only way to God;" who condemned him; and finally, people who hated him.

But, God gives you "right standing with himself." That means that mere humans who want to condemn your message or your Christian lifestyle are not to be feared. God has vindicated you. God loves you. God is for you. You can be strong in God's love during opposition. In God's hands it is going to all work together for your good.

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity in A Year with C. S. Lewis: Daily Readings from His Classic Works*, p. 86.

Paul knows. The trajectory of his life changed for the better. His relationship with God moved from burdensome duty to a relationship of love with Jesus Christ. We would not be here today were it not for Paul's setting his own will like a flint on doing God's will.

Paul found love and purpose in Jesus. His life opened up in many ways: fellowship with believers who once avoided him, the thrill of the Holy Spirit's leading, and the power of God.

Paul also encountered many difficulties. He became ill. He ran into opposition. He didn't always have enough money. He was hit by violence and threats. Paul encountered evil in this world. Even his closest friends undercut him, and one even abandoned him. His new churches were persecuted because of their faith in Jesus. (1 Thes 1:6, 2:2; 2 Cor 1:3-10, 12:7-8; Phil 1:12-18, 4:12; Acts 13:13, 15:36-39)

Perhaps you are experiencing some of those same things.

Reality is that there is both good and evil in this world, yet Jesus is here. Paul says:

"Does it mean [Jesus] no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? . . . No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us" (Ro 8:34b-37).

Let's say together: "*Overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.*"

Overwhelming victory means "to prevail completely" in all circumstances. Not just the easier trials, not just temporary losses—but in the most difficult.

Do not think that smooth sailing in your life means God's approval. Calm does not necessarily mean God's favor.

How many of you have had troubles, or not enough money, or illness, or calamity? A peaceful life may mean God is blessing you for a time. But storms in life do not mean God is NOT blessing you. Peace is something inside, regardless of circumstances.

Paul continues:

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow-- not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below-- indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ro 8:38-39).

Where in your life do you need a little more infusion of God's loving presence?

✓ *In your worries about tomorrow?*

- ✓ *In a stressful circumstance that feels like Satan himself is winning?*
- ✓ *In the "ain't-it-awful" sentiment of today's political climate?*

There's a woman in our church who suddenly lost her job at the Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau when they downsized. She had done well there for twenty-three years. It was quite a blow. Even though she did not understand, she took it in stride. She got another job closer to home. It was easy—no commute downtown, no travel, little stress. Still, the loss was not very pleasant.

But unbeknownst to her, her mother was becoming ill, and she would need a lot of care, something Anna would not have been able to provide with her other high stress job. When her mother's needs became evident, she was there and able to care. The thing you have to know about Anna is that she loves to care for people.

When a four-year-old boy fell from a third story window, she was there to help with the family's four other children so the parents could care for him at that devastating time. Even though Anna personally has had hard times, God knows Anna thrives on helping others and allowed her the time to be available for both her own family and others.

We are talking about Anna today because she has sold her house and is going to travel, and to help with her nephew's toddler. So I have probably embarrassed her now. But all of you know how she has served here. She poured her organizational skills into our work. Her work has often meant success in our many events. The Lord loves her and uses her, even in the midst of the pressure when things get hard.

What about you? Do you fear the trials that come when you step out in faith, or anxiously hope nothing bad comes your way? Are you learning to have peace that you will prevail because Jesus' Love will not fail?

Set your mind to do God's will and go out in faith to build God's church. Sure, there will be opposition and at times it may be an uphill battle. No matter what you are fighting, whether it is personal or whether someone comes against you because you are trying to do something for the Lord, cling to the main thing—that God loves you and your wellbeing is in safe hands.

What is your strength? It is that nothing can separate you from God's love as you go about living out your faith. Though you will encounter evil in the world, God rewards you with overwhelming victory and inner peace when you cling to the main thing.

AMEN