

Psalm 56 (Opening)

1 *Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me;
 all day long an attacker oppresses me;*

2 *my enemies trample on me all day long,
 for many attack me proudly.*

3 *When I am afraid,
 I put my trust in you.*

4 *In God, whose word I praise,
 in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
 What can flesh do to me?*

5 *All day long they injure my cause;
 all their thoughts are against me for evil.*

6 *They stir up strife, they lurk;
 they watch my steps,
 as they have waited for my life.*

7 *For their crime will they escape?
 In wrath cast down the peoples, O God!*

8 *You have kept count of my tossings;
 put my tears in your bottle.
 Are they not in your book?*

9 *Then my enemies will turn back
 in the day when I call.
 This I know, that God is for me.*

10 *In God, whose word I praise,
 in the LORD, whose word I praise,*

11 *in God I trust; I shall not be afraid.
 What can man do to me?*

12 *I must perform my vows to you, O God;
 I will render thank offerings to you.*

13 *For you have delivered my soul from death,
 yes, my feet from falling,
 that I may walk before God
 in the light of life.*

Introduction

The world is a dark and sometimes evil place.

There's wars going on all over the world; terrorism is everywhere; crime rates are up; it just feels like there's no good news anywhere.

Sometimes, we just feel totally surrounded and we just want to give up. Trouble seems like it's on all sides. Like the first line of the song "Jesus is Coming Soon" says:

Troublesome times are here,
 filling men's hearts with fear,
Freedom we all hold dear
 now is at stake;

It paints a very dire picture, and I'm sure when Robert Winsett wrote the song in 1942 he must have felt that the Jesus must have been returning soon with all the horror the world was facing at the time.

I'd venture to say that things haven't gotten much better. We as a human race have a pretty horrible track record of bloodshed over the centuries. Nothing has really changed, except the methods.

In the first and second century it was swords, crucifixion, wild animals in the arena, and burning at the stake, just to name a few. It seems like the sword is a timeless favorite, since beheadings are the big thing in the news over the past few months.

It's not just Christians that are suffering, but it seems like evil has started to focus more and more on Christians. Some are saying that the persecution Christians are facing is just a beginning, and it's going to get worse.

Yes, I'm painting a rather bleak picture of the world, but no matter how horrible things get, we shouldn't let that bother us. That's the point that Paul is making in our scripture for today, Romans 8:31-39.

Romans 8:31-39

³¹ *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* ³² *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?* ³³ *Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.*

³⁴ *Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.* ³⁵ *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?* ³⁶ *As it is written,*

*“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

³⁷ *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* ³⁸ *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,* ³⁹ *nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

God is on our side (31, 32)

Paul starts with a question that he asks frequently in Romans. “What shall we say about all this?” Most of the time, he asks this and includes a question that should be answered with a resounding “NO”. Like he does at the beginning of chapter 6, “Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?” But this time, Paul has a surprise for us and his readers in Rome.

If God is with us, who can be against us? Well, the answer is that there's a lot that's against us in this world, specifically because we've decided to be on God's side! Jesus warned his disciples that there would be problems. Let's take a look at what Jesus says in John 15.

John 15:18-25

¹⁸ *“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹ But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. ²² If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ²³ Whoever hates me hates my Father also. ²⁴ If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. ²⁵ But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’”*

So, if God is for us, who can be against us? The world and the prince of this world are against us, and will do everything in their power to cause us problems. But God knows that we’re going to face problems, and he wants the best for us. Let’s look at Matthew 7:7-11.

Matthew 7:7-11

⁷ *“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. ⁹ Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? ¹⁰ Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!*

God is a good Father, and even sacrificed His own son for us, so we could be forgiven and become adopted as His children. He wants the

best for us and will hold back nothing that will provide us with what we need.

Who accuses? (33-37)

But that doesn't mean there won't be problems. We know there will be, just like Jesus said back in John.

Where do those problems come from? They come from the accuser. His goal is to get us to walk away from God. He's going to do everything in his power to cause problems for us so we just give up.

Have you ever been accused of something that you didn't do? It doesn't feel very good when it happens. Sometimes, if it happens enough, you just give up. You say something like "Well, if I'm going to be accused of doing it all the time, I may as well do it." That's what Satan does to us, and that's the result he's hoping for. Just give up. It's not worth the trouble.

But take a look at what it says in Revelation 12:10 and 11.

Revelation 12:10-11

¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.

Satan, the accuser, the ruler of this world, accuses us, but the accusations don't "stick". And we know that he has already lost the war.

Just because we're accused doesn't mean that we'll be condemned for what we're accused of. We know that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth, and we know from what Paul told us back at the

beginning of Romans chapter 8 that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. That's great news!

Let's look at how John puts it in 1 John 2:1-6.

1 John 2:1-6

¹ My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. ³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, ⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: ⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

John says that Jesus is our advocate with God, so none of those accusations will be found just. The payment for the transgressions has already taken place.

Look at the list of problems that Paul lists for us in verse Romans 8:35: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, and sword. That's an all-encompassing list of really bad things! But Paul adds to it, insult to injury, if you will. Paul quotes from Psalm 44 verse 22.

Paul says that we are like sheep being lead to the slaughter; we're being killed all day long! We don't face just little problems, and neither did the Christians in Rome during the first century. Persecution was just the tip of the iceberg. And Christians are still being persecuted around the world. Persecuted, hunted, tortured, and killed. Just like when a pack of wolves attacks a flock of sheep.

But Paul says that we are "more than conquerors". This phrase is used to translate a rather interesting and unique Greek word. It's only used

once in the New Testament and rarely in classical Greek literature. The word is hyper-nik-**ah**-o, hyper meaning above and nikao meaning to be triumphant. Maybe “Grand Champion” could be a good way to understand it. It’s not just “winning”. It’s so much more than that. It’s a complete and total victory over everything that stands against us.

How can we be more than conquerors if we’re facing all this evil and all these things are happening to us? Because, if we look back at the scripture in Revelation 12, the war has already been won and we didn’t even have to fight in it. We have to focus on obeying Jesus, our Lord, our commander in this war, but the end result has already been decided.

No separation (38, 39)

Now, in verses 38 and 39 of Romans 8, Paul gives us another list of things. And this list is things that can’t separate us from the love of God. And what a list it is!

Paul groups this list in pairs of opposing things that he is comparing for us. It’s a long list, and it’s all-encompassing, maybe even more all-encompassing than the previous list, if that’s possible! Paul lists all these things: our experiences, spiritual beings, time, space, and just to make sure he didn’t miss anything he adds “anything else in all creation”. None of these things can separate us from God’s love; the love He showed by sacrificing His son for our sins.

Jesus reassured his disciples about this in John 10:27-30.

John 10:27-30

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

Nothing can take us away from Christ. But our accuser knows that we can walk away on our own, that's why he keeps trying to get us to give up. He keeps attacking us with all these things that Paul lists, but if we understand God's love for us, we know we can't lose, and, in fact we're more than victorious already!

Conclusion

Yes, it's bad out there in the world. We really are surrounded by evil most of the time, and it seems like it's getting worse every day.

But Paul points out that no matter what happens, we who are in Christ are the winners. Even if the world thinks that we lose because we are persecuted, tortured, and even killed, we still win.

This is one of those "Win one for the Gipper" scriptures, the pep-talk before going out on the field. No matter how bad things get, no matter how much it hurts, just like Paul says in Romans 8:18, it's not even a drop in the bucket compared to how good things will be when we get to heaven.

But, just to hammer home the point here, the only way to be on the winning team is to be in Christ. That means become a Christian. To be in Christ you need to believe what He said, submit totally to His will, repent from all the things you've done that are against what He says to do, be immersed into His death, and raised from the watery grave as a new person.

If you've done this already, that's great. If you haven't, or if you have questions, get with me so we can talk about it.

2 Corinthians 4:7-12 (closing)

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.