

“No Bridge Too Far”

Romans 8:31-39

May 17th, 2020

Final in Series on Romans 8

Pastor Andy Kinsey

“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our LORD.”

- Romans 8:38-39 (KJV)

Prayer of Preparation

O Lord, may we receive with hope the love of your Son Jesus Christ and so live in communion with you in the power of your Spirit, realizing always how nothing can separate us from your love. Amen.

Message

In 1977, movie director Richard Attenborough directed one of the most popular war movies of all-time: *A Bridge Too Far*. It told the story of Operation Market Garden during World War II, when the Allied forces sought to seize several key bridges over the Rhine River in the Netherlands in 1944. The plan was to use airborne forces to take over bridges before the Germans could react.

However, things did not go according to plan and the Germans were at first able to delay the attacks and then defeat the Allies. In fact, Operation Market Garden was widely seen as a military failure, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives. Only in time would the Allies gain more strength to enter into Germany.

The whole expression “a bridge too far” comes from this movie, and it refers to an act or a plan whose ambition overreaches its capability, often resulting in disaster.

If we say, for example, “That’s just a bridge too far,” we are saying something to this effect: we are saying that “what we are trying to do is beyond what we can manage at the moment. It’s more than we can accomplish.”

It's one of the reasons we normally do assessments before we enter a financial campaign: can we meet our goal with the resources we have? It's also why we try to figure out beforehand how much materials we may need to build a house or a barn. It would be foolish to get started and run up short (Luke 14:28-36).

Review of Romans 8

One of the things we have been sharing over the last four weeks in our series on Romans 8 is how God is able to overcome sin and death by the Spirit and so bring us into relationship with Jesus Christ (Romans 8:11).

In Romans 8, we have learned how the Holy Spirit not only forgives us, but dwells in us so that we may walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). It is one of the reasons why we may consider the sufferings of this present time not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18). The Spirit has adopted us as children (Romans 8:16) and has assured us that we belong to him (Romans 8:17). We are part of a whole new creation (2 Cor. 5:17), a whole new effort to work with God for the good – even in the midst of challenges we may consider beyond our capability to reach, or beyond what we think we can handle (Romans 8:28)!

Life in the Spirit means that we can live as more than conquerors through the One who loved us and who gave his life for us (8:32). We can live with the assurance that *if God is for us, then who can possibly be against us?* We can move toward those bridges that seem impossible to cross and then cross with the confidence God is with us. After all, look at Who is pulling for us! Look at Who is in our corner!

Think of it in terms of a court of law, with Paul before the jury making the case that God is for us and with us. In fact, four times Paul asks the jury to inspect the evidence of what he has shared up to this point.

For example, Paul asks the jury, “Who is really against us?” And the answer Paul gives is, “No one. God gave to us his only Son and will give us all things with him.”

“Well, okay then, if there is no one against us, then who will bring a charge against us?” Answer: “No one. God himself has **justified** us and declared us to be in the right, even though we don't deserve it. God has forgiven us.”

“Well, then, who is to condemn us?” Answer: “No one.” Jesus has died and has been raised from the dead. And he now intercedes for us through the Spirit. We can live in freedom.”

“So who shall separate us from God?” Answer: “No one and no thing! Yes, there are many things that will try, but the bridge has been crossed!”¹ God has landed in enemy-occupied territory; and the victory has been won.²

No Separation Possible

So what’s the point? The point, Paul argues, is that “nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

Pandemics can’t. Wars can’t. Depression can’t. Suffering can’t. Death can’t. They can try, but in the end they can’t. There is nothing that can tear us away from God’s love! For *that’s what the very heart of the gospel is all about: take that away, and there is no gospel, no hope.*

In other words, there is no bridge too far that God won’t seek to take and cross over to save us; there is no obstacle that God won’t seek to knock down and defeat to rescue us.

Take that dimension of the gospel away and we realize that God’s love is not really love at all, for what makes God’s *love unique is how it goes the second-mile.* It always tries to find ways of bringing together what the world is trying to keep separate.

Indeed, one of the things we try to do here at Grace Church is have what we call “Bridge Talks” as a way to demonstrate how God wants us to work together and bring together people to accomplish good.

The whole point of having Bridge Talks is to learn how we may care for others and demonstrate ways of compassion and understanding, whether it’s in Africa with one of missionaries, or in Franklin with one of our partners. Bridge Talks are simply ways to reveal what God is doing, often in small ways, to make a difference.

What’s Love Got to Do With It?

¹ N.T. Wright, *Romans for Everyone: Romans 1-8 – Part One* (Louisville, KY: John Knox/Westminster Press, 2004), 158-159.

² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1952), 51.

In fact, I would say that most of the time that's how God's love works, in small and often ordinary ways, offering hope.

I know years ago I used to think that love always had to be big, grandiose almost. After all, I had a "superman" complex about the Christian life. That is to say, I had this picture in my head that communicated how "love and suffering for the sake of Christ" meant that you had to become a missionary to Latin America, or you had to become crucified on an anthill, like Celia Coplestone in T.S. Elliot's *The Cocktail Party*. I thought that such love and suffering in the Christian life meant going to the gallows like Dietrich Bonhoeffer did.³

To be sure, that can happen, but more and more I realize how, for most of us, *love in the Christian life, life in the Spirit*, is much less glamorous.⁴

Instead, love is something more ordinary, like making a telephone call to a person who has lost a loved-one, or taking time to make face-masks for healthcare workers, or sending cards for those who are living alone, or a helping a neighbor in need. That's usually what *love in the Christian life* looks like –listening to a person from a different background or political perspective, engaging a friend about a self-destructive habit, or confronting something in yourself you can no longer deny.⁵

For the vast majority of us, I believe, that's how love *really* works: ordinary actions in everyday situations, making a difference.⁶

Because *in the Christian life* such love is sacrificial; it suffers, it understands that, if we are going to follow Christ, we will also suffer with Christ (8:12).

After all, in Romans 8, Paul is not talking about love as hearts and Valentines. Rather, he is talking about the struggles we all face on a daily basis; he writing about how we are to act sacrificially toward others, and especially toward those who are going through difficult times, through grief, loss, loneliness.

And in our current crisis who among us is not experiencing such feelings? Indeed, if we aren't, we are probably in some kind of denial – and that's not good.⁷

³ Fleming Rutledge, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 263.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Scott Berinato, "That Discomfort You're Feeling Is Grief," *Emotional Intelligence* (March 23, 2020).

It is why naming what is happening is so important. In fact, even this week, in addition to all the pandemic stuff, several families in our own church have been suffering loss – a reminder that life “happens,” pandemic or no pandemic.

It’s why Romans 8 is such tonic to all the other “fluffy spiritualities” in the market place these days: the Christian life is not about fleeing into self-indulgence or away from the problems of the world, but is rather about being formed into the very likeness of Jesus Christ, which means being formed into a cross.⁸

But it’s a cross that claims victory, and it’s a victory that leads us over bridges of conflict and struggle into God’s glorious presence, as we realize more and more that we are more than conquerors through the One who loved us and saved us, and convinced always that the affirmation is indeed true: that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, not things to come, nor powers, 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” (Romans 8:38-39).

Brothers and sisters, there *is* no bridge too far for God.

Amen.

⁸ Fleming Rutledge, “From Denial to Victory,” *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*, 259-260; see also, Scott McKnight, *Reading Romans Backwards* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019).167,