

What if God is for Us?

First in a Series

...in all things, we are more than conquerors

Rom. 8:37

September 13, 2020

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Prayer: Dear God draw us into your word and by your Spirit reveal the truth you have for us today. May each heart, mind, and spirit be open to receive. Amen

Message

Nothing like a pandemic, never before seen natural disasters, an election year, multiple and simultaneous home-improvement projects in my own house , a hybrid school schedule, a positive covid test in my house, cancelling annual family vacations, and trying to figure out what ministry, worship, and community looks like when physical proximity and limited numbers are in effect, to make a person ask the question, “what if?”

What if this is the new normal? What if this is life now? What if it’s all a hoax? What if it isn’t? What if Biden wins the election? What if Trump stays another four years? What if this is what public school looks like from now on? What if this is as good as it gets? What if, what if, what if.

For being such small words in the English language, the words what and if when put together can be full of promise and hope like “what if this is the best day ever?” or “what if this is the answer I have been waiting for?” They can also be full of uncertainty and dread like, “what if this is the worst day ever?” “What if this is all there is - what if this is the answer?”

Over the next few weeks, we invite you to consider the powerful and profound nature of the question “what if?” when it comes to our life and the living out of our faith during this particular time in our country and in history.

What if...

What if we lived our life out of our God given potential rather than human generated fear? After all, potential is God's gift to us. Making the most of it is our gift back to God.

What if we measured spiritual growth and faith in someone not by keeping score of their sin, failures, and shortcomings or by tracking how well they follow the do's and don'ts of religion and its institutions, but rather by being Jesus to each other?

What if we approached every day as if the victory has already been won at Calvary's cross, (because it has) rather than fearing we just might lose?

What if we could reimagine what community, success, wisdom, love, and neighbor could look like or sound like?

Too much to ask for? Too big? Too lofty? Too rainbowy, warm fuzzies, and pixie dust wishful thinking?

Really? Cause have you ever wondered what if Moses' mother hadn't saved him by floating him down the river for Pharaoh's daughter to find? What if David's sling slipped and he missed Goliath's forehead? What if Esther refused, had not prayed and fasted, thereby finding favor, thus saving the Jewish people from genocide? What if Joseph and Mary had not heeded the angel's warning to flee Bethlehem before Herod's henchmen showed up? What if those first followers of Jesus gave up, quit, or walked away when things didn't make sense, when they were afraid, or when everything around them was in turmoil, falling apart, or being undermined and destroyed?

What if?

Mark Batterson writes the following in his book entitled, *If*: (SLIDE)  
“If you stop and think about it, everything begins with if. Every achievement, from the Nobel Prize to the Oscars, begins with what if? Every dream, from

landing on the moon to the moon pies created to commemorate it, begins with what if? Every breakthrough, from the internet to iTunes, begins with what if?”

There are 1,784 ifs in the Bible. Most of them function as conditional conjunctions on the front end of God’s promises. If we meet said condition, God delivers on the promise. All that stands between so much of our current political, economical, racial, environmental, and cultural situations and a unified, acceptable, doable, workable, and sustainable solution is one little if. What if we would truly listen to one another? What if we treated one another as people and not labels? What if we recognized and admitted when we were wrong and grew from it? All that stands between your current circumstances and your wildest possibility, dream, and God potential, is one little if. What if I took a chance? What if I could do it?

One little if can change everything. One little if can change anything.

It is our prayer that this series will help us all process what is happening around us and equip us with a knowledge that will unite us (when so much is dividing us); wisdom that will stir the desire to reimagine what is or what could be (rather than focussing on what is not and who’s to blame); and hope to recognize God’s presence, power, and peace in the midst of it all.

Where do we start? We start with the greatest “what if” chapter the bible offers: Romans 8. When it comes to the eighth chapter of Romans, “even wordsmiths are at a loss for words. Not many adjectives can do justice to its mystery and majesty” (Batterson, 15). One theologian calls it the “Great Eight.” Martin Luther called it, “the clearest gospel of them all” (Batterson 15). William Tyndale, who was martyred for translating the Bible into English, called it, “the most excellent part of the New Testament.” You can probably guess what Batterson calls it: The If Chapter.

Why “The If Chapter?” Because in the midst of the action, adventure, story line, subplot, and even a few special effects, the hinge on which everything turns is the “if” statement in verse 31b or the second half of the verse.

Now I realize you will be sorely disappointed that I am not reading the entire 39 verses of this chapter, however I encourage at some point in the next couple days after hearing parts of it today, that you will read it in full. Today I pick up with verse 31.

The verses before this section contain Paul’s words expressing and describing all that God has done, the intentionality with which God did it, how God did it through Jesus and all that Jesus fulfilled. It speaks with passion and clarity what it means that Christ now resides in us and us in Christ. Paul basically and beautifully captures the entire book of Romans, his entire teaching really, into the 39 verses of chapter 8. Right down to telling us that when we get tired of waiting, tired of the struggle, and or find the words to capture how we feel or how to pray, the Spirit of God hears our every plea and groan and prays on our behalf. Hear these words and may they come alive in us all.

Read Text: Romans 8:31-39 MSG

\*insert NRSV “if God is for us who can be against us” for verse 31b.

If God is for us who (or what) can be against us?

That is the game changer - the life changer; the little word if.

If you believe with every ounce of muscle, bone, and fiber of your being that God is for you, then you have nothing to fear; the sky's the limit for your God given potential and how you live out your faith in word and deed. AND you have much to offer the rest of us.

If however, hidden behind or just below the surface of that good job, nice house, big smile, perfect pet, and manicured lawn, you doubt God’s love and good intentions, such doubt will surface in a thousand forms of fear. We might masquerade the fear with sayings like, “I just like things done a certain way,” “This

just isn't a good time for me," "That's just not me," "I want to wait and see what happens then decide," "I could never do something like that," "I am too old," "I am too young," "I don't have time," "It's really not that big of a deal, it was just an idea," "I'm not prepared," "I'm not sure it makes sense or that anyone will listen," "Someone else can do it."

Fear. Fear. Fear.

Those early followers knew fear. They carried the task of spreading the Jesus message to the known world at the time. They were confronted with uncertainty, disappointment, and failure. They knew hardship, struggle, and heartache. They faced cultural challenges, political assumptions, and government expectations. They questioned God's purpose and Jesus' call on their lives and how they were to live. Paul knew what they were facing and said: yep, it's a long haul, a tough road, uncertain at times AND God is with you through it all. Period. God was, is, and will be with you. Jesus was, is, and will see you through. Period. That is Paul's great reminder and truth of chapter 8.

I don't know for certain, but I can almost guarantee that every person God used every person we read about in this book (hold up the bible), dealt with some level of fear.

We want to challenge you today by asking: What if rather than asking the question "what if" out of fear and doubt, we asked the question out of faith; trusting God is indeed for us? Trusting that God is with us through it all? Trusting good will come and all will be well.

Two things could happen. First, we would begin to ask more positive what if questions: What if this actually works? What if things, people, ideas, understanding, and paradigms could change? What if that person could teach us? What if the hard conversations make us better? What if we tried it this way? What if we gave them the benefit of the doubt? What if they are doing the best they can with what they have and where they are?

Second, even if the negative what if's raise their voice and fear rebels against us, we would begin to hear whispers of "even if" stand to replace them: Even if this is the new normal, God is with us. Even if it is hard, God will see us through. Even if life is chaotic, the bills are piling up, the house is a mess, or my heart is breaking, Jesus walks with me, holds my hand, and has my back. Even if the situation or circumstance doesn't make sense and we can't feel God near, God is. Even if things seem to be falling apart at the seams, God is an incredible seamstress. Even if...

I have stated this before, but I believe our current situation deserves to hear it again. As part of my DMin work, I attended several week long gatherings. Several times throughout the week, we were reminded and challenged to claim the following truth: I am one in whom Christ dwells and I live in the unshakable kingdom of God.

What if you could say that of yourself and truly believe it? What if your life reflected such awareness, certainty, and hope. What if you started not from a place of fear, questioning whether or not God is listening, tallying all your sin and mistakes (and those of others), or imposing your assumptions and expectations on everyone else, and instead, embraced that if God is for us, nothing and no one can stand against - or come between God's love and us; not sadness or grief or loss or loneliness, not a global pandemic, or hurricanes and wildfires; not politics, racial injustice, broken systems or long standing institutions; not labels, oppression, violence, or divisive behavior.

If God is for us dear church (and God is), there is no room for fear, only faith, hope, and love. And our communities, our families, friends, colleagues, neighbors - our world could use a little faith, hope, and love right now.

Thanks be to God and may it be so, amen.

Resources Consulted:  
Mark Batterson's *If*  
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