

More Than Conquerors

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[0 : 0 0] Well as I said in our reading today we are going to continue our study in Romans and we're coming towards the end of Romans chapter 8 which as we said is a chapter that is full of just stunning teaching regarding the Gospel. It's highlighting the many extraordinary benefits that are ours through union with Jesus Christ. So if you want to find out what being a Christian is going to give you or if you want to try and explain the blessings of the Gospel to a friend who's asking you then go to Romans 8 is a wonderful chapter where we see the fullness of what God is doing for us through his son Jesus. And so today we're coming nearly at the end of this chapter it's probably the second last sermon we'll do in Romans 8 we're at verse 35 to 37. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword as it is written for your sake we've been killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. And in many ways I want to focus on the words in verse 37 today. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. That's a verse that we probably know fairly well especially that phrase more than conquerors. We see it in songs we see it as the title of books. It's the kind of phrase that can sometimes be frequently used in various avenues of the Christian church. It's one that's probably familiar to us but what exactly does it mean?

Sometimes we can know things but maybe not know them if you know what I mean. What exactly is Paul saying when he says that we are more than conquerors? Well that's the question I want us to consider together today and we're really going to just take a very simple approach. We're going to go to verse 37 and we're going to just go through it bit by bit and see what it says.

So first of all Paul's first statement is no in all these things. Now the minute you read that it should point you backwards to what has just been said. This is one of the many examples that we see in scripture where yes you can have a famous verse but that verse doesn't exist in isolation. There's loads of famous verses in Romans chapter 8 and we said before that the kind of verses you'll get as a fridge magnet or a picture or something and that's great. It's wonderful to have a verse on display in your house or in your car or whatever that is brilliant but we must never ever forget that these verses are connected to what has been said before and after them. We always want to consider the context of a verse. So when we have this familiar phrase we are more than conquerors. We have to recognise that that's not just a general statement of triumph. It's actually referring to very specific things. Paul is saying we are more than conquerors in all these things. So that raises the question what are the things? What's Paul talking about?

Well have a look can you see what would you say the things are? Where's the answer to that question? Well you can look there and you can see that the things are all listed in verse 35. These are the things that Paul is talking about. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. In all these things we are more than conquerors and so Paul is wanting us to think about what all of these things are referring to. These are all threats to the Christian in their life and when you look at all of these things they are all serving as threats against their faith. It's a great reminder that Christians face threats and we must never ever forget that the whole of human life and experience ever since the fall is now in the context of conflict. The whole world, the whole of human history ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against God, the whole of history is now in the context of a battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil and that's why the world is the way it is. That's why you can look at the world and see so much good. It's God's creation and you see the the splendor and beauty of that creation. You see gifted people who do wonderful things. You see precious social structures like family and community. You see beautiful acts of kindness where people do remarkable things. We can see in the world around us many many things that reflect the character of the glorious creator who made us but at the very same time you can look at the world and see so many horrible things. You see awful cruelty. You see terrible actions.

[5 : 50] You see people doing things that are just just terrible just awful and that can happen even in our local setting as well and so you think about the news in the past week at one level you've got humanity who is capable of pulling together a group of people from across the world to go and rescue 12 wee boys who are stuck in a cave in Thailand and that's brilliant to see and yet at the very same time you've got a whole nation like Venezuela that is falling apart and hardly anybody is rushing to help and most of the world well certainly our country seems to be doesn't seem to be taking too much interest in what's happening and so you just have to look at the world to see that humanity is beautiful but humanity is broken and the kingdom of darkness the devil is trying to corrupt and destroy humanity. That means that we are living in a war zone. We are living in the context of conflict and as a result we face threats. The glorious truth about being a Christian is that you've changed sides you're no longer on the side of the kingdom of darkness you're a citizen and a soldier in the kingdom of god and that is the best best best place for anyone to be it means you're no longer on the devil's side but that means we now face threats and these threats can manifest themselves in various ways. Paul lists seven of them. There they are. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword. These were the threats facing the Christians in Rome. These are threats that have faced

Christians across the ages of history ever since and these are threats that face us today as well and that's why it's important to think about them in a little bit more detail and one of the great things to do in terms of thinking about key words in scripture is to look a little bit deeper into what the words mean and to what is being what's being conveyed by the words and of course that means thinking a little bit about the the original language in which these words were spoken in which were written in which of course was Greek. So I want to go through these words one by one and see what we learn about them. So first of all tribulation now that word basically means pressure. The word the Greek word that we've got here basically means pressure so it conveys the idea of being pushed down being pressed down by your outward circumstances and we can think of that very easily it's an easy image to use if you put pressure on the seat behind you or on the the pew in front of you you're exerting a force an external force onto that object and how true that can be in our experience as Christians we face pressure. It manifests itself in various ways there's a general pressure with just the burdens of life in a fallen world so we have our responsibilities we have our concerns with our work with our family with with our community with people we know even with within a church we don't live in a world that is is perfect we live in a world that's broken and that brings pressure in lots of not so different ways and it can leave us feeling overwhelmed with all the the stresses and strains of life but we can also face a more specific pressure from other people so we face pressure to follow the world whether it's in terms of greed or status or social life or relationships that can be very very subtle but very powerful because the world is doing one thing and the bible is saying do something different and yet the pressure of the world can be very very very heavy on us you might have had that in the last week you might face it in the week ahead people around you trying to get you to do stuff that you don't want to do and that was a reality for the people in Rome not long after this there was huge pressure on Christians to say that Caesar was Lord that Caesar was to be worshiped as a god and of course the Christians couldn't do that and they faced huge pressure and persecution as a result today we face pressure in a different way we face pressure to say that self is Lord because the world around us is exerting pressure in all sorts of directions so that people can get what they want so you see pressure being applied to schools to councils to governments because people think i want something and i'm going to apply pressure until i get it we face the same kind of pressure to compromise and to conform to what the world wants so tribulation conveys the idea of pressure distress that's a really interesting word it means narrowness or confinement and so that's that's conveying to us the idea of being restricted and constrained by our circumstances and in broad terms that's a very common threat to the Christian church back in the days of these Roman Christians they were marginalised and the world wanted to keep them in check it wanted to restrict them and the world is still doing the same today the world wants to keep Christianity restricted and that's

very true in Britain today because in generations gone by the influence of the Christian morality and teaching was very very widespread in Britain that is being narrowed isn't it in lots of ways Christian influence has been undermined and people are trying to remove it from our society and at best people will say well your faith that's fine but keep it to yourself and keep it out of the public domain so there's this confinement in a general sense but it also can apply at a personal level often we can feel that our our circumstances are restricting us they're confining us and that can happen in lots of ways it can be our health it can be our resources it can be our opportunities often in life we have plans but they're restricted by our circumstances and that can cause us great distress so we face distress in in this regard persecution is a really interesting word it basically means to chase isn't that a really interesting image because that's what persecution is chasing after someone to harass them and to hurt them it's a reminder that as

Christians we don't just face the difficulty of the things that come our way as we go through life we also face we can also often face the deliberate attack and pursuit from people who are opposed to us and that was the reality for these early Christians they had opponents who chased them if you read about Paul's second missionary journey so I think that's Acts chapter 18 maybe 16 16 17 18 I think it's like a chase you read Paul he goes across to Macedonia and he gets chased out of Philippi chased out of Berea chased out of all the different places because his opponents are following him and are persecuting him Paul knew the reality of that and so did many other Christians Peter tells us that the devil is like a roaring lion prowling around seeking someone to devour to devour and so persecution is a reality that Christians have always faced it's a reality that Christians throughout the world face today to a far greater level than we do but but we are not immune to it either because there are opponents to the gospel even in Britain there are a lot of people that would want to see the church of Jesus Christ disappear and you only have to go onto Facebook or Twitter and to find some pretty horrible threats and to find people who are chasing the church and trying to get rid of it so persecution that's a reality and a struggle famine that's very self explanatory basically just means to be hungry conveys the idea of not having enough and that's a really interesting point for Paul to add here because you could many in many ways you could say well the first thing that's all because of of stuff happening whether it's being placed under pressure being confined or being chased it's in many ways a direct threat from opponents but hunger is basically just the threat of not being able to survive and that's a threat to the Christian church as well so physically these churches these Christians in Rome they might not have had enough to eat many Christians face the same thing today but even in circumstances like ours where we have plenty to eat we still face the threat of not being able to survive as a church because the church is constantly dependent on on more people coming in the new generation of a church is not there automatically and so we look at ourselves and we think well you think in 50 years time will more people come in will our church have the resources to reach out to the next generation what will happen when when the older generation and the people who've kept the church going for years are not here we can face this threat in terms of survival we think we might not have enough to survive there's the danger of hunger of a lack of resources in lots and lots of different ways nakedness is related to that it's in a way similar to to famine but it's not just the case of not having enough it's also conveying the idea of of poverty of weakness and of destitution if you're naked you don't have even have clothes to wear a reminder that the Christian church is often poor because when Jesus called people to follow him he didn't just go around looking for the elite and for the people with all the resources and status and wealth in the world he called people from every single class and more often than not it was the poorest and the lowest who listened to him so in all the grandness of the Roman Empire where you had these elite classes who controlled the wealth who controlled the land and who controlled the country not very different from today really

you had many many people who were poor and the church faced this threat of a real lack of resources destitution can be a great threat to the church still applies today churches have massive costs how are we going to pay for that the church wants to help people aren't in need how are we going to be able to do that what's going to happen to the church in scotland if we run out of resources it's a threat to us second last one is danger that word there basically means being at risk and that's a reminder that being part of the church in Rome in these days if you were part of that church you were taking a risk you were at risk of your safety at risk in terms of security at risk even in terms of your status and we know that that's true for many many Christians today we pray for the persecuted church every single week because there are people who come to worship like us on the morning of the first day of the week and they are in danger when they do it they are taking a risk and it can be true for us as well and maybe not in such an explicit way but but if you identify yourself as a Christian even at work tomorrow if you're able to go to work tomorrow and and openly say I was at church yesterday and I loved it because I love Jesus you might be taking a risk a risk of being shunned by friends a risk of being mocked by people who well been mocked by people who who make out like they look down on you but probably underneath the envious of you and you're at risk of being regarded as a fool because often the truths of the gospel are foolishness to the world it can be a risk the Christian church has always existed in the midst of danger and then we come to the most serious threat of all which is mentioned by Paul the sword which of course is referring to death these Christians in Rome they faced the threat of being killed for their faith and just a few years maybe possibly six years after Paul's letter to the Romans was written just a few years after that many of the Christians who read this letter would have been killed when the emperor Nero engaged in a in a fierce persecution of Christians it's been a threat to the Christian church from day one and it remains a threat today so the

[20 : 03] Christian church faces all of these threats they were a reality in the New Testament they've been a reality throughout the history of the church and they remain a reality today and we look at all these things and we can feel so discouraged because these threats are real and they are intimidating and they are unpleasant and they can leave us feeling incredibly vulnerable you look at all that and you think you feel like hiding you feel exposed and that's exactly what Paul describes in verse 36 he says we're being killed all the day long we are like as sheep to be slaughtered you think of a sheep waiting to be slaughtered it's just helpless weak and vulnerable and you think of all these threats and as a church we can feel so discouraged and so exposed the threats to the church can look like they are too strong and the key question is is that true are all these threats too strong what's the threat of imperial persecution too strong for these Christians in Rome is the threat of secularism and pluralism too strong today is the church going to lose this battle well Paul gives us an amazing answer Paul says no way absolutely not and the reason he says no way is what we find in verse 7 because we are more than conquerors now the word that Paul uses there for what we translate more than conquerors is actually just one word in Greek and it is a brilliant word it literally translates as as hyper conqueror or super conqueror it basically means to be completely and overwhelmingly victorious now just think about that Paul has given us a formidable list of threats and then he says but in Jesus Christ we are going to be completely and overwhelmingly victorious and it's the most confident most wholehearted most all-encompassing all triumphant word that Paul could possibly use he's not saying hopefully we'll make it he's not saying we might just make it he's saying we could just get there he's not saying anything like that at all he is saying we will completely and utterly overwhelmingly triumph over every single threat which stands against us so if you look at those threats that you can see in verse 35 and ask the question are these threats going to win can the pressure of the world crush the church can the restriction of the world confine the gospel can the chasing of the world rid the world of Christianity can hunger and deprivation starve the church to death can nakedness and destitution shipwreck the work of the gospel can the risk be too great can the threat of death break the power of the gospel the answer to all of those questions is absolutely not a chance absolutely no way because we are more than conquerors in this context of conflict we are completely and overwhelmingly victorious and that is absolutely amazing but you might say to yourself well Thomas that sounds great

but how do you know how can we be so confident how can we be so sure well Paul tells us how we can know and he shows us that this triumph over all that set threatens us makes perfect theological sense because we are more than conquerors through him it is through our union with Jesus Christ that we have this victory Jesus has won the victory Jesus has overcome the world Jesus is now risen and exalted at the right hand of God Jesus is king of kings and lord of lords and if you are trusting in him or if you start trusting in him today which you can then you are united to him and that basically means that everything that you are is bound up with everything that he is and so that's for that reason we need to apply our theology to all the threats that we face you look at that list of threats you need to take the theology of scripture the theology of the gospel and apply it to all of these threats with particular reference to Jesus Christ so tribulation talks about pressure can the world pressure Jesus no because Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God the world is his footstool and when the world tries to fake shake its fist at Jesus and tell God what to do then it's just a joke that's how Sam too I think describes it it really is just like a joke because Jesus reigns over everything distress talks about confinement and narrowness can the world confine the power of Jesus no the world keeps trying to force Jesus into a corner and say to him stay there stay in that corner and yet Jesus is the very one through him the whole world was created can the creation restrict the creator of course not of course not persecution conveys the idea of a chase can God's church be chased out of the world no and so persecutors think that they can harass Christianity out of existence but if a persecutor chases the church where is the church going to run to the church is going to run to the lord of the armies of heaven and to him the oceans of the world are just a drop in the palm of his hand and yet people really think that they can chase God's family away of course they can't absolutely no chance famine speaks about poverty but not having enough resources are God's resources going to run out no of course they're not so is the church going to get too hungry or too weak to survive no the lord owns the cattle on a thousand hills the lord clothes every single flower in every single field the lord has all the resources that we need the lord simply needs to speak and the whole universe comes into existence he is never ever ever going to run out of the resources that his family needs nakedness talks about being destitute so is God unable to provide for his people when they are in need no so are people too poor are people too broken are people too destitute are people too far gone for God to help them of course not and that's why Jesus says you really don't need to worry about what you're going to eat or what you're going to wear tomorrow because your father in heaven knows what you need

Paul talks about danger is it too hard for God to protect his people from danger course not because by faith we are united to Jesus that is the safest place we can ever be the whole of the bible is the account of God's amazing rescue mission where he brings people out of danger and he places them in eternal safety so none of these things tribulation distress persecution famine nakedness danger none of these things are too much for God but what about the last one what about death can death itself break your relationship with God but no because Christ has won victory over death a decisive conclusive overwhelming unstoppable victory and if you put your faith in him then you are united to him so you are bound up in everything that that victory has achieved and that's why ultimately for the christian death is no threat at all because it is only going to bring you home to be with Jesus forever so in other words you look at all of these threats and you ask yourself the question is God going to let you down is God going to let you down no way he will never ever let you down you will never ever let you down as an individual he'll never ever let you down as a communication so can we carry on with the work of the gospel in the midst of all these threats can you reach out to the world around you can you continue on with the work of the gospel can you be a beacon of hope and a pillar of truth in this community can you stand up for Jesus in a broken world can you stand in the face of all of these threats can you win this battle of course you can because we are more than conquerors and that's why the most unlikely group of weak disciples who were left devastated after the crucifixion of their leader that's why that unlikely weak and in many ways they looked hopeless that group of men and women has grown into the largest and most influential movement in all of history and that is why every single attempt to stop the church of Jesus Christ in the past 2000 years every single one of these attempts has got one thing in common they failed and this is why it's vital that we keep our eyes on Jesus in everything in every single thing that life may bring whatever a day or a week or a month or a year may bring no matter how unexpected or unwanted it may be we need to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus because he is the one who will take us through he is the one who will keep us history tells us that when the church takes its eyes off

Jesus it will fail when disciples take their eyes off Jesus they will fail but when the church is grounded in Jesus Christ then she conquers we are more than conquerors in him there's one last thing that this verse tells us if we ask the question what is the reason why we are completely and overwhelmingly victorious in Christ what's the reason for that is it because God wants to glory in a great triumph is it because God wants to demonstrate how powerful and strong he is is it because God wants to prove himself as the one who can overcome is that why no it's because he loves you we are more than conquerors through him who loved us so in the gospel of Jesus Christ we have an overwhelming and unstoppable victory in Jesus because he has an overwhelming and unstoppable love for you that is what makes the christian gospel the best news that you will ever hear what a message what a savior thanks be to God let's pray our father we thank you so so much for the victory that we have in Jesus Christ and all of these threats can sometimes overwhelm us and can make us feel so insecure and weak and feeble and we pray oh god that in all of that we would remember what your word is teaching us today that because of Jesus and in Jesus and through Jesus we are more than conquerors we thank you for the sheer magnitude of Jesus's victory and we pray lord that by faith every one of us would share in that victory and that we would keep our eyes totally firmly and forever fixed on him please bless us and help us and please write your word in our hearts and we just want to thank you that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us amen