

. . . *apart from me you can do nothing* (John 15:5)

In all our sufferings, we are more than conquerors through the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us.

A. All our sufferings.

What a life full of suffering the apostle Paul experienced after he became a Christian! Often whipped, beaten and put in prison. Often facing imminent death from flooded rivers, robbers and mobs. Once almost stoned to death. Shipwrecked three times. Spending a terror-filled night and day on the open sea, travelling many weary miles with sleepless nights. Being acquainted with constant hunger and thirst, with being cold and ill-clothed and experiencing harrowing escapes. And on top of all of this, having to bear the daily burden for the many churches he had started. No wonder he told the members of these churches that they would have to go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of heaven (Acts 14:22)! No wonder he writes about creation and believers groaning because of the sufferings this present time (8:18-25). He knows what he is talking about because he is a broken man who lives in a broken world just like the rest of humanity in general and the Christians in particular. What kept the apostle going during all these sufferings he lists and the ones he did not list? Why did he continue to believe in God in the midst of all these sufferings? Paul had a profound secret that sustained him during all of his afflictions. A profound secret that he wants to share with the Roman Christians and, in them, wants to share with you too.

B. In all our sufferings being loved by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul's profound secret in all his sufferings is that he knows that he is not his own, but belongs with body and soul, in life and in death to the Lord Jesus Christ. And because he does, he knows that he is profoundly loved by the Lord Jesus

Christ in the midst of all his sufferings. He had eloquently written about this love of the Lord Jesus Christ in his letter to the Romans. First he had written that God is angry at all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of human beings both in the world and that among his own people. And when it concerned his people, the law could not help them appease this anger. On the contrary, it only got worse with all the daily accumulation of sin and guilt (1:18-3:20). But then he wrote that what the law and his people could not do, God did in sending his own Son who not only lived a perfect life of obedience for them, but also bore the wrath of God against their sins, making atonement for these sins once and for all. Accordingly, whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ is freed from this anger of God (i.e. reconciled to God) and declared to be righteous before God (3:21-26). Consequently, Christians have peace with God (5:1-2). And this peace is not a temporary truce, but an abiding peace because the Lord Jesus Christ is at the right hand of God interceding for us. Accordingly, unlike the guilty who cannot stand before God and thus will be let go so that they perish, Christians can stand before God in the Lord Jesus Christ and his forgiving grace. And one day he will share in the glory of God (cf. 8:18-30). This sheds light on the sufferings Paul experiences. Because he has been and is loved by the Lord Jesus, he knows that the sufferings he experiences on his journey to the new heaven and new earth are not punishments for personal sins, for these sins (past, present and future) have already been punished in the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. Moreover, since he knows that he will one day share in the glory of God, he can rejoice in his sufferings because he knows these sufferings

will not have the last word in his life, but the sharing the glory of God will (cf. 8:22). Accordingly, sufferings make him stronger in his faith so that he perseveres in his faith.

C. In all our sufferings, we are more than conquerors through the Lord Jesus Christ who loved us.

Now in our text, Paul is standing on the top of a mountain, as it were, and surveying the love of the Lord Jesus Christ in his life. And even though this love of the Lord Jesus is an invisible reality much like the army of angels on horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha and his servant, he sees and experiences this reality the reality of this love through the eyes of faith enlightened by the Holy Spirit. And so he confidently calls out: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" And he triumphantly answers his own question: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Right in the midst of all his sufferings Paul knows himself to be more than a conqueror ("hyper conqueror") because of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Q & A 1). This is the deep secret in all his sufferings. To be sure, this confidence will be attacked. It will be attacked by our own emotional mood swings. But when that happens, we need to climb to the top of the mountain together with Paul and learn to connect our emotions to the spiritual reality of our being more than conquerors in the Lord Jesus Christ who loved and still loves us. When we do, we will learn to triumphantly confess that nothing in all of creation will ever separate us from this love.

