

## Notes on Romans 8 : 31 – 39 ‘In Jesus there is now no separation’

We began listening to Romans 8 in Lent and as we read and watched ‘God on Mute’ together, we moved from the demands of Lent to the joy of Easter as we celebrated Jesus’ resurrection and witnessed two baptisms and now, we journey in awe of Jesus the ascended Lord and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. All of these rich, powerful and passionate themes are summed up in verses 38-39 and the celebration that nothing can separate us from the love of God we know in Jesus. This long, rich chapter immerses us into the very person of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the assurance of our identity and vocation as those who are, and will be made into, the Image of Christ (verse 28). These verses do not merely have a pastoral focus, that is our assurance of being held in the hand of God, they are also deeply missional since we are not to keep such a love to ourselves, we have the joy of sharing it with all we meet and know.

1979 was momentous for me for two reasons. The first was that I came to faith at the Greenbelt Festival in a field near Newport Pagnell, the second was the release of the film ‘Monty Python and the Life of Brian’. At Greenbelt I was captivated by the love of Jesus I saw in the lives of 20,000 people around me. The Life of Brian was a cynical and sceptical view of faith and what a life shaped by faith looks like. All of the Pythons are Oxford graduates who all share this same cynical and sceptical view of life though Michael Palin in his diaries when considering whether he believed in God or not had a Martin Luther style moment when the sky turned black and a storm came hurtling down as described in his entry for 9<sup>th</sup> November. This is opposite to Paul who wants us all to be persuaded of the utter dependability of the Gospel in Jesus which is the true demonstration of God’s love for us. He underlines this by combining a string of questions, three Biblical echoes, or quotes each from a different part of the Old Testament and two lists of dangers in verses 35, 38-39. These three elements are all tied together by a tight summary of Jesus’ story in verse 34. We never find anything like this in all that Paul wrote and we need to pay close attention to it.

The questions Paul asks us in verses 31-35 all expect a negative answer. Paul wants us to ask ourselves these questions whenever we feel pressured, sad, hurt, grieved, in despair, when we feel bewildered or in any other difficult time. These questions are crucial to our mental and spiritual health and wellbeing as they are how we apply the Gospel of Jesus to ourselves and our lives as they give us perspective, hope and are the foundation of our epistemology of love, or how we see and understand the world.

The three Biblical echoes and quotes are in verse 32 referring to the testing of Abraham in Genesis 22, in verse 33 referring to the suffering servant in Isaiah 50 verses 4-9 and in verse 36 and referring to Psalm 44. In Genesis 22 Abraham was tested by God to offer his son Isaac and in first century Judaism, the story was seen as pointing to creation, Passover and the Day of Atonement. But in Romans 8 we see the Father giving his Son so that the Covenant will be fulfilled and that we may receive God’s promised inheritance. In Isaiah 50 it is Jesus who is the suffering servant, and it is we, his people, who live secure in the promise of no condemnation. In Psalm 44, the psalmist complains against God because he is suffering even though he has kept the covenant but in Romans 8 our suffering is how we express our vocation and keep

the covenant and when we groan in suffering, we do so alongside the Spirit who groans for the world to know Jesus crucified and raised for them.

The two lists we find in verses 35 and 38-39 describe something of what it means for us to take up our cross and the confidence we can have in Jesus who is greater than them all.

Rome believed that it had a secret name which gave it the right and the might to rule the world, but it was said that if this name was spoken it threatened to destroy Rome itself; this name was Amor which is Roma backwards. Amor is Latin for love because a founding story of Rome was that Rome was descended from Aeneas, who was the son of Venus, the goddess of love, but in verse 34 Paul reworks what love is by retelling the story of Jesus. In this verse he describes the conquering love of God we know and see in Jesus who is and defines what the Good News, or Gospel, is all about. Jesus is Good News to us and he is Good News to Dronfield and to all the world. We are entrusted with this God's greatest mystery, that in Jesus who was crucified and raised from the dead we see what love is, we see what it means for us to live this love and we glimpse the difference this love can make to this world God loves so much. I saw, I felt, I knew, I understood what this love meant to me in a field near Newport Pagnell in 1979 and I have never been the same since, may we all be never the same again because our lives are now constrained, moulded and filled by this love of God we see in Jesus.

#### Questions on Romans 8 : 31 – 39 'In Jesus there is now no separation'

- 1 When you hear the phrase that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, what springs to your heart and mind?
- 2 What was it that made you choose to live a life of faith trusting in Jesus?
- 3 Paul wants us to be persuaded of the utter dependability of the Gospel, in verse 38, which of these four elements helps you the most?
- 4 Which of these questions is most pertinent to you in your life today?
- 5 Which of the three echoes or quotes from the Old Testament helps you the most in assuring you that nothing can separate you from God's love?
- 6 In the lists Paul uses, which element do you find the most challenging?
- 7 Paul uses the story of Jesus in verse 34 to rework what the power of love looks like, which part of this story, if you can separate it, gives you the most comfort and which part challenges you the most.