

## **Romans 8:31-39 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

<sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

<sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

<sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

<sup>35</sup> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

<sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

<sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> 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.

The celebration of Easter is the foundation of the Christian faith. Everything that we believe hinges on what happened on that first Easter morning.

This great chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans would mean nothing at all if Christ did not rise from the dead.

The theme for this year's Easter message is taken from verse 31 of Romans 8 "What, then, shall we say in response to this?"

If Easter means anything at all, it demands a response. A response to:

- **The Claims of the Gospel**
- **The Sacrifice of JESUS Christ**
- **The Hope that we have for the future**

## I. What Shall We Say?

## II. What Shall We Do?

## III. What is Your Hope?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings to the forefront the great questions that every human being has to deal with.

Questions about the purpose of life and the meaning of death. Questions about human suffering, and a hope that goes beyond the grave.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ forces us to deal with the claims of the Gospel.

- The Gospel isn't just an analogy to try to explain the unexplainable.
- The Gospel isn't a therapeutic story to help us deal with the painful reality of death.

The Gospel claims to be the ultimate truth that deals with all of the great issues of life.

**The empty tomb is where the physical and spiritual questions of life intersect.**

Is man simply a biological creature that lives and dies and then goes out of existence? Or is there a spiritual, eternal aspect to our being as well as the physical?

If there is a spiritual side to man, then where does that come from, and where does that lead us?

The resurrection of Jesus Christ runs right into the prevailing post-modern view of the world.

Postmodernism says that there is no such thing as truth, in the ultimate sense. Every one of us constructs our own understanding of reality, there is no grand story or narrative to life.

Postmodernism says that if you want to believe in Jesus, that's fine. If you don't want to believe, that's fine too. It doesn't really matter in the end. Truth is whatever you want it to be.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes that to be nonsense. You can't avoid the great questions of life by pretending that there aren't any definitive answers to them.

At the empty tomb of Christ all of us face the great questions of origin, meaning, morality and destiny.

### What shall we say to these things?

If there is life after death, then death doesn't have the final say, God does. He is the one who will judge the living and the dead. Our lives will be held accountable to the One who holds power over the grave.

What shall we say to the great claims of the Gospel? You cannot be indifferent to the Gospel. You can't claim that you just haven't thought about it. The Gospel demands a response.

The atheist says that they don't believe in anything metaphysical, as if that settles the matter. Rarely is unbelief challenged with the same scrutiny as Biblical Christianity.

The atheist says that they have abundant faith in science and reason. But science and reason alone can't deal with the great questions of life. They don't deal with the issues of:

Meaning	Purpose
Love	Hope
Right	Wrong
Good	Evil

The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes all of those issues relevant and essential. For example:

- Do you ever wonder if your life has any lasting significance? Are you just here taking up space, only to be forgotten soon after you're gone?
- Is life more powerful than death, or does death have the final say?
- Is the grave the end or the beginning? Will you ever see your loved ones again?

What do you say in response to these things? The Gospel isn't just wishful thinking. It's not a myth. It claims to be the truth behind all truths.

The great questions of life flow out of the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. What do you say in response to that?

In the name of the risen LORD, I urge you to respond in faith. Believe the Gospel. As doubting Thomas confessed a week after the resurrection, bow before JESUS and confess, "My LORD and my God."

### **Romans 10:9-11 (ESV)**

...if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. <sup>11</sup> For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."

Have you done that? Some of you here today been in church all of your lives and have never publically said anything about the claims of the Gospel outside a church setting.

If you say nothing about what you believe concerning the Gospel it's the same as saying that you're ashamed of Christ.

### **Mark 8:38 (ESV)**

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

What shall we say about the claims of the Gospel? Are you ashamed of the Gospel, or are you like the apostle Paul who said boldly:

## **Romans 1:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

For centuries believers have greeted one another on Easter morning with the words, “He is risen.” And what is the response? “He is risen indeed.”

If you believe that, then proclaim it. Tell it to people you know and love. Tell it to those you meet and interact with.

You will get strange looks and people will think that you’re odd. But we’re not ashamed of being a fool for Christ.

**What do you say in response to the claims of the Gospel?**

Just as important as what you say in response to this, but what will you do in light of the life, death and resurrection of JESUS Christ?

What difference will this make in how you live your life? The apostle Paul asks, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Who is our adversary? If God is for us, is there a force or power that is out to destroy us?

Why is there death, destruction, hatred and evil in the world? And what is your response to all of these things?

The GREAT STRUGGLE of life that we’re engaged in is described in the Bible as the conflict between light and darkness, life and death, righteousness and rebellion.

## **Ephesians 6:12**

<sup>12</sup>For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Whether you want to be or not, you are a part of that struggle. There is a cosmic battle that plays out in our culture, in our neighborhoods and in your own living rooms.

If God is for us, who can be against us? Who would want to bring us harm? Who would want to separate us from the love of God?

Ultimately the struggle is between the sin that would bring you condemnation, and the grace that would bring you redemption.

Last week the President described the world scene as a mess. Two seemingly small and rather insignificant dictatorships may have brought us closer to WWII than we've been since the early 1960's.

**Syria and North Korea** have both provoked the world's superpowers to take action. Those actions could easily escalate, and who knows what that could lead to.

We live in an unstable world. There are forces that are out to destabilize the world and bring us harm. Though no nation is without fault, it's not that hard to distinguish between good and evil.

Our leaders are faced with the dilemma, "What shall we do in light of this present evil?"

The person and work of JESUS Christ exposes the spiritual battle between good and evil.

The source of evil is sin. Sin is the transgression of the Law of God. It is a lack of righteousness. It is selfishness. It is a hostility toward the only true God who is absolutely holy.

Sin brings separation, alienation, division, sickness and death. It makes our lives here on earth a toil and a struggle.

The struggle of life is between faith and despair. It is between hope and gloom. Who wins in the end? Will it be life or death? Will it be sin or righteousness?

The battle is to keep the faith in the midst of struggle. It is to remain faithful when you're pulled the other way. What you do with your life depends on where you stand.

### **Romans 8:5-8 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

If I know that certain actions and attitudes are wrong and hurtful, why would I ever give into them? **It's a part of the struggle.**

If I know that God works out all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to His purpose, why do I worry about things? **It's a part of the struggle.**

If I know that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, then why am I afraid being condemned and rejected by others? **It's the struggle.**

If nothing can separate me from the love of Christ, why do I so often feel worthless and completely unlovable? **It's the struggle.**

If you're a follower of Christ, you will be a part of that struggle. You can't sit this one out. Life this side of heaven is a constant battle.

Just when you think you have the enemy licked, he comes back with a vengeance. Just when you think you've got things figured out, something unanticipated takes place.

Just when you think that you've got things under control, you run into a new problem.

- Faith and doubt.
- Hope and anguish
- Love and selfishness

The struggle is between **faith** and doubt. If God is in control of all things, then even in your times of weakness He reigns supreme and will never leave or forsake you.

The struggle is between **hope** and despair. If Christ has been raised from the dead, then our enemy has been vanquished.

The struggle is between the selfless **love** of God and the selfish desires of the flesh.

- Faith and doubt.
- Hope and anguish
- Love and selfishness

A good part of our struggle in life is dealing with suffering, something that even Jesus had to deal with.

#### **Romans 8:18**

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

My struggle is to see the hand of God even in my suffering. Perhaps that's your struggle this morning. You're suffering, either physically, emotionally or spiritually, and you wonder what the message of Easter means to you.

#### **Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)**

<sup>2</sup>Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Easter points us past the cross to the tomb which is now empty. Easter points us past the suffering to the glory that will be revealed in us who believe.

Easter points us past the struggles of this life to the Savior who at this very moment intercedes in our behalf. The struggle is there for a reason.

But it won't always be this way. The one who would destroy us can't defeat us. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If God is for us, who can be against us?

**Romans 8:32 (ESV)**

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

That points to the great sacrifice Christ made for you. Sacrifice is at the very heart of our faith. We are saved not because of anything we've done, but because of what Christ has done.

God did not spare his own son for you. What will you do in response to that? How will that sacrifice affect the way you live your life?

Will it make any difference at all once you leave here today? True faith will always involve a response. What shall we do with that sacrifice?

In chapter 12 Paul says that because God didn't spare his own son, we can offer ourselves up to God as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God which is our spiritual act of worship.

If JESUS offered himself up for us, how can we neglect such a great salvation? What then is your hope in life and in death?

**Romans 8:35 (ESV)**

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Most of us here have never faced such things as it relates to our faith. Believers in Egypt this past week read these verses a bit differently. Their faith went through the ultimate test.

Your hope must be found not in the things of this world, but in that which is eternal.

**Romans 8:37-39 (ESV)**

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things

to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> 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.

**THE GREAT GIFT** is what Easter is all about. The gift of eternal life. The gift of a relationship with God. The gift of being brought into the family of God.

What shall we say in response to this? What do you normally say when you receive a gift? Thank you. Thank you for what you've done. Thank you for what you've given me. Thank you that in Christ I am more than a conqueror.

The GREAT GIFT of Easter is Jesus Christ. Not a dead prophet. Not a quaint example to follow. But a crucified and risen Savior.

What do you say in response to this? Mary at the tomb said, "Rabboni, or teacher." Thomas a week after the resurrection said, "My Lord, and my God."

What say you? What kind of response comes from your heart this morning?

When God truly intervenes in a human heart, it's more than just a passing emotion. You become a new creation. You know that you belong to God.

The gift of salvation changes you. You learn to let go of some things that you used to cling to. You look at people differently. You see yourself differently.

The gift of Easter is new life in Jesus Christ. Whether you embrace that gift for the first time today, or whether it takes a hold of you anew again this morning, the gift changes you.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not along with him, graciously give us all things?