

I KNOW part 14: “Hard Times Will Not Defeat Me” 03.18.12

Scripture: Romans 8:35b-38 NIV

Intro: A few months ago Charlie Sheen became a national joke with his redefinition of “winning.” Even now if you type the word, winning, into your Google search, the top images, videos and websites will be about Charlie Sheen. I can’t show you any because his idea of winning is so warped - all about drugs, partying, women, material success.

You may not have Charlie Sheen’s moral definitions of winning and losing, but today - in our examination of Romans 8:35-38 - I hope that we walk away tonight with the idea that our own definition of winning and losing may be as warped to God as Charlie Sheen’s is to us. What does it mean to be defeated? What does it mean to win? What, if anything does Christ have to do with “winning?”

I. My defeat is not the result of my TROUBLES .

Before we talking about winning, we have to talk about losing. What does it mean to be defeated? Do you feel defeated? What causes you to feel that way? We know what it means in a game - to score fewer points than our opponent. But what about the game of life? What are those things that defeat you, that get you down, that make you want to quit, that makes you feel like a loser? I’m guessing that your list - whatever it may involve - isn’t anyway near the Apostle Paul’s list.

“... Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?” Romand 8:35b NIV

Let’s look this list over one at a time:

Trouble: pressure or distress; tribulation; affliction, suffering. This is not accidental trouble that comes on, but the purposeful harm placed upon us intentionally but someone who wishes us harm.

Hardship: narrowness, i.e., being pressed in, hemmed in, crowded; calamity; the idea of being corralled, fenced in, forced to go where we don’t want to go or do what we don’t want to do.

Persecution: pursuit, chase - being hunted down; In Paul’s case, being persecuted... suffering for the faith. v. 18 - present sufferings

Famine: to be so hungry that you can’t think of anything else; bad harvests would often to people to false gods, fertility gods. Bad harvests always considered the wrath of the gods. Sometimes literally thought of a “absence of bread,” which causes us to look on communion in a whole new light.

Nakedness: unclothed, exposed, stripped. To be treated as inhumane, no soul, like an animal.

Danger: peril, risk, being under threat; deprivation

Sword: dagger, knife at a sacrifice; the power to punish; knife used by butcher, priest or surgeon.

No matter what you are facing today, nothing is quite as difficult as what Paul describes. Yet he says that *none of these things can defeat us*. Maybe our definition of “winning” and “losing” needs to be adjusted!

II. My victory is not the result of my UNIQUENESS.

We are taught from an early age that we should consider our uniqueness as an advantage. Even here in church I have told you to think of your unique S.H.A.P.E. - Spiritual gifts, Heart (passion), Abilities, Personality, and Experience - as your unique way to serve God. In our society we are taught to use our uniqueness - our physical strength, or our mental smarts, or our education, or our family connections - to get ahead in life. These are the keys to victory... to "winning!" But notice the graphic way Paul describes the lives of himself and his fellow Christ-followers.

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." Romans 8:36 / Psalm 44:22 NIV

All day long... the idea that this was continuous, not ending.
Sheep to slaughter... How unique is one sheep from another as they are being herded in to the slaughterhouse? They become nothing but meat. Something to be consumed. This ultimately - according to Paul - is how the world treats Christ-followers - as nothing but meat for the slaughter house. Our special characteristics - our "winning" ways - don't ultimately amount to much. We need a redefinition of winning and losing.

III. My victory is the result of CHRIST'S LOVE FOR ME.

As a Christ follower, there may be many things I enjoy, ways to be happy and prosperous, people to love and to care for. *But these human good things can never be my ultimate avenue to happiness and joy because if they are - then they can also be taken away.* In other words, my joy becomes purely based on how well things are going for me. I'm "winning" when things go my way and I'm "losing" when things don't go my way. The Christ follower defines winning and losing differently. What does it mean to be a winner... a victor... a "conqueror?"

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Romans 8:37 NIV

All these things - meaning all this list and much more besides. Our reminder of 8:28, "In all these things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." Remember that when God says "all things" He doesn't exaggerate!

More than conquerors - How can we be "more than?" There's another level. There's losing. There's winning. Then there's MORE THAN WINNING!

Illustration - The Greatest Football Team. Who would you say is the greatest professional football team in history? The Green Bay Packers won the first two Super Bowls. The 1972 Miami Dolphins had the only perfect season. The Pittsburg Steelers won more Super Bowls than anyone else (six). In the modern era, the Indianapolis Colts, the Green Bay Packers, and the New England Patriots have been in more playoff games than anyone else. *Yet all these teams have one thing in common! They have all eventually lost a game!*

There's losing. There's winning. And there's *more than winning*. More than conquerors. That is, there's never losing again. Always winning. And that's the destination for the Christ follower who knows the real score... who knows what real winning and real losing is all about.

Losing - for the Christian - is about being separated from Christ's love. We learn here that NOTHING will ever separate us - either in this list or in the one we look at next week.

Winning - for the Christian - is about always being connected in Christ's love. And that's what we learn here today... "through him who loved us." Christ - who gave His life for us. God the Father - who allowed His son to be sacrificed. The Holy Spirit - who even now goes with us, encouraging us and reminding us of Christ's love being ALWAYS available and NEVER separated.

My 3 Takeaways Today:

Takeaway #1: What do I have to complain about? (Really!) I look over this list from Romans 8:35 and know that nothing I'm facing right now comes close to that list. I have it really good. And relative to this list, so do you! Which one of us here is really in trouble, facing hardship, experiencing persecution? Can I really complain about my job or my pay or my boss? Who here is experiencing famine? Our problem is too much food, not a lack. Nakedness? Our biggest challenge is often the style or label we wear. When's the last time you said, "I just don't have anything to wear!" and proceeded to go naked the rest of the day? We can't really fathom the danger or the sword - at least not here in America. So let's stop complaining about how hard we have it. Let's appreciate just how incredibly good life is - because it's not that way for all Christ-followers even now on this planet - and it may not always be this good for us. Let's do a whole lot more appreciating and a whole lot less complaining!

Takeaway #2: What's Really Normal? The Bible's list in Romans 8:35 describes more of the normal persecution and suffering that can be expected by the Christ-follower. What we experience here in this "good life" is really not the norm. So let's pray for 2 things: (1) for those in this life on this planet now who are persecuted for being a Christian; (2) for us not to become warped in our thinking about what life should be like. Could we be so spoiled that we forget God's goodness to us? Could we become so spoiled that we simply expect, as a matter of entitlement, only good things to come our way? Paul learned that in the tough moments of life to find God's most perfect and dependable love. Do we even search for God's love today?

Takeaway #3: How do I prioritize God's love? Is it the most important thing in my life? Do I seek it and appreciate it above all other things and all other loves? How do I respond that NOTHING will ever separate me from God's love? As ok news? As good news? As the best news ever? Put another way, if I was to fill in the blank, Nothing will ever separate me from _____, what would I put in there? The truth is most of us would put in something other than God's love. The love of another person. Safety. Children. Prosperity. Health. Being accepted. Being appreciated. And all those things are good things. But they are not the best things. And they are not the things that God promises will never be separated from us. Only one thing will never be taken away. God's love. Do I appreciate this as the great gift it really is? Do I feel like *more than a winner* because I know that hard times will not defeat me - will not keep Christ's love away from me?

Prayer and Communion.