

# BELPRES CHURCH

## **Sermon Title: Nothing**

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### **Scripture:**

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#### **Romans 8:31-39**

<sup>31</sup>What, then, shall we say in response 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, along with him, graciously give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup>Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. <sup>35</sup>Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? <sup>36</sup>As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;  
we are considered 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 convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup>neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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### **Transcript:**

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The scripture comes from Romans Chapter eight, starting with verse 31: What then shall we say in response to these things? 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 also, along with Him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen. It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died? More than that, who was raised to life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present

nor the future nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Those are some amazing promises, right? Amen. So Holy Spirit, help these promises to be more real to us as we think about them in these next few minutes, and we ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

Well, last week, as a lot of you know, there were a lot of celebrations in the UK to mark the Queen's 70th year as queen. And my favorite picture to come out of all those celebrations was of little Prince Louis, when the military jets flew over. Do you ever feel like that? I feel like that sometimes, like maybe when you find out that this Thanksgiving, your weird Uncle Fred is going to be there and you're like, "No," or maybe if you're a graduating high school senior and you're thinking about what's coming next and you're like, "I don't want to think about it," or maybe it's a problem you face in your life, health problem, financial school problem, career problem. Maybe it's just the bad news or the direction of our country and you're like, "I just want to block it out."

God has a better way. God has a better way than just blocking it out. God wants to replace fear with fortitude in our hearts and make us resilient Christians, brave Christians, maybe like the Christians, say, Chinese Christians or Iranian Christians who when the government says, "If you follow Jesus, we'll take your house away," And they say, "That's fine. That'll just teach us to rely on God more." Or then the government says, "Well, we'll throw you in jail," and they say, "That's great. That's a new mission field to tell people about Jesus." And then the government says, "Well, we're going to kill you," and then they say, "Well, that's great because you'll just send me to my Lord faster." Because God has replaced fear with fortitude, and he has made them brave, and he made them resilient, and he wants to do that with all of us.

And these verses give us the reasons why we can be that way and how we can become resilient and brave and courageous. And it starts out by saying, "What then shall we say in response to these things?" So first question you got to ask is what are these things? What's that referring to? Well, we have spent the last nine weeks looking at just one chapter in the Bible, Romans Chapter eight, and these things that's right there, it refers to everything that has come before in Chapter eight. So let's review this whole sermon series.

What are these things? No condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit guides us. We are children of God. Suffering will be replaced by glory. The Holy Spirit is our helper. And finally, the verse right before the ones that I just read, "We know that in all things, not some things, all things, even bad things, God works for good." That's what these things refers to, everything that's come before in this chapter. And what all that adds up to is that God is for you. God is for me. God is for us. In spite of the fact that I sin and shatter his commandments, hurt other people, sometimes ignore Him, God still says, "Scott, I am with you." The almighty,

creator, sustainer, ruler, sovereign ruler of the universe is for you, is for me. And that's the bottom line of this chapter.

And what that means is that there are a whole lot of nothings out there that have no power over you. And when you understand, when we understand the frail flimsy nothingness of those nothings, it moves us from fear to fortitude. So what do I mean? What do I mean by the nothings out there that have no power of us? So let me explain.

Well, first, nothing number one, nothing can be against us. The text says, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" And that's good news because a lot of times, things feel like they're against us. What feels like it might be against you right now? Maybe it's a problem you face with finances, health, career. Maybe it's a boss, a coworker, a fellow student, a teacher, a parent, a child. What feels against you? And notice that the verse doesn't say, what is, what can, what is against us? It says, "What can be against us?" In other words, what is able to ultimately be against us? Because no matter what is against us, it is not big enough to stop God's purposes in your life or in mine.

We all go through hard times. We all suffer as we talked about a few weeks ago, but if we know Jesus through His power, not our own, but through His power, suffering does not have the last word. The weapon may be formed against us, but it will not prevail. Again, That doesn't mean we'll have this carefree life. It doesn't mean that everything is going to be easy. These verses are not about comfort. They're about confidence and courage. We turn them into comfort verses, and they're comforting, but it's ultimately about courage and confidence. And that comes from knowing that we will encounter suffering, failures, defeat, but they will never be big enough ultimately to stop God's purposes in our lives, which brings me to nothing number two.

Nothing can condemn us. And that's also good news because, man, do you ever feel condemned? I think a lot of times, we just feel completely condemned because it's just in the culture around us. It's everywhere around us. I remember when I was in high school, when you would try out for the football team or the basketball team or something like that. The next day, they would post the results of who made the team and who didn't make the team. They would post that for the entire school to read. Who made the team and who didn't? It's just this shame fest. Who thought that was a good idea? I know. Let's scar the students for life, but I'm getting over it. I'm getting over it.

And I think it might be even worse today because of social media. You just go through your feed on social media and it's like, "Why is everyone's life better than mine? What's wrong with me?" Because they're just showing you their Instagram life. What's wrong with me? And then you start to condemn yourself and feel like there's something wrong with you. And Lord help you if you say one wrong thing on social media, because then everyone just jumps on you and criticizes you and condemns you because we love to condemn other people because it makes us feel better about ourselves.

I love it when people say, "Oh, Christians are so judgemental." Are you kidding me? Look at our political discourse. People are so judgemental. Now, I'm not talking about constructive criticism that helps us get better. I'm also not talking about holding people accountable, people need to be held accountable for what they do, but that's different than condemnation where people gossip about us or label us, not good looking enough, not smart enough, not popular enough, not successful enough, not rich enough, whatever. And sometimes, we feel it even in just subtle ways, just like subtle ways.

For instance, I think a lot of our graduating seniors today, what is the number one question older people in their life are asking them constantly? What's next? What comes next? I've asked that question of graduating seniors, and it's well-meaning, but it also might feel like pressure or expectations. So if you're a graduating senior in this room, on behalf of every older person here, forgive us. We know not what we do.

It's everywhere. All this sense of condemnation is everywhere around us. But here's the thing. The only person who has the authority to render a verdict on you is God. It'd be like if, at a trial, after the person was convicted, if I went up to the judge and said, "Move over, judge. I'll figure out what the right sentence is for this person. Life in prison." I do not have that authority. Nobody other than God has the authority to render a verdict in your life, including you. Nobody other than God has a verdict, has the authority to render a verdict on you, including you because sometimes, this sense of condemnation comes from ourselves.

If I screw up one wrong thing, I can dwell on it forever. I'll sometimes even physically cringe, and this has happened to me before, like I'll be watching Netflix or something and I'll think of something I did in the past. It doesn't even have to be a bad thing. Maybe just like an embarrassing thing, and I'll physically cringe, and my wife will go, "What? What is it?" I said, "Nothing. Just something I did 25 years ago." And I just condemn myself for it.

You do not have the authority to render a verdict about yourself or anybody else that is above your pay grade, and when we do that, we are usurping God's place. A while back in worship, over there in the sanctuary, I was leading the Lord's prayer. Only when it got to the line, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," I accidentally said, "My kingdom come. My will be done," out loud. Everyone was like, "Oh, that's so revealing of our pastor's heart." I like my judgements. I like judging other people. I like rendering a verdict on other people. Well, I'm sorry. That's above your pay grade. That job belongs to God and the job is filled. No need for you to apply. Nobody has the right to render a verdict on you or anyone else. No one has the right to condemn you.

So let me read these verses again, and there's some blanks there, and I'm going to put my name in the blanks. You put your name in the blanks. Who will bring any charge against Scott, whom

God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns Scott? No one Christ. Jesus who died, more than that, who was raised to new life, is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for Scott?

See, the reason, these verses point to the reason no one can condemn us because Jesus took our condemnation for us, paid the price for our sins on the cross, died to pay the penalty we deserve and then was raised from the dead. And if you feel guilty over something, if you are feeling way down by something you did, some sin, some destructive thing you did, take it to the Lord in prayer or read these verses and insert your name in it and hear Jesus say to you, "Yeah, you did that thing, and yes, it was a sin. However, I do not condemn you. Now, let me help you sin no more."

And if you're feeling condemned because of a label or a judgment that someone else has given you, go to Jesus in prayer and say, "Jesus, replace this lie with your truth about who I really am." Because here's the thing. If Jesus is your leader and forgiver, there is nothing you can say or not say, nothing you can do or not do that will get God to condemn you. God loves you, and there's not a darn thing you can do about it. You're just going to have to learn to live with it, literally, because how much bigger would your life be? How much freer would your life be if you didn't care what other people think about you? When we realize there's no condemnation, it makes us brave. Nothing can be against us. Nothing can condemn us.

And finally, nothing can come between you and God. And this is different because every other religion on the planet says you need to be afraid of the things that can separate you from God. Your sin can separate you from God. Hardship can separate you from God. Every religion says you need to fear the things that can separate you from God, except for one, and along comes the good news of Jesus that says if you know Jesus, in the words of Pastor Andrew Hopper, "Nothing can separate you from God because it is not based on how tightly you hold on to him but on how tightly he holds on to you."

And that's the whole point of this text, and it's one of the best passages in the Bible. "What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" No. In all of these things, we are more than, more than conquerors through him who loved us for I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither hype nor death nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. That is a long list of things that cannot separate us from God.

So let me group them into categories just to get our minds around them. Let me group these into categories and it'll be up on the screen. Nothing emotional, what verse 35 calls troubles, can separate us. Nothing circumstantial, hardship, famine, nakedness. Nothing adversarial, persecution, the sword. Nothing supernatural, angels, demons. Nothing in your present, nothing

in your past, nothing in your future, not even death itself will ever sever you from the love you have in Christ Jesus, our Lord. That's a whole lot of nothings that have no power over you.

And notice the text says that we are more than conquerors, more than. See, just being conquerors, that would mean these things, we overcome them. More than conquerors means that God takes what is meant for evil and He uses it and turns it around for good. Conquering is just winning. More than conquering is God using the hard things to be the eventual servants of our joy.

And again, this doesn't mean we don't suffer, we don't have grief. We do, but ultimately, it can't separate us from God. There is no job loss, no broken relationship, no election, no election, no disappointment, no painful event, nothing in your future that you may be worried about. Those things may rage. They may roar. They may win a battle or two, but they will not win the war. Nothing is big enough to separate us from God or stop his purposes in our life. Nothing, no thing, zip, zero, zilch, nada, nix, [foreign language 00:15:11] can separate us from God. And yes, I speak all of those languages fluently. It's amazing.

And in a world that tries to make us very afraid, this truth makes us resilient. It makes us courageous and moves us from fear to fortitude, brave enough to partner with Jesus in healing the world because see, that's the point of these verses, is to make us brave. And the fact that nothing can separate us from God should not lead to complacency. Oh, well, they're suffering in injustice in the world. Oh, well, nothing can separate us from God. I'm good. No, no, no, no. Sometimes we turn these verses into comfort verses, which they are, but really they're not meant to be comfort so much as they're meant to be a rally cry. These verses did not make the early Christians comfortable. It made them brave. It made them courageous, willing to die for their faith.

And that's a call to us to be brave and move out into the world because you see, there are folks having a hard time right now, believing that God is with them and for them because they're in so much suffering. So what's God's plan? To assure them that God is for them. You are God's plan. I am God's plan. We are God's plan. People in your school or your workplace, who are hurting or maybe going through a terrible loss or fears or disappointments or health issues, you are God's plan to show up, listen, offer practical help to show them that God is for them, that God is with them, that nothing can separate them from God because they're having a hard time believing it right now, and you're God's plan. No matter how old you are, graduating seniors, senior citizens. Even if you can't get out anymore, you're still a part of God's army. You can pray. You can tell people by Jesus. You can listen to people in pain.

There are people in Congo, who are victims of ethnic violence, and this directly affects people in our congregation from Congo whose family and friends are being killed. What's God's plan? To show them that God is with them, for them. Nothing can separate them. We are God's plan, which is why today we're going to receive a special offering to help. And you'll hear more

about that in a few minutes. And then at the end of the month, I will be traveling to Congo with a few people from our team to meet our partners there, to show them physically, to show up and say, "We are with you, and God is with you, and God is for you. Nothing can come against us. Nothing can condemn us. Nothing can separate us from God."

And when we get that not just in our head but in our hearts, and that's the trick, getting in our hearts, when we get that, it makes us braver, more courageous.

So this week, here's how we're going to practice this, this week, here's our action step. Do one courageous thing this week. Just do one because of all these things are true, because nothing can separate us, do one courageous thing this week. It doesn't have to be a huge thing. Just something outside your comfort zone. Tell someone about Jesus. Give more money than is comfortable. Fix something unjust where you work or where you live or where you go to school. Do something that takes you outside of your comfort zone because we don't experience God's power and presence until we do things that require God's power and presence, and those don't happen in the comfort zone.

Nothing can separate us from God. And what that means is we can live bigger. We can live braver. We can live bolder.

This fall, when we dropped off our youngest child for college, for her first year of college, completely empty nest. As we drove away, my wife said, "We have now fulfilled our evolutionary purpose. We can die now." And I'm kind of misty. We're having different experiences and in our different seats in the car. And then she posted that on social media, and someone commented back, "No, not yet. There are still tuition checks to be written." Okay. That's a small view of life. We do not just live to write checks and buy things. Because of Jesus, nothing can come against us. Nothing can separate us from God. Nothing can condemn us. So that gives us courage to live a bigger life. Yes, we will suffer. Everyone does, but it will not have the last word.

And I know this to be true because I see it in so many of you, and I have seen it in Rwanda and Cambodia. I have seen it in Muslim refugees, who are becoming Christians in Greece. And I tell you so many of these stories because they teach us something. Like a man I'll call Tamir, who was the child of his father's third wife in Afghanistan, child of his father's third wife, and in that culture, that meant he was constantly shamed, unloved, felt condemned all the time. Well, he got out of Afghanistan to Greece where he was homeless. He had no prospects. He was very poor. And he met a man who I'll call Hasam. And Hasam was not a Christian, but he was intrigued by Jesus, but he knew that if he became a Christian, his relatives might try to kill him. Well, anyway, Hasam ended up telling Tamir about Jesus in spite of the fact that Hasam wasn't a Christian. And Tamir said, "If you talk like that again, I will kill you myself."

Well, a couple of months later, Tamir was at a camp, a retreat with one of our mission partners there in Greece, and Hasam was there as well and still not a Christian. And as people talked about Jesus, Tamir was captivated, especially the part about no condemnation because as the child of his father's third wife, he had felt condemned in his culture all the time, so he gave his life to Christ. And within days, he started to be a different person. He was still homeless but he had more hope, he had more joy, he had more love. And when Hasam saw how changed he was, Tamir, how changed Tamir was because he had this life altering encounter with Jesus, that for Hasam, that finally sealed the deal and he became a Christian as well.

And now the two of them are creating Christian content to be broadcast back into Afghanistan to bring others to Jesus as well. And if they get caught or if their relatives discover them, they may be killed. But knowing that because of Jesus, nothing can be against them, nothing can condemn them or nothing separates them from God, it makes them brave.

And there are thousands of stories like that, thousands. God is doing something there with Muslim refugees. I remember talking with another man, who also as a Muslim refugee, became a Christian and now runs one of the ministries we partner with. And he pointed to a map of Europe with lines going out from Athens all over Europe, and he said, "God has gathered us here in Athens to send us all over Europe to win Europe back for Jesus." And that's what they're doing. Churches that have sat empty for decades are filling up again with Muslim converts to Christianity. God is on the move. Christianity started in the Middle East when God used Middle Easterners like the Apostle Paul to take it to Europe, and now God is using Middle Easterners again to bring it back to Europe because we seem to have lost Jesus along the way.

And the reasons these people are in Athens are terrible. They're escaping war, poverty, oppression, rape, death, and yet, they are filled with joy and holy fire because they see God taking what was meant to destroy them and using it to bring new life. And their faith is no frail, flimsy, cultural habit. It is brave. It is resilient. We call them refugees, we call them immigrants, when what we should be calling them is missionaries, sent to the west to bring Jesus back to the west, and they may yet save the Western Church.

It's happening here too. God is bringing people from all over the world. Some of them are coming to this church. People from China, from Congo, from Rwanda. Many of them have also experienced difficult things in their lives, but they have also seen the power of Jesus.

So whatever condemnation you face, whatever fears you face, whatever worries you face, whatever concerns you face, you do not have to make the Prince Louis face. Ask Jesus to move you from fear to fortitude, able to say with Christians all over the world, I will risk to follow Jesus. I will risk to make Him known. I will risk to heal injustice in His name. I will risk to help the hurting because in Him, we are more than conquerors. Stir up racism in our country, and God's



people will bring reconciliation and in justice. Stir up ethnic violence in Congo, and you will see the Church of God rise up and smack that garbage down and bring reconciliation.

People hurting all over the world. You will see God's people reaching out to love and to care because we know that what the enemy meant to break us will ultimately make us, because we aren't just conquerors. We are more than conquerors because I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future nor any power, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all of creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that we have in Christ Jesus, our Lord. And that's what makes us brave.

So Jesus, make these promises real to us, please, in our hearts, not just in our heads, so that we become resilient Christians, courageous Christians, moving out into the world to make this earth more like your heaven. We ask this in your name, Jesus. Amen.

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### **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

**Icebreaker Question:** Share something that you are thankful for this week.

**Opening Question:** Looking back...Last week we talked about the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions:** Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, and priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions:** Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- When was a time that you knew that nothing could separate you from God? What difference did that make for you?
- Since nothing can prevail against us, nothing can condemn us, and nothing can separate us from God, what difference does that make in how we live, what we do, how we act, how we engage with others and with our world?

**Closing Question and Application:** Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

**Closing group prayer:** Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.