

“Romans 8: If God is For Us...”

Asbury United Methodist Church

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- We live in a world that is filled with news. Some of it's good, some of it's bad. But everywhere we look, there's news.
 - When we wake up, there's news waiting for us on our phones.
 - When we turn on the television, there's news being broadcast.
 - When we scroll through social media, we see news that our friends are sharing!
 - Everywhere we look, we see news.

- Yet, in a world that is filled with news, I've got a secret for us today: Christians have the best news ever.
 - And that's what we're talking about today! We aren't talking about bad news or mediocre news or even decent news. We're talking about the best news ever.
 - News that literally changes everything. And here it is:
-“The best news is, that God IS for us. What an incredible gift.”

- Did you hear that? God IS for us. Right here, right now.
 - We don't read, “God was for us a long time ago, but then we blew it. Then we missed up and God was no longer for us.”
 - No, instead, we read that God IS for us. He is for His people.
 - And this isn't some new idea that the Church is just coming up with today. No, this is a truth that has been testified to all throughout the church's history.

- And so today we are continuing our sermon series journey through Romans chapter 8.

-In a moment, we'll read verses 31-36 out loud together. But before we do that, I just want to say a few introductory words about this passage.

-To begin with, we see Paul's brilliance in writing come out in this text. Repeatedly throughout Paul's letters in the New Testament, he claims that he wasn't a very good public speaker. He wasn't trained in public speaking and didn't preach with "human eloquence."

-Yet he wrote with such brilliance and wisdom and power, and we certainly see that come out in these verses.

- We also see Paul use great rhetoric in this passage. He's like a rapid canon, firing question after question in this passage.

- He evokes strong emotions in his writing.

- Instead of simply saying, "Yep, God is for us," he confidently exclaims, "If God is for us, who can be against us?"

- Paul is writing about such a magnificent truth (that God is for us) – and his writing reflects that.

- One more thing before reading our passage together.

- This is a joyful and exuberant passage of scripture. Paul doesn't envision us reading these words with boredom, or dullness, or in a monotone voice.

- These are words of victory! Words of joy and celebration!

- I appreciated what NT Wright had to say about this passage of scripture: "Learn to dance and sing for joy to celebrate the victory of God. The end of Romans 8 deserves to be written in letters of fire on the living tablets of our hearts."

- And so, with that build up, let's stand together out of the reverence we have for God's word, and read these words out-loud together: (Romans 8:31-36)

- God is for us, we read. But, do we believe it? Like, really believe it. Do we live like it's really true? That God is for us.
- **Some people believe that God is just indifferent towards them.**
 - He's not really for them, not really against them. Just indifferent. Somewhere in the middle.
 - Kind of like my thoughts on **pecan pie**. Thanksgiving is coming up, and it's a really popular dessert, but I really am indifferent towards pecan pie. It's decent, but I don't have strong feelings for it either way. It's definitely not my first choice for dessert, but I'm not opposed to pecan pie. I'm just kinda in the middle...
 - And some people think that's how God views us. Just indifferent... Not for us or against us; just somewhere in between.
- **And some people believe that God is against them.**
 - I was reading a book this past year, and this pastor was writing about all of these different issues people have shared with him over his years in ministry.
 - Relationship issues, job issues, financial issues, on and on.
 - But what struck this pastor was the number of people who came to him and said they believed that God was against them.
 - You know, there are many people out there today, who not only don't believe that God is for them, but believe that God is actively against them.
 - Maybe some of you here today have thought that. That God is against you.
- Well I do have good news for us: God is not the one against us. God is for us!

-You know who is against us: the devil, the thief. Jesus said in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” There’s a strong contrast there between the thief who is against us and Christ who is for us.

-So, God is not against us. The devil is against us. God is for us.

- Finally, some people believe that God is for us IF we (fill in the blank).

-In other words, they believe that God’s love for them is based on their performance. How good or how bad they do.

-They better they do, the harder they work, the more God will be for them.

-It’s a very conditional way of *thinking*. God being for me is based on these conditions.

-But none of these ways of thinking are correct. God is not indifferent toward us, God is not against us, and God is not for us IF... God is for us, and who can be against us!

-And so today, let’s keep it simple. I have two aims for this sermon: First, I’d like to share about what “God is for us” means. And, second, I’d like to share some implications of that.

So, **“God is For Us...”**

-That sounds good. It’s something we often hear and sing in the church. But what exactly does it mean? What does it mean that God is for us?

-To give a broad overview, saying that God is for us is saying that the one True God loves us with an eternal love and, through Jesus, has made a way for us to experience a full, condemnation-free life in Him.

-That is what we believe as Christians. That our God is for His people. He loves us and reaches out to us and rescues us.

- And I do want to make a quick textual note. Notice how this passage continually uses the word “us.”

-If God is for *us*, who can be against *us*? This passage isn't written only for individuals. It's written to the Church, to God's people!

-And we start getting into trouble when we get this wrong. When we start saying, “God is for me, but not for you. God is for my local church, my Christian denomination, but not yours.”

-No, this is a text that reminds us that God is for the whole community of faith, not certain individuals here and there.

- This idea, that God is for us, has been a powerful word of comfort to the people of God throughout the centuries.

-We can even go to the Old Testament and look at the book of Psalms. In the Psalms, many of the writers would reflect upon how God was for them.

-There's one Psalm in particular that I would like to lift up.

-In Psalm 56, David found himself in a difficult situation. He felt overwhelmed and anxious. Yet, he so powerfully writes,

“You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me.”

- David, in this difficult moment in his life, found comfort, knowing that his God was for him. That every toss and turn in the night, that every tear he's cried, was counted. It didn't get missed by God.

-And so, he could confidently say, “This I know...” this I am assured of, this I am confident of... “that God is for me.”

- I also think of the book of Daniel, and the story of three men of God: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

-For those who aren't familiar with the story, these three men found themselves in Exile in a foreign land (Babylon) where they were the minority. There weren't many people who worshipped the one true God in Babylon.

-At this time, the King of Babylon made a decree that anyone who didn't worship this giant statue, would be thrown into a fiery furnace.

- Well, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (being the good God-worshippers that they were) didn't bow down and worship this giant statue, and so they are brought before the king of Babylon. He orders them to be thrown into the fiery furnace.

-Yet, right before that happens, this is what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego say:

-“O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.”

-Those of you who know the story know how this ends. They are miraculously rescued and are not burned by the fire.

- But I think of before that happens. Before they are miraculously rescued. What kind of faith they would have had to had as they stood before the king.

-And as I was preparing this sermon and thinking about this story, I thought about all that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were up against.

-Politics were against them, as the king was trying to eliminate them and making decrees against the worship of their God.

-Culture was against them, as they found themselves in a place where their God was not worshipped. They were certainly in the minority there.

-Their health was in danger, as all those who did worship this golden idol were to be thrown in a fiery furnace.

-So much was on the line! Yet, even with politics and culture against them, even with their safety and health on the line, they found comfort and courage in knowing that God was for them.

- And so what about you? What about the Church? What do we find ourselves up against today?

-We're trying to emerge out of a global pandemic. We're trying to navigate through a divided culture. We see tensions in our political system. We experience strains on our relationships.

-Yet, even with all of that going on, we can take comfort knowing that God is for us. And if God is for us, who can be against us?

- Additionally, if God is for us, who is to condemn us? That's another question Paul, in our passage today in Romans 8, asks: Who is to condemn? And I love his answer to this question he asks:

-“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.”

-Christ – the perfect and sinless one – isn't condemning us. As we looked at in verse 1 a couple of weeks ago, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

-So Christ isn't the one who condemns us.

- But I love how Paul doesn't leave it at that. He expounds up that, and makes a very powerful claim:

-Not only is Christ not condemning us, He died for us! More than that, he was raised for us, and now, indeed, he is interceding for us. He is praying for us, His church.

- You know, today when people are making claims and saying things, there's a strong emphasis on offering support.

-We hear that all of the time → Support your claims with evidence!

-If you were to write a paper for school or give a presentation for work, yet not have any support to what you were saying, it wouldn't look good. That would be a weak paper or presentation.

-Well here, Paul is supporting these claims that God is for us and is not condemning us by pointing to Jesus!

-In essence, he's saying, "God is for us. And you want to know how I know God is for us? Jesus. In his life, death, resurrection, and intercession, I can be confidently assured that God is for me."

-And so we need not doubt, whether or not God is for us. He is! We can know that because of Jesus.

- And so I hope all of this was helpful in understanding what "God is for us" means. It's a very large concept.

-It entails God's love for us, and God's rescuing us in the person of Jesus, and freeing us from a life of condemnation.

-Now, however, let's look some of the implications of God being for us.

- **What are the implications**, of God being for us?

-I have four that I'd like to share from this text, but there are many more we could list.

① "Who can be against us?"

-What a great question. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Let's say that out loud together.)

-Maybe you're like Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego, and you just feel like so much is against you. Take heart! If God us for us, who can be against us?

-We will face hardships and challenges in life. But if God is for us, who can be against us?

-Like John, we can rejoice in this truth: "he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

- All throughout Christian history, different Christians have experienced hardships.

-Persecutions, plagues, poverty, the list goes on and on.

-Yet the church has endured and persevered through all of these hardships, because if God is for us, who can be against us?

- Even death itself, one of our longest foes as human beings, is left powerless in the presence of Christ.

-Christ Jesus has overcome death. Jesus is victorious over it! And he invites us to share in his victory. If God is for us, even death itself can't stand against us.

-So whatever may be against us, however strong it may seem, if God is for us, who can be against us?

② We don't have to prove ourselves.

-And this has really been an important word for myself over the years.

- Notice how, in the text, we read, “If *God* is for us, who can be against us?”

-We don't read, “If I can do (fill in the blank), who can be against me?”

-Or, “If I can only be this strong, this smart, this talented, then who can be against me?”

-Instead, our ability to overcome is rooted in the character of God. In His goodness and love and capability.

- Yet, that's not often our go-to approach. When we find ourselves in times of difficulty, we often want to show how strong or how talented or how smart WE are...

-This is a struggle I have had before as a young pastor. When I was 20, I became a first-time pastor. I'm 22 years old now, so if you think I look young now, take two years off!

-But I remember struggling with wanting to prove myself. With wanting to show that – even as a young person – I could do good ministry.

- And maybe proving yourself is something you've wrestled with before, also. Wanting to prove yourself, to your co-workers or family or friends.

-Maybe, when opposition comes, you rely on your own strength and capability. Let me tell you, that's exhausting. It's exhausting, trying to prove yourself.

-It's exhausting to try to do that all day, every day.

- There's a really good song out now called "Dear God" by Cory Asbury. I encourage you to listen to it.

-You can tell it's a really good song because it's by a guy named Asbury.

-But the song describes a person who is trying so hard to prove himself to God and to others.

-Here's how a part of how it goes: "Dear God, I've been chasing their approval and it's killin' me, And I know, The more I try to prove, All the less I have to show, And I'm stuck inside my head, Most of the time, But if I pray a little harder, If I follow all the rules, I wonder, could I ever be enough?, 'Cause I try and try, Just to fall back down again."

-Trying harder and harder to prove ourselves is exhausting.

-Well thankfully, we don't have to prove ourselves. Instead, we can rest in who God is. We can rest in Him, knowing that He is for us. And if He is for us, who can be against us? We don't have to prove ourselves, for our God is faithful and able.

③ We view hardships in a different light.

-Even though this is such an exuberant passage of scripture, Paul writes about hardships! About distress and persecution and famine and nakedness and peril and sword and being "accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

- Friends, the presence of hardship does not contradict God being for us.

-Even though God is for us – and no one can be against us – we will still face difficult things in life. Ask the Apostle Paul, who wrote these words.

-There words weren't vague concepts to the Apostle Paul. They were things he knew firsthand. Paul knew what it meant to face hardships. He knew what it was like to go without eating or sleeping. He knew what it was like to be beaten and left for dead. He knew what it was like “be on the run.”

-In fact, Paul's life got significantly harder after becoming a Christian. Yet, even in spite of the difficulties he faced, even in spite of his hardships, he knew that God was for him and for the church.

- And so today, hardships are never easy. Going through difficult times is never fun.

-But, may we never think that, because of these hardships and difficult times – God is no longer for us. Friends, God is for us.

-And because of that – because God is for us – we can have joy even in the darkest moments, even in our most difficult hours.

-The final implication I want to share this morning is this:

④ We can joyfully come to God.

- So when I was in the fifth grade, I played tackle football for a year. I had never played before, but I wanted to be cool like all of my friends, and so I joined the team.

-And while I enjoyed playing, I had this certain coach that never seemed to be in a good mood. In fact, he was constantly grumpy, always yelling at me and other players, and wasn't pleasant to be around.

- And so I avoided him. I knew that, if I was around him, I was just going to get yelled at. It wasn't going to be good.
- But then I think of other people in my life, people that love me support me, and how much of a joy it is to be around them.
 - What a different experience that is.
- Well, how much more is the joy that is found in coming to God, the One who is for us and loves us and did not even spare His own Son for us!
 - When we approach God, we don't have to worry about Him turning us away, or condemning us.
- And so, in a moment, we'll have an opportunity to respond to the Lord. We'll be invited to His table.
 - The Table where we remember Jesus Christ, "who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us."
 - Friends, He is for us, not against us. He loves us and invites us to Himself.
 - God is for us, who can be against us?
 - God is for us, and now we don't have to prove ourselves anymore.
 - God is for us, so we view hardships in a different light.
 - God is for us, so we can joyfully come to Him.
- In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.