

TITLE: "Greatest Lie, Greatest Love, Greatest Truth"

TEXT: Romans 8:31-35, 37-39 (NT p. 159)

Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

³¹ What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ 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.

Introduction – Lies and cats

Mark Twain said: "One of the most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that the cat has only 9 lives....."

1. Greatest Lie

Lies have been around since the first human beings. The very FIRST lie came in the Garden of Eden. After God created them, God forbade Adam and Eve to eat from one of the trees in the garden. They could eat from all the others, just not that one. And God told them that if they did eat from that tree, they would die.

Satan talked Eve into eating the forbidden apple by saying, "[If you eat the fruit from that tree] you will NOT die." So Eve ate and then Adam ate the forbidden fruit. And, at first, Adam and Eve must have thought that Satan was right because they did not die.

But as soon as they ate that apple, three things DID start to die.

One was their relationship with EACH OTHER. When God confronted them about their sin, Adam blamed Eve and, for the first time, contention entered into their relationship.

The second thing that started to die was their relationship with GOD. Prior to their sin, Eve and Adam used walk and talk with God. After they sinned, they tried to hide from God. After their sin, their relationship with God their Creator was never the same.

Thirdly, THEMSELVES. Although they didn't die right away, Adam and Eve did eventually die. Had they NOT eaten the apple, they would have lived with God in the Garden forever. ...I believe heaven is going to be like the Garden of Eden before sin. In heaven, we will walk and talk with the Lord, our relationships with God and one another will be filled with love, joy and peace, and we will never die.

So, what IS the greatest lie? That we can SIN and will not die.

I have believed that lie all my life. ...When I was a teenager, I drove my motorcycle and car like a maniac believing that if I did so I would not die. I'm ashamed to admit that I never thought that someone else might die because of my self-centeredness. One day I jumped my dirt bike on a downhill run and tried to brake and turn before the bike was under control. I went down with the bike on top of me and the handlebar stove in some ribs. When I woke up, I realized ...I COULD die because of my behavior. In my 20s, I ate a LOT of food high in cholesterol and saturated fats. I believed that I could do it and would not die. Like Adam and Eve, I did not die immediately, but I very well may have, had I kept eating as I was.

In my 30s and 40s I worked about 70 hours a week. I told myself I could do it and would not die. Early on, I COULD do it and function pretty well. In my late 50s, I realize I can't or I will, if not die, have some serious physical problems. It is STILL very annoying to me that I can't do what I used to, but there it is.

We all have sins, things that we do that are destructive to ourselves and others. During each service of worship there is a moment when we can examine our lives and confess our sins. We need to do that. We need to identify the destructive things we are telling ourselves that we can do and not die. ...Why? Because if we don't identify them, our relationships with those we love, our relationship with the Lord and we ourselves will all begin to die.....

2. Greatest Love

In a moment, I will tell you about HOW to conquer our sin, but first I want to talk about God's love. Why? Because if we don't know, beyond a shadow of doubt, that God loves us, we will never be able to conquer our sins.

Our text reads: "...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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 greatest love is the fact that God loves us and none of these things can SEPARATE us from that love.

The key words here are: “the love of God IN CHRIST JESUS our Lord.” It is in Christ, and ONLY in Jesus Christ, that we can experience the love of God. There is only one thing that CAN separate us from the love of God; ...that is US. We need to do whatever we need to do to stay in Christ so that we CAN experience the love of God. If we don't, we will separate ourselves from the love of God.

About 15 years ago, a young man from the community came to see me. He had tried to commit suicide a number of times and in desperation, his father brought him to see me. I asked him if he had accepted Jesus as his Savior. He said he had years ago. He explained that his life was great at first. He was filled with love, joy and peace for the first time in his life. “Then,” he said, “God sort of drifted away.”

I asked if he went to church, if he prayed, if he read the Bible, if he helped others and the answer to each was, “No.” I said, “Well, I think it was YOU who drifted away from God.” If you are not feeling close to God, guess who MOVED? It WASN'T God. The kid got back in touch with God. I bumped into his dad a little while ago and he told me that his son is doing very well.

3. Greatest Truth

The greatest lie is that we can sin and not die. The greatest love is God's love. What is the greatest truth?” That all we have to do in life is to stay IN CHRIST. That's it. If you stay in Christ, all the rest of the things in life will work out. Jesus says, “Seek first the kingdom of God, and GOD'S righteousness, and all the things you need will be added to you as well” (Matthew 6:33).

Staying in Christ is the only way to conquer sin. Our text says:

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

The key here is that we can be conquerors of our sin through Jesus, and ONLY through Jesus, who loves us.

E. Stanley Jones writes (*In Christ*, p.66):

I can conquer “in” because [Jesus] has conquered in. Everything I meet, [Jesus] has already met. When temptation, sin, difficulty, opposition, misunderstanding, criticism, fear, resentment, inferiority, pride, loneliness—yes, anything comes upon me to bully me, I ask that thing to bend its neck. When it does so, I exclaim in joy: “There I told you so—there is the footprint of the Son of God upon your neck. He has conquered you. I'm in him and I conquer in HIS conquering.” Everything I face is a defeated foe—I'm dealing with the already conquered. I do not have to conquer by struggling, trying—I simply take my stand by surrender to JESUS....

Let me tell you about Tommy. Tommy was the head of the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang in Bristol Connecticut because, drunk or sober, he could beat up any of the others ...and they were a tough bunch. Tommy was addicted to heroin and when he was high, he used to get on his motorcycle at night and ride the wrong way down a road. He got a kick out of the cars honking and swerving out of his way. He called it "playin' chickin'."

How did I know Tommy? His wife, Sue, was a Christian, and when things got really bad at her home, my mother used to invite her to stay at our house. When I came home from college on weekends, I used to repair her car, and occasionally I had a conversation with Tommy, who always bragged about his crazy stunts. Being with Tommy was like being in a room with large stick of dynamite with the fuse lit; you never knew what Tommy was going to do next, but you knew it was probably something crazy. Tommy would have nothing to do with Jesus.

Then one night, while playing chicken on his bike, he decided to turn off the light on his motorcycle. A pickup truck hit him head-on and he was thrown off his bike and sailed over the truck, suffering severe injuries to his head and both legs. He almost died. Eventually he did recover, but the doctors said he would never walk again.

Finally, Tommy surrendered his life to Jesus. He joined a Christian community and moved to Texas. A year later, he came back and I spent some time with him. I could hardly believe he was the same person. For one thing, the Lord had healed his legs and he could walk, which was a miracle. The Lord also cured his heroin addiction. Tommy said, "Jesus helped me leave my old self behind and I become a new man." We even went fishing, which would have been inconceivable before he met the Lord.

As E. Stanley Jones says: "Everything I face is a defeated foe—I'm dealing with the already conquered. I do not have to conquer by struggling, trying—I simply take my stand by surrender to JESUS." When we surrender to Jesus, miracles happen....

Conclusion – What kind of saint?

When I was a kid, one of my friends told me that a saint was someone who tried really hard to be good, and succeeded. At the time, I wasn't sure who was a saint, but I knew I wasn't one. Now, as an adult, I don't really like that definition. The picture in my mind is one of a person frantically trying to be a good person.

I also heard about a mother who brought her young son, and his younger sister, to church one Sunday. As they were waiting for the service to start, the little boy was looking at the beautiful stained glass windows with the sun shining through the glass figures. He asked his Mom who those people were, and she said, "Those are saints." His little sister asked him what a saint was, and he whispered, "A saint is someone the sun shines through."

And that's our choice. We can spend our life struggling to conquer our sin, or we can spend our life doing what we need to do to stay in Christ and then THE LORD will help us conquer our sins. And when we DO stay in Christ, we also know that someday our struggles with sin will be over, and we will live with Jesus, in a gloriously beautiful garden, with no SNAKES to tempt us, forever and ever. ...Amen.