

Faith Over Fear. I've seen the yard signs. Have you? What does the sign mean to you? Here is what it means to me. God gave me a brain to do common sense things. I don't want to put myself in a dangerous situation and then expect the angels to protect me. So Mark, Wash Your hands, Watch Your distance from people, and wear a mask when near groups of people. Then have faith in me. Trust that if you still get Covid, it was meant to be. Trust that I will watch over you, and heal you. Either you will be part of the 95 percent that keep living, or I take you to heaven. Quit living in such fear. Fear Not!

The fear factor. It is everywhere today. Governor Newsome in California has stated that if you gather in a church with more than 10 people, you could have your water or electricity shut off. If you have a white Jesus in your church, you are racist, and should expect someone to come and tear it down. If you are a church today, that is conservative, and sticks to what the Bible says, you may soon be labeled as hate-filled or racist. You may face fines, or the government might just heavily tax your church, or fine any members that show up on a Sunday. Back in 2018 presidential candidate Joe Biden said at an LGBTQ fundraiser, "Christian churches that oppose the gay agenda are forces of intolerance and the virulent dregs of society." So if a Socialist US Government fines you \$500.00 if they catch you at Open Bible, will you show up? Or will the Fear Factor keep you away? Will you be a Christian with a Sign on your sleeve, Faith Over Fear.

The first six months of 2020 proved to be another challenging time for Christians in Pakistan. Despite lofty claims made by the PTI-led government, the country's Christian community continued to suffer discrimination, intolerance, and instances of outright persecution. Christians living in Iraq are being marked for slaughter by Islamic terrorists. The Arabic letter for "N" is being spray painted on homes to mark people as Christians who follow Jesus the Nazarene. They are being forced to flee, convert to Islam, pay a fine or face death. Some are brutally beheaded for their faith and loyalty to Jesus.

These words we just read to you from Romans 8 were written to comfort Christians in Rome who are about to go through times of severe persecution for their faith. Some who read these words from Paul would one day stand before the blood thirsty crowds in the great Coliseum and hear them roar in delight as they are being attacked and torn apart by wild beasts.

Like the Christians in Rome, Christians in the United States will soon face severe persecution. But it is Faith Over Fear Christian. You are more than A conqueror!

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"

Troubles and Hardships. Who here today can say they haven't had any? A conflict with a friend or neighbor, a serious illness or surgery, your marriage just isn't what it should be. Your daughter refuses to talk to you-again, your back trouble isn't going away, or you feel so alone, so empty since your spouse died. Never thought I'd have to spend my final days alone.

And what was the thing that finally gave us peace? It was the smile of God upon us. It was something He did for us in His mighty love. We came to learn that His face was shining behind the clouds and soon life was brighter and better again.

When troubles and hardships come, Christians are often tempted to believe that this is an indication that they have lost the love of God. They are like children who think that when their parents spank them or will not let them have their way to do what they want to do or to have what they would like to have, that their parents do not love them. And yet the Bible says that he that spares the rod hates his son, and that he who loves him disciplines him when he needs it. In the same way, we ought not imagine that when trouble comes into our lives, this is any

indication that the Lord's love somehow has been separated from us. In fact, the Bible says, "For whom the Lord loves he disciplines, and scourges every son whom he receives."

The inspired writer Paul knew what he was talking about, and his own life is a good commentary on this text. Paul came from an aristocratic family. In his youth he was highly thought of among the Jewish people. In terms of this world we could say that he had it made. And then he became a Christian and lost everything. The rest of his life he spent in hard labor, persecuted, and often enduring great suffering. When he said, "No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us," he knew what he was talking about. It made no difference to him what happened in this world. He knew that God loved him in spite of his unworthiness, and he knew that this love of God was not just a temporary or passing thing. He knew that none of these sufferings could separate him from the love of Christ.

Remember, God is for you. Not maybe, not has been, or would be, but God is! He is for you today. At this hour. At this minute. No need to wait in line or come back tomorrow. He is with you. He could not be closer to you than he is at this second. Had he a calendar, your birthday would be circled. If he drove a car, your name would be on his bumper. If there a tree in heaven, he's carved your name in the bark. We know he has a tattoo, and we know what it says. "I have written your name on my hand", he declares in Isaiah 49. God is with you. Knowing that, who is against you? Can death harm you now? Can disease rob your life? Can your purpose be taken or your value diminished? No. Though hell itself may set itself against you, no one can defeat you. You are protected. God is with you.

"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 good things?" Suppose a man comes upon a child being beaten by thugs. He dashes into the mob, rescues the boy, and carries him to the hospital. The youngster is nursed to health. The man pays for the child's treatment. He learns that the child is an orphan and adopts him as his own and gives the boy his name. And then, one night, months later, the father hears the son sobbing into his pillow. He goes to him and asks about the tears. "I'm worried Daddy. I'm worried about tomorrow. Where will I get food to eat? How am I going to buy clothes to stay warm? And where will I sleep?"

The father is rightfully troubled. Haven't I shown you? Don't you understand? I risked my life to save you. I gave my money to treat you. You wear my name. I've called you my son. Would I do all that and then not meet your needs?" This is Paul's question. Would he who gave his son to die on Calvary's cross for us not meet our needs?

But still we worry. We worry about the November election, getting Covid 19, and being one of the 2% in Florida, who end up dying from it. We worry about living under socialism and communism in our last days. We worry about our United States Dollar collapsing. We worry that we won't have enough money if we live to 95, and when we have money we worry that it will be taken by a government power grab. We worry that the world will end before the parking meter expires. We worry that someday we'll learn that fat-free yogurt was fattening.

Honestly, now. Did God save you so you would fret? Would he teach you to walk just to watch you fall? Would he be nailed to the cross for your sins and then disregard your prayers? Come on. Is the Scripture teasing us when it says, "He will give his angels charge over you to keep you in all your ways. I don't think so either.

You and I might consider our emergence from trouble and hardship as mere escape....Like whew, I got through this one. In truth, it is victory. In every encounter with adversity, even when apparently overcome by death, the Christian is the victor. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Life is full of changes but one thing never changes.

The love Jesus has for you is the same yesterday, today and forever. Goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives.

Go to the highest heights. Go to the lowest depths. Use a telescope to view the distant stars. Use a microscope to search the smallest particles. Take a bathysphere into the deepest ocean depths. You will not find anything in all creation that will separate you from the love of God that is yours in Christ Jesus your Lord and your God and your Savior. There is no pit so deep that Christ is not deeper.

If my hope of being close to God and loved by God depended on anything that I have done to earn God's love and favor, then I am hopelessly lost. Sin does terrible damage to our lives. When you open yourself to hurting other people and thinking only of yourself, you drive a wedge between you the person you are hurting. Husbands and wives who constantly hurt each other in marriage risk drawing farther and farther apart. Sin separates us from God. It causes us to fall short of his glory and come under his wrath and condemnation. Immediately after falling into sin Adam and Eve wanted to hide from God not just because they were ashamed of what they had done, but because they were genuinely afraid of what a holy and righteous God would do to them because of their sin. Sin drives us into a corner. It tortures us and leads us to cry out, "There is no hope for me. I have nothing to offer God to earn his love and favor."

Satan loves to try to separate you from God by overwhelming you with your sin. The Revelation says he accuses us before God's throne day and night. But then we overcome his horrible accusation by the blood of the Lamb and the word of God. Paul asks the question in Romans 8:34, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died, no more than that who is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us." So dear Christian picture in your mind being hauled into court. Satan is ranting and raving and yelling and screaming about what a terrible person you are. But then you look up and see Jesus defending you with his blood that was shed for you. You see him holding out his hands and showing the wounds that guarantee even your sin was forgiven as awful as it is. You look up and see your Judge smiling at you because your defense attorney and judge are the same person. What a powerful case there is for us, not against us!

Why can we say we are super conquerors through Christ? It because everything that Jesus accomplished in his life is now ours in fullest measure. You are a Christian. Christ's death is yours. Christ's resurrection is yours. You are already seated with Christ at the right hand of the heavenly Father. You are his sheep and he is your Shepherd. You are his bride and he is your Bridegroom. The Chaldean Christians who are dying for their faith in Iraq are dying with the same hope that Christians had when they gave their lives in the arenas of Rome and other parts of the Roman Empire. They are able to pray as they face death, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit." If the enemies of the Gospel someday mark your home with an "N" because you follow the despised Jesus from Nazareth, you will be able to say to those near and dear to you, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Amen.