

Good News for the Anxious: Part II

Romans 8:31-39

Introduction

Do you have a mantra or litany? Now, don't worry, I'm not going all 'new agey' on you! What I mean is do you have something to tell yourself when times get difficult or when doubts arise or when you get anxious? In the film Cars, the main car, Lightning McQueen, has a mantra he repeats to himself when he races, "I am Speed. I am faster than fast, quicker than quick. I am Lightning."

Or, in one of my favourite series of novels, the fantasy series Dune, they have a litany against fear when they feel afraid "I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past...only I will remain."

Do we have things that we can say to ourselves when certain situations arise? Truths that we can preach to ourselves, questions we can ask ourselves, when the world around, and sometimes even our own minds are saying something else?

Last week we began to think about this section as good news for the anxious. We began our mantra, our litany against anxiety, so to speak:

- I do not need to be anxious because... ALL THINGS are working for my good – we saw that in (verse 28)
- And secondly, I do not need to be anxious because... there's an UNBREAKABLE chain leading to my glorification (that was verses 29 and 30).

And now Paul carries on in verse 31 and says, "What shall we say to these things?" The setting comes back to a courtroom, like in chapters 1-3, and the lawyer or solicitor is now summing up. It's as though he's taking us back to the trial of those early chapters when God has put us in the dock. And now he's saying "bearing in mind all that we've seen in Romans since then, what's the verdict now?" And he hammers home all that we've been seeing since chapter 3 with five devastating questions to the prosecution, like five golden nails in the coffin our condemnation. Five golden nails in all the things that make us anxious in this world.

So we're going to look at those five golden nails, this morning. Five questions, just two points though to keep it simple. The first point that we have is God is for me...

I do not need to be anxious...because GOD is for me (v31 - 34)

Golden Nail 1: If God is for me NO-ONE can stand against me (v31b)

If God is for me, no-one can stand against me. Have a look at verse 31, the second half:

If God is for us, who can be against us?

If God is on our side then who can stand against us! And you might be thinking there's plenty against us, isn't there? The swell of public opinion, perhaps my friends are opposed to my faith, my family are opposed to my faith, the government isn't always the most helpful, and there are Christians in other countries who are killed for their faith. Paul, who's writing this letter, will be put in prison, won't he, himself?

But staying alive a little bit longer is not what Paul counts as winning. In Acts 20 he explains (Acts 20:24):

But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Winning for Paul is making it to the end, finishing the race still trusting in Jesus, making it to glory. And if God wants that then who on earth or in heaven or under the Earth can stop him! If God is working for our good and final glory as we saw last week, then who can really stand in his way?

Let me put it this way: did you know Belgium won the first and second world wars! Belgium! Little Belgium took on the might of the Kaiser in the First World War and Nazi Germany in the Second - and they won! Now, of course, they had a little bit of help from the whole of what was then the British Empire and the US and other countries as well! They may be little- but with world powers on their side it was something else! No-one could stop them!

It's the same with us. It's not how big and powerful we are, it's not how clever and cunning we are - it's about who's on our side that decides whether we make it! And the Gospel tells us GOD is on our side. And you can't get much bigger than God, can you? I mean that's an understatement really, isn't it? There is no one bigger than God, he's in a league of His own! He sustains the very atoms of our being. Everything continues to exist because He wills it to. It's not like we're a pawn on the chessboard and he's the King or the most powerful piece, the Queen. It's like we're the pawn and he's the creator of the game, the mover of the pieces, the maker of the rules. If we have him on our side we literally cannot lose! And the Gospel tells us this incredible truth - God is on our side. He is FOR us, not against us.

Now, bearing that in mind would you want to be on the other side? Perhaps there are no more terrifying verses in the bible than these, in Nahum 2:13a "*Behold, I am against you, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will burn your chariots in smoke, and the sword shall devour your young lions.*"

If God is against you, you cannot win, but if God is for you, then you cannot lose. So let that be the first nail in the coffin of anxiety - the Gospel says: God is FOR me, not against me!

Golden Nail 2: If God gave me His Son He will hold NOTHING back from me (v32)

Have a look at verse 32:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Paul's point here is that if God has given us his son, how will he withhold anything from us?

Imagine, for a second, you have a really generous aunt who loves you very much. One day she tells you that when she dies you can have her house, her car, all her jewellery and the entire contents of her bank account- in fact, everything she has – that's one very generous aunt. The next time you go round and she offers you some cake she's made, you take some but later on you're still hungry. You want some more cake, but you're worried she won't give it to you, or that she'll be offended by you asking. And you mention this to her. What's she going to say?

She's going to say: "You've got the car, the house, the jewellery and everything I have! All that is precious to me! How am I going to deny you a piece a cake?"

And that's what happening here – God has given us what's most precious to Him - His Son. How after that is he not going to give us everything we need? More than that- all things! Really this is a promise for the future when we will share Christ's reign with Him. Everything will be ours- we will inherit the Earth, as it says in Matthews gospel, the meek will inherit the earth. We will inherit the Earth.

So God is not holding out on us - that was one of the lies of the devil in the garden, that God was holding something good back from us. But God is not holding back - if he was, he wouldn't have given us His most precious thing, would He, His Son? If God was willing to give His Son for us, what will he not give for us? So, whenever you are tempted to think God has not given you the best, remember: He even gave his Son for us, He is working for my good! That's the second nail: God is holding nothing back from us. And then the third golden nail.

Golden Nail 3: If God has already declared me not guilty NO-ONE can bring a charge against me (v33)

Have a look at verse 33:

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

What it's saying there, is in this courtroom setting, the time comes for the charges to brought by the prosecution. Except as the prosecutor stands up and starts to speak the judge gives his verdict - not guilty!

Whatever the charge Satan, the accuser could bring, God has already declared us not guilty! The prosecution has no way forward, there are no appeals in the court of heaven, because God always makes the right decision. Satan has no hold on us because we have been justified- declared innocent. God has declared us not guilty and the prosecution must rest before it even begins. No charges will stick, no charges will stand before the judge who has declared us righteous in His sight. We are his elect, his chosen ones! God has justified us, as the song we were singing before reminded us.

So no charges against us; no-one can bring a charge that would stick. And that's the third golden nail – no one can bring charges against us. And then the fourth golden nail.

Golden Nail 4: If the Son is interceding for me NO-ONE can condemn me (v34)

Have a look at verse 34:

Who is to condemn? 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.

No condemnation now I dread! This is the flip side of 'no charges', if you like, it's another thing added on to that. Who could possibly condemn us when Jesus has taken that condemnation for us? Jesus who died instead of us! How could He possibly charge us, how could He possibly condemn us? It's like when we get to the hangman, the hangman goes "No, can't condemn this one- someone's already been hung for this earlier!"

And what's more, though, Jesus has not only died, he rose again and ascended to the right hand of the Father. Not only did he die for us, he lives for us too! He lives to intercede for us in heaven. If there were ever a danger we could fall out of God's favour, Jesus intercession knocks that one totally out of the park! His lives to intercede for us, and not just as one supplicant among many coming to God the Father, He intercedes as God's right-hand man.

Now, if you're into British Politics (please don't switch off!), there's a convention in British Politics that the king or queen always takes the advice of his or her prime minister. The prime minister is their chief advisor and they ALWAYS take the advice of the prime minister. Well, God the Father never says "no" to God the Son, He always does what He asks Him to do, it is inconceivable that they would disagree about something - which also means that God the Father is not a mean so and so who must have his arm twisted behind His back. He delights to answer the requests of his son, after all what He wants is what His Son wants and visa-versa!

How could God finally condemn us to Hell when the Son, who not only died for us, but is there at His side pleading for us? It's inconceivable isn't it? And if God won't condemn us - then who will? God is the judge; God is the only Person who can condemn people. And if God won't do it, NO-ONE will. No-one can! So that's the fourth nail in the coffin of anxiety, actually no one can condemn us if Jesus is there to intercede for us.

The fifth golden nail is so big we're going to deal with it as a separate point. Our last point and last golden nail in the coffin of insecurity and anxiety is: I do not need to be anxious...

...because NOTHING can separate me from God's love (v35-39)

His last question is this: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? That's what we see in verse 35. The quick answer is NOTHING! Nothing can separate us.

But Paul gives it a longer treatment here, it gets a longer answer, because Paul is not just here to impart information. This isn't a theological dissertation, it's more like a half time talk to encourage the team. So he's really going to tell them this to hammer it home! So that it goes from their minds to their hearts.

Now in my humble opinion this is still a courtroom setting as the word separate there is the word used of divorce. So, in old translations, it was translated as put asunder, as in "what God has joined together let no man put asunder". Absolutely nothing can divorce us from Christ's love.

And Paul wants to drill that into our minds. He does so with a series of long lists of things that do not separate us from God. The first has to do with our circumstances, have a look at v35:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

*"For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*

Difficult circumstances cannot separate us from God. And Don't we need to hear that right now! I mean it doesn't say viruses on this list, but I'm pretty sure it's included, probably

under 'danger'. Corona Virus cannot separate us from the love of God- so in the end, ultimately, it can do us no harm! It can't take away what's most important to us, whatever else it can take away. Whatever circumstances we're in, whatever we're going through it cannot take God's love away from us! It cannot separate us from God's love. Corona Virus is going on, but there are other things as well, aren't there? There are still things like bereavements, recent or old. We can still be struggling financially or with our work situations. We can still be battling a difficult family situation. Or maybe a mixture of all three! All these difficult situations seem to make us nervous and anxious.

But whatever they can do, they cannot take God away from you. They can't snatch you from His hand. They cannot take away your salvation- which is safe in God's hand. It's like Mel Gibson in Braveheart – you know, that big speech he gives - "they may take our lives, but they'll never take our freedom". But in this case - "they may take our lives, and they may even take our freedom" as Christians in prison today would vouch, but they cannot take God's love away from us.

They cannot finally bring Him to condemn us. As Martin Luther wrote in his hymn "A mighty fortress is our God" (long before Braveheart!):

Then let them take our life,
goods, honour, children, wife;
We will relinquish all;
they profit not at all,
ours the abiding kingdom!

The Kingdom abides whatever. Our salvation abides whatever. Situations cannot separate us from God's love - but bigger things, what about spiritual powers, devils, angels and demonic forces, what about bigger things, things we don't know about yet? Well that's our second list, have a look at verses 38-39:

For I am sure that 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.

NOTHING can separate us from the love of Christ. JB Phillips in his paraphrase of the Bible puts it like this in this passage: "I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of Heaven nor monarch of earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord!"

There is no power in the universe that can separate us from Christ's love. No one can divorce us from Christ's love. God has united us to Christ by His Spirit - that's what we talked about in chapter 6 wasn't it? - and what God has joined together no man, or angel, or future event, or power can put asunder. They just cannot do it! They might want to, they might try to, but they cannot do it. They do not have the authority; they do not have the power. Only God does - no other power or person can do it.

And that includes ourselves. Now I know this might be controversial for some this morning, but think about it. But Paul is so inclusive with this list, isn't he? Look at that last phrase: nor

anything else in all creation. Are you a part of creation? Then surely you are included! We're comfortable that our death can't separate us from God – that's what it says there - but it also says our life can't separate us. And think about this it would make zero sense if it included us being able to separate ourselves from God's love. Angels, rulers, powers can't separate us, but my puny will or whim can? That's strange isn't it. What encouragement would that be?

And in the human story, let's face it, if we can mess something up, we will mess it up! We have seen in Romans how sin pervades our very being, even as believers. If we could separate ourselves from God's love, we would end up doing it, wouldn't we? Especially given all those situations Paul gave us in the last list. Is it really saying that trouble and persecution can't separate you, but they can get you to a point where you separate yourself! That wouldn't be an encouragement at all, would it?

So this must include ourselves. We cannot separate ourselves from God's love, we cannot lose our justified status before God. Of course, there are people who seem to turn away, who seem to believe for a while and then give up. We know that from experience - a lot of us painfully. We also know that from Scripture: passages like the parable of the sower teach us to expect that. But I still don't believe that they are losing what has been described here.

Is it really conceivable that someone who has been foreknown by God, who has been chosen before time, someone who has been paid for by the blood of Jesus, someone who has been indwelt by the holy Spirit, someone who's been justified in the courtroom of heaven, for them Not to make it to the end? For them Not to make it to glory? Whatever's going on, **that** surely can't be the case. Something else must be going on. Because if we are somewhere on that 'Golden Chain' we talked about last week we must make it to the end of the chain- that's why it's there as an encouragement, that we will make it to glory

For many of us though, that's not enough, is it - the question simply moves to: well am I on that chain? What if I just appear to be? What if I'm not really?

I don't have time this week to go into everything on this. But really what we need to do is go back to the promises of God. Jesus said in John 6:37, *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out."* Whatever our view on the sovereignty of God, Jesus will never turn us away if we come to Him. So, are you a whoever? Have you come to Jesus in faith and repentance, trusting in his death to make you right with God and turning from your sin? Well Jesus will by no means cast you out!

I sketched out a long section here on evidences that you're on the chain, but in the end, it's throwing ourselves back on that promise, isn't it? Trusting that promise that Jesus made. If you are trusting in Jesus now, if you have answered the call, you have no reason to doubt that you are not on that chain. Worry about it when you're not trusting in Jesus! Though chances are if you are not trusting in Jesus, then you won't be so worried!

This is given to alleviate our anxieties, not increase them. So let God alleviate your anxieties by throwing yourselves on the promises of God. And he promises that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That's the final nail in the coffin of anxiety.

So why not have this as your litany or mantra? When anxiety rears its threatening head remember what we've seen:

- I do not need to be anxious because... ALL THINGS are working for my good (v28).
- I do not need to be anxious because... there's an UNBREAKABLE chain leading to my glorification (v29-30).
- I do not need to be anxious because.....GOD is for me (v31-34).
- Finally, I do not need to be anxious because ...NOTHING, absolutely NOTHING can separate me from God's love in Christ Jesus (v35-39).

Let's comfort ourselves with these words and comfort each other as we walk through good times and bad, anxieties and joys, together, dependent on God's grace.