

For Christ's Sake

✠ **sadistic targets** (vv.35-36)

✠ **Super Conquerors** (vv.37-39)

In the name of Jesus Christ, the love of God, dearly redeemed believers:

It must have been easy to see Jesus as a Superhero when He took a little boy's lunch of bread and fish and made it into a super satisfying meal for "*five thousand men, besides women and children.*" (Matthew 14:13-21) It's quite easy to see why "*they intended to come and make him a king by force.*" But why would Jesus compel His disciples to "*get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd*" (Matthew 14:22), a loyal crowd? And why would He withdraw "*again to a mountain by himself*"? (John 6:15) At the peak of His popularity Jesus walks away.

Believers have been asking God this question since ancient times. To our human reason this makes no sense at all. Psalm 44, about a thousand years before Christ: "*You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale. You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us. My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered with shame at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge. All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten you or been false to your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path. But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness. If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart? Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*" (Psalm 44:12–22 NIV84) It's true, dear friends. **For Christ's Sake** we are...

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Some might deny it ever happened. And I admit, I don't know the source of the story. But somewhere I heard about a Christian on an airplane who said to his neighbor, "I admire how you told the stewardess you are fasting. It's good to see people who love the Lord that much." His neighbor cringed, "Oh, no. I'm not a Christian!" he said. "I worship Satan. Our leader has declared a week of fasting to pray to Satan to disrupt all the marriages of the pastors in our town. That's why I am fasting." Is that **sadistic** enough for you? Or are Christians just being "paranoid"?

In our God-blessed country persecution has been mostly verbal, maybe twisting the law, but seems to be on the rise. Ask a college student what it's like to speak up in class against an arrogant professor who pits his intelligence against the Word of God. One Christian professor told me years ago that some faculty members made it their life's ambition to tear down the Christian faith of all their collegiates. "That's your parents' faith! What do you believe?" They're **sadistic** with students as **targets**.

And don't forget the persecution of Christians throughout the world. One young woman in Pakistan worked in the home of a member of the 90% Muslim population. He insisted that she marry his son. As a Christian, she refused. So the man beat her and sent her home. When her mother came to his house to complain, he poured gasoline on her and set her on fire. Where is the law in such places? More in keeping with the question weighing heavy on our hearts, where is our God?

God has been explaining through His holy Apostle Paul that because God is for us, no one can stand against us. Jesus even said in one place that "*the gates of hell will not prevail*" against Christ's Church (Matthew 16:18). Gates are used for defense. We're on the offense spreading the Gospel. And "*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 in heaven, on earth or in hell can bring charges against God's people, *"those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns?"* Our crucified, risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ is pleading our case as He intercedes with God on our behalf. And that is why nothing can really harm God's people. Everything must work together for our eternal good as God disciplines His dear children and brings us home to glory, fit for eternity.

When you mix hearing God's Word with Christian suffering (8:35,38f) and pour in *"the love of Christ"* (8:37), the result is victory far beyond the Super Bowl or World Cup. God mixes Christian suffering with *"the love of Christ,"* and conquers sin, death and hell. His Word produces faith in Christians that triumphs over fear and sadness. Faith is "super victory" that makes all God's people...

✝ Super Conquerors (vv.37-39)

The Apostle Paul had to admit, *"I am convinced...."* Before he even got to Rome for his first imprisonment and trial, Paul faced *"death"* in beatings from his fellow Jews, stoning by pagans on distant Empire roads, attacks by bandits and shipwreck itself. Standing trial before the Roman Emperor always meant he could see thumbs down for his immediate execution – just to *"rid the earth of him!"* (Acts 22:22) It's easy to see why one could fear *"death"* as a separator from God's love.

But why would he need convincing that *"life"* cannot separate us from God's love in Christ? One woman found out the hard way when her pastor pleaded with her to pray according to God's will. She insisted that God must make her son well. He recovered, grew up, and she watched him hung from the gallows as a murderer. *"Life"* can easily be too long trying to live on the outside of God's Word.

Our professor in Romans and Dogmatics at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary was Doctor Siegbert Becker. He told us people were shocked at his response to the death of his infant son Christmas morning many years before. He checked on him and a few minutes later found the boy dead. Grieving Pastor Becker told friends and family, he would rather have a dead son than an unbelieving son. He was convinced God took his baby boy in baptismal grace as promised in Isaiah: *"The...righteous are taken away to be spared from evil."* *"All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace."* (Isaiah 57:1; 54:13 NIV84) Summer after my senior year, God called Dr. Becker home.

"Life" cannot separate us from God's love, but Paul was convinced that neither can *"angels or demons."* One of Dr. Becker's books has been republished as an *NPH Classic* often requested over the years. He told our class he did not enjoy writing *Wizards that Peep*. But the assignment did teach him how active the devil is in our scientific world with the resurgence of witchcraft and devil worship. Satan will do his worst to devour us. In 2 Corinthians 11:14, the Lord tells us through Paul that *"Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light."* Dr. Becker wondered whether this is what happened to Joseph Smith when he said the angel Moroni appeared to him and told him how to write the *Book of Mormon*. Mary Baker Eddy claimed similar "inspiration" for her *Keys to the Scriptures* when she founded Christian Scientists. Likewise Mohammed said he saw an angel in the desert who gave him the *Koran* as the "Scriptures" of Islam. All claimed their religions came from angels. Yet all are work-righteous religions that lead away from Jesus Christ as the one, true God, the only Savior from sin. Thus they are soul-destroying religions that deny the divinity of Jesus Christ and His vicarious atonement. Today many Protestant theologians ridicule Christ's vicarious atonement as "old fashioned blood religion."

Ancient generals like Alexander the Great had at least one thing in common with modern victors like George S. Patton. They kept their troops advancing on loyalty. Christ not only commands our respect, He won our loyalty because *"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8 NIV84) Still He *"delights to show mercy."* (Micah 7:18) Since Christ has died, Christ is risen and Christ will come again, we too are **Super Conquerors** *"through him who loved us."* When Paul's head went rolling in the sand, when Christians had their houses and land confiscated, it looked as if evil was winning. After so much persecution the martyrs and all the saints in glory shout **For Christ's Sake:** *"I am convinced...nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* Amen.