



# The Trinity Pulpit



## More Than Conquerors Romans 8:31-38

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What is your image of a winner? Is it a NASCAR driver doing donuts in the infield? Is it the wreath of roses being placed on the fastest thoroughbred at Churchill Downs? Is it cutting down the nets at the Final Four? Maybe it is the yellow jersey of the Tour de France. Maybe it is a green jacket at Augusta or lifting high the silver platter on center court at Wimbledon. For some of us, a winner looks different. Maybe your view of a winner is a politician taking an oath of office or a well dressed man or woman in the penthouse office. Maybe it is the entrepreneur who witnesses their vision come to life. We all love winners! All of us are drawn to those who are able to win, regardless of the field of competition. In fact, we are drawn to those who are successful not only in sports, but in business and their personal life.

Paul reminds us that through Jesus Christ we can be more than conquerors. The term Paul uses is an interesting term, because it is a compound word in the Greek. It was not enough for Paul to say "You will be a winner", instead he used a term to describe a super winner, or, as some translations have it, an overwhelming victor. Paul's use of this word is an interesting choice, for we would think that being a winner would be enough. That is not so to Paul's way of thinking.


The word for victor is the Greek word "Nike". This is a familiar word to us: just the word "Nike" produces in our minds images of great athletes with a passion for sport and competition. Would it not have been enough to say we are all Nike? For we are all victors. Paul instead uses the word for super, or overwhelming, to modify the word Nike. Maybe the reason that Paul did not just use Nike is that it is a word meaning victory which really lasts but for a season. In some way the word "champion" is a word that is a passing word. One is the champion until the next competition, or the

next season, then the winner might be someone else. The idea of the victor reminds us that this battle is won, but there is another one on the way.

So, maybe that is why Paul chose to use that modifier – to remind us that in and through Christ we are more than victors: we have won an overwhelming victory. It is a victory that cannot be diminished by time or even the changing events of life. When Paul first wrote these words, I am sure that they sounded hollow to the first readers. Those who first read these words were early Christians who were being persecuted for their faith. They were experiencing all sorts of hardship which Paul will mention. Most of the early Christians were of the low economic class; therefore, they were struggling to make a living and have the basic necessities of life. How do you say to someone like this "You are a winner; you, my friend, are a champion; you have won an overwhelming victory"?

The word "victor" might even sound a little hollow to us. Although not many of us are worried about what we might eat after church today, except that we might eat too much, and we are not worried about having a roof over our heads tonight, we too have struggles in our lives for which the word "champion" or "winner" does not sit well with us. It seems out of place when we are sick, depressed, hurting, grieving, anxious about our work, or feeling like a failure in our marriage or as a parent. Paul's use of the term "winner" just does not seem right.

I think that is why he uses the term "overwhelming conqueror". He wants us to know that there is more than meets the eye. There is something else going on here than just



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measuring ourselves as winners in the eyes of others. We are more than conquerors, not in ourselves, but through Christ.

I think Paul also uses this term to remind us that victory comes with a struggle. You know there are all types of winners. Some people win out of dumb luck: they enter a raffle and they are lucky as they win the prize. Some win because they are chosen for no other reason than someone likes them. Then there are some who win just out of pure talent: they are gifted at this sport, or in this particular skill, and they are successful. Then there are the rest of us who have to work to win – if we are going to be a success, it will only come by hard work and perseverance – our victories are always the result of a battle or struggle.

I think that is why Paul used this word “overwhelming victory”. It not only describes the result through Jesus, but it describes a process of victory.

What does it mean to be overwhelming victors in Christ? Let me mention three areas of our lives where we are more than conquerors.

First, we are more than conquerors when it comes to our sin. Paul writes in Romans 8:31-34, “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us. He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with Him, give us all things. Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”

What Paul wants us to know is that through Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are more than conquerors when it comes to our sin? Paul has spent the first chapters of Romans convincing us of our sinfulness and its consequences. He has told us we are guilty, and we are without excuse; we have all fallen short of God’s intent. There is no one innocent; no, not one. He has also confessed that, because of the power of sin, we, on this earth, will always struggle with sin. It seems to have a power over us – even after we have become Christians and when we are striving to do our best.

This is a great picture of Paul’s use of the term “overwhelming victory”. We know that we struggle with the power of sin in our lives. We might have a moment of victory here and there, and we feel like we have made great progress only to find ourselves, in the next moment, falling back into old habits and sins. There are seasons when we feel strong in our faith, and there are seasons when our faith is weak. One victory over sin is never enough. Paul says “Through Christ we are more than victors”.

Paul writes “Who can bring a charge against us? Who can condemn the person who is in Christ Jesus?”

This is the great promise when it comes to our sinfulness. We might struggle here and now, but through our faith in Jesus Christ, we have gone from being someone who is guilty without excuse, to being someone who is blameless and without charge before God.

How did this happen? How did this change come? It came through Jesus whom God did not spare but gave up for us. Paul then asserts “If God would do that, give Jesus up for our sin, then God surely will bring with Jesus all things.” God, through Jesus, proves his love for us once and for all, and the result is we are more than conquerors when it comes to our sinfulness. Sin does not get the last word in the Christian’s life.

Paul also says we are more than conquerors over trials and difficulties. Now, we must admit that this one is the hard one for us. We can theologically ascend to the place where we realize that our sins are forgiven. We recognize that we struggle with sin, but our faith tells us that we will one day stand before God, sinless through Christ. Most of us can understand and celebrate in this future hope. But when Paul tells us we are victors over current trials and difficulties, that is a little harder to experience and believe. The reason, of course, is that being blameless and finally sinless before God is a future hope, but difficulty and trials are right here and now.

Notice the trials that Paul mentions. He speaks of trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger or sword. We can break this down into three groups. There is what Paul refers to as hardship, which is many times translated as tribulation. The word literally means “to be placed in a tight spot”. The visual image of this word is a wine press: the process of taking the grapes, pressing them, and squeezing them until the juice is produced; then the process of winemaking can begin.

For us, we might say the word means to be between a rock and a hard place – there just seems nowhere to turn. It describes for us those moments when life has just overwhelmed us. It is not that we are dealing with one problem; it is that we, as Paul puts it, have “trouble on every side.” There is no relief today, and in our imaginations, there does not seem to be any relief in sight. There is nowhere to turn and there is no choice to make but to stay right there, in the tight spot, and see it through.

Let’s go back to the winemaking process that this word picture comes from. Now, I know that as good Baptists none of you know anything about wine (sarcasm); but let’s just imagine that your neighbors do, or that you have seen something about it on the internet, or it is just general knowledge.

There is great debate about what makes some wine more expensive than others. Some say it is climate and others suggest it is just reputation. The French insist that it is the geography and soil that produce the grapes that makes a difference. Then, of course, it is the process which takes years. So, what makes a good wine begins with the grapes and the process of crushing. You cannot have the end product without the process of the wine press.

When the world is closing in and there is no way out, it might be just the time to remain in the tight spot, and for us to remember that to be more than a conqueror sometimes requires pressure and endurance. It is the Christian who remains in the tight spot, allowing God to work, who many times experiences the joy of victory.

John Ortberg includes in his book, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat*, a quote from a desert father named Abba Anthony. Someone asked Anthony what one must do to please God, and his first two answers were predictable. He said we must live with an awareness of God's presence, and we must obey God's Word. His third answer was the surprise: "Wherever you find yourself, do not leave easily".<sup>1</sup> Circumstances are sometimes hard. There are times when we are pressed from every side, and the tendency is to quit, change direction, or choose another way, but that might be the very difficulty where God is going to produce the greatest fruit of your life. When life is pressing in on us, we might want to take Anthony's advice and not leave easily. It might be just the place where we are going to discover what it means to be more than conquerors.

Paul uses other words to describe our trouble: nakedness and famine. It is the picture of being destitute and desperate. When we are naked and hungry, we are desperate. When we are desperate, whatever the situation, we become consumed by that situation. Now, many of us have never been without the necessities of living, but many in the world spend their days making sure they have something to eat, something to wear, and a roof over their heads at night. They do not have the luxury of getting stressed by the things that stress us. The reason is simply because when you are in a desperate situation, that situation becomes your priority.

We might not know desperation in this way, but we all have had moments when all the everyday worries pale in comparison to the situation in which we find ourselves. In those moments of crisis, there is a desperation which requires our total attention. It could be your work or

business that has become difficult, and it has preoccupied your thinking no matter if you are at work or at home. It might be your rebellious child, whose actions have caused you to worry to the point you cannot concentrate at work. It might be your health, which now effects every decision you make. We all experience moments of desperation that overwhelm us. Paul says "Yet through Jesus Christ we are more than victorious in moments of desperation."

What gives us strength in our moments of desperation? The answer is found in verse 36, "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

This is a quote from Psalm 44:22. This Psalm deals with a complaint to God that although the people of God had not turned away from Him, they felt crushed and abandoned. In the following verse, the Psalmist describes the people with words depicting desperation, "We are brought down to dust." In other words "We have become nothing." But the Psalmist ends with, "Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love."



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What does Paul write after he quotes this Psalm? "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us." In both places, what makes the difference in our desperation is the thought that God loves us, and, ultimately, his love will not fail us. It is not our doing that saves us in our desperation; it is God's unfailing love which rescues us. Because God loves us, we are more than conquerors.

Paul concludes that nothing can separate us from this love. Paul then gives us this wonderful list of all the things that cannot separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus. If we look at the list, what we discover is that it is a list of things we do not control. Paul includes life and death. He includes angels or demons. He includes the present and the future. He mentions the power and height or depth which is an astrological reference, and then,

he gives us the grand statement: "Nor anything else in all of creation".

The ancients believed themselves to be pawns in a great game that was beyond their control. They had no control over life and death. They were simply earthly beings without power over heavenly beings. They did not believe you could control your own future with a choice. They even believed that the stars and the planets controlled their lives. However, Paul wants us to know that the things that seem to control us are not able to separate

us from God.

I like to read this list and think of the things in life we cannot control. I guess one of the most helpless feelings is when you are driving a car and it goes out of control. If you have had that experience, you know what I am talking about. The car is sliding and you are trying your best to get control of it, but it seems that no matter what you do, you cannot gain control – you go one way and then another. Then, finally you just hold on and hope that you come to a stop before you crash.

There are many of us who feel that way right now – we are out of control. It might be in regards to the way we are living: we have a sin in our lives that is out of control and we know it. We think we have it all under control, but, the truth is, the sin is controlling us. When we step back and look at it with any sensible thinking, we know we are out of control, and we hope we can stop before there is a great crash.

For some of us it is a circumstance that we cannot control. Perhaps your corporation has filed for Chapter 11. You have done your job; you have been faithful, but the economy or choices by others have put your job and your future in jeopardy. You are angry, anxious, and worried, but you also are helpless to change the outcome. It is out of your control. For some of us, what is out of control is a relationship. No matter how you try and try you just cannot force another to do what you think they should do. You want to control that situation so badly, but it is out of your control. There are things in life we just cannot control.

Even when things are out of our control, we can be conquerors. We are still winners in those moments because God is present: that is Paul's promise. Those things that control us do not separate us from God. Your out-of-control sin has not separated you from God. All you need to do is turn to God for forgiveness and help. Your anxiety over work has not separated you from God; God will take care of you. Your out-of-control relationship has not separated you from God – God is at work in your life and the other person's life. There is nothing that separates us from God and God's love. Because God is present we can be victorious, even in the situation which is beyond our control.

The Greeks had a race in their Olympic games that was unique. The winner was not the runner who finished first. It was the runner who finished with his torch still lit.<sup>2</sup>

That is what Paul wants us to know: when our sin is getting the best of us and we find ourselves in desperate straights and in uncontrollable situations,

God has promised to be with us, and, through it all, God's love will sustain us. So, let us be faithful so that we might, through Jesus Christ, win the overwhelming victory. ✿



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things we are  
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***-Romans 8:37***

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<sup>1</sup>Ortberg, John, *If You Want to Walk on Water, You've Got to Get Out of the Boat* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001).

<sup>2</sup>Stowell, J., *Fan The Flame*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986) 32.

