

## HOW TO BE A CHAMPION Romans 8:31-39

Good morning! I'm so glad the sun is out and God has allowed us to enjoy today's worship and picnic. It's so nice to see you all and I'm so blessed you're here. Why don't we all stand and greet one another again. And say to at least five people, "I'm so blessed you're here".

What I'm going to share with you this morning is actually the first part of a series which we are starting today. The series is entitled "Becoming a Champion". I thought of this series after realizing we just saw the emergence of two champions early this month one after the other. First, are the Stanley Cup Champions, the Washington Capitals. And second, the NBA Champions, the Golden State Warriors!

In this series, we're going to look at what it takes to be a champion. We're going to see that being a champion means defending truth and freedom which is our message next week. Then, we'll also see that being a champion means overcoming obstacles in relationships, winning the financial battle, being victorious over sin and a couple of other messages. And so, I'm going to give you biblical and practical ways to conquer many issues that concern us in life.

To kick off this series today, I'm going to talk about how to be a champion, where real power comes from and why we can be champions.

I mentioned the Capitals and the Warriors, winners in their own sports. Everybody loves a winner, right? No one remembers the second placer. Well, the second placer can be commended as well for putting up a good fight but the truth is, even the Bible says that we should strive to be first-placers, to win it all. It's all or nothing. When it comes to life.

Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:24-27, “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” Did he say “run in such a way as to get the second prize”? No, there’s no second prize, there’s only one prize, first prize. And he exhorts Christians to win first prize, to become a champion.

So, he compares life to a race. Everybody of us is in a race. Now, mind you, we’re not competing against each other. We’re supposed to be helping each other. We’re actually competing against all those things that hinder us or slow us down, like vices, materialism, temporary pleasures, evil desires, evil people, Satan and his cohorts, etc., etc.,. Paul wants us to overcome all this and emerge victorious in the end. Just like the Warriors and the Capitals. They overcame injuries and battled against several other teams before they were crowned champions. It took a lot of heart, skill, and perseverance on their part.

Which is the same thing that is expected of us. If we want to become life champions, we need to have a lot of heart, learn life skills, and exhibit much perseverance. But, they are not enough. Because we cannot be champions in life if we depend only on our own efforts. Our own human efforts will always fall short. We need super power to become champions. In fact, we can be super champions with the help of this super power.

Now, I want you to get your Bibles because I want us to read a passage. I hope you brought your Bibles. Whether it’s the old-fashioned one or the new-fashioned one, if you brought it, please share it with someone. Now, turn with me to Romans 8:31-39. Let us read together. We may have different versions but that’s all right. I’m reading from the NIV. Let us all stand (READ Romans 8:31-39)

What I want to us to focus on is that verse on your outline, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us”. Then, let’s concentrate on the “more than conquerors”. (Hold up picture of Swoosh) I’m sure many of you know what this picture represents. This is the logo of Nike. Nike is Greek which means “Victory”. That is the root word of the phrase “more than conquerors. In Greek, it’s actually a combination of two words, “hupernikao”. What do you think “huper” means? Huper means over or beyond which sounds like hyper or super! Right? And nikao, which is the verb form of Nike means “to conquer”. So, put together, it means “to conquer overwhelmingly” which is translated in our Bibles as “more than conquerors”. Christians then are Super Conquerors! And yes, some of us are more hyper than super! Christians are supposed to be able to conquer life’s problems without a problem. The problem is when problems come it looks like we are the ones conquered rather than the conquerors. You know why? It is because we’re not aware of the super power that is in us. We have to harness that super power.

Who is the super power that is in us? God! Or Jesus! They’re one and the same. If you draw your power from God, nothing or no one can defeat you.

The title of this message should be “How to Be a Super Champion”. This morning I’ll give you a few reasons why you can be a Super Champion, why you can conquer life’s problems, why you can be victorious always.

1. God is for you.

This is like having Michael Jordan on your side. I’d like to use LeBron James but, well, his team got swept by the Warriors. But Michael Jordan, he’s got six rings. He went to the NBA Finals six times and won each time. And he was the MVP each time as well. Anyway, my point is, you don’t lose when God is on your side. If God is for you, who can be against you?

You know, there will always be problems, difficulties, sickness, haters, but God is able to get you over all these things. He's got the right game plan for you to overcome all these challenges.

There are times when we don't know what to do. We panic. We worry. We get anxious. But let me encourage you as Paul says a few verses earlier in chapter 8, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." In fact, the reason why Paul says that God is for us is that in this life, we'll continue to experience pain and suffering. In verse 18, he says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." It's a fact. It's reality. We all go through the same thing – pain and suffering. If you're not suffering, you must be dead. Although even some who are dead are suffering in hell. But that's another topic.

The fact is, God knows what you're going through. He is omniscient. He knows everything. The Bible says he knows you by name so you don't have to be afraid. In Isaiah 43:1 he says, "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine." See, God says, you are mine. That's very comforting, isn't it? Like a mother hen who knows her chicks and protects them with her wings, God knows his children and provides refuge for them. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble."

Friend, God is for you. That's why you can be a Super Champion. Another reason why you can conquer is this.

2. God will give you what you need.

What do you need in your life? What do you need today? What do you need to happen in your life? Are you frustrated because it seems long in coming? Are you getting desperate? Don't be, my friend. God is faithful. In his own time, he will give you what you need.

Verse 32 says, “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?”

It’s saying, “If God gave his own most precious Son by letting him die on the cross for you, why would he hold back anything else if you really need it?” That’s how gracious and generous our God is.

But you know why we get frustrated sometimes? It’s because we have unrealistic expectations. Meaning, we want something we don’t need. And that’s hard. Because God will not give us what we want. You see, want is different from need. A want is something we desire to have but we can do without. But a need is something you cannot do without, you need it to survive.

For example, here in America, generally a car is a need. You are not mobile without a car. How did you come to this park this morning? By car, right? Whether on your own car or someone gave you a ride, you needed a car to come here. There are no tricycles or jeepneys. So, a car is a need. Now, you know where I’m going with this. Basically, what I’m saying is this. When you need a car, you won’t want something luxurious or extravagant. You just want something that is practical, that will meet your basic need for transportation. If you force the issue, meaning, you get a Mercedes when you can’t afford it, then you run into money problems. That’s what happens often when we get mixed up with what we want and what we need. We get into debt when we buy something we want instead of what we need. The truth remains, however, that God knows exactly what to give you and when to give it to you. He will not deny you what you need.

When Jesus was on earth, he met the needs of people. He fed the five thousand, he made the blind see, he healed the sick, he resurrected a little girl, he gave life-changing lessons to people, and so much more. Jesus knows exactly what you need. And he will meet you where you are.

The third reason you can be a Super Champion is this.

3. God has chosen you.

Some of us go through life feeling downcast and miserable. We feel like we're not worth anything or we don't amount to much. Our minds are filled with sordid thoughts like "I'm not good. I can't do it. I am not capable of anything." I grew up pretty much like that. I knew I had some talents but my insecurities and inferiority complex prevented me from achieving my potential. I was so self-effacing and literally withdrew from challenges. Like I remember, when I was about 12, my mom bragged to a friend of hers who was the editor of a comics section of a popular newspaper in the Philippines about my talent in drawing. In fact, she showed her some of my drawings and he was impressed. After that, my mom told me to just contact the guy so he could give me an opportunity in his department. But you know what, I never did because I didn't believe in myself. I thought I would just make a fool of myself.

Or the time I was playing chess with this neighbor friend. I was 14 and he was a few years older than me. We played several times and I beat him each time. Then, some more neighbors came who were good players of chess, too. And my friend said, "You must play with Rolly. See if you can beat him." But I said, "No, no, I'm not that good. Don't believe him" and excused myself and went away. I didn't want a challenge. I was afraid I would make a fool of myself. I was afraid.

I'm not saying this to brag about my abilities. I'm saying this to brag about what Jesus can do. Because afterwards, so many years later, Jesus found me who was lost and I gave my life to him. And that's when he changed me inside out. He gave me a kind of confidence I never had. The Bible says in 2 Cor. 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come." And so, when he called me to preach, even though I was naturally shy, Jesus gave me the confidence to study in Bible school and learn how to preach. Do you know that every Saturday night, I feel I couldn't make it the next morning?

I feel like I don't want to do it. I feel like I wouldd just ask Anabel to do it instead. She's better at it anyway. She does it every day at home. But Jesus is my super power. He gives me strength. He inspires me. So, even though I know I will make a fool of myself, I'll do it knowing that Jesus is with me.

And Jesus is with you, too. You can do all things through him who strengthens you, Amen? Why can you do all things? Because he chose you.

In John 15:16, Jesus says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." If you're a follower of Jesus, you became a follower not because you chose him but he chose you. You see, we cannot choose Jesus because we're all lost. Isaiah says in Isaiah 53:6, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way." We're all doomed to a life of desperation and eventually die. But God, in his mercy, put a desire in our hearts to make a decision for Christ.

So, hear this. The reason we can come to Jesus is because the Father himself moved in our hearts to respond to Jesus' call to follow him. He says in John 6:44, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." So, our salvation is the work of God from start to finish. It is wholly the work of God.

Friend, God has chosen you. In fact, he chose even before he created the world. Now, open your Bibles and turn to Ephesians 1:4. It says, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world." I'll stop there. The word the Apostle Paul uses about this sovereign act of God in choosing you is "predestined". Now, let's jump to verse 5, "...he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." Another word is "election" which is in 1 Peter 1:2 which says, "elect (referring to Christians) according to the foreknowledge of God the Father". Elect comes from the Greek word Eklektos which means to choose or to pick.

Now, let me tell you one truth. If you are chosen by God, nothing or no one can bring any charge against you as Romans 8:33 says.

The reason is that God's election of you is final and complete. He will not re-elect you. There's no re-election. You are elected for all eternity. What election means is that he has justified you. Meaning, you are no longer guilty of any sin. He has acquitted you of any wrongdoing. No one can say, "Hey, what about that ugly thing you did 10 years ago? What about your tendency to be impatient?" Friend, you have been forgiven of your sins, yesterday, today, and tomorrow. That's possible because of the death of Jesus on the cross. The Bible says in Hebrews 9:22, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness." Because you've been forgiven, the enemy can no longer bring up your past. That's why the very first verse of Romans 8 says, and let us say together, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."

But be careful. Because the enemy is so sly. He will whisper or put thoughts in your mind to doubt your salvation. I remember when God called me to be a missionary years ago. Because I had a hard time raising funds, I doubted the goodness of God. And then a thought came over and over in my mind, "God doesn't love you, God doesn't love you, God doesn't love you." It distressed me and I nearly believed his lie. Until I realized the enemy just took advantage of my situation and so I rebuked him and he left me.

But, of course, being chosen doesn't give you the license to do anything you want. Jesus said to the adulterous woman who he saved from being stoned by the Pharisees, "Go and sin no more". God wants us to be worthy of our calling. The rest of Ephesians 1:4 which I quoted earlier says, "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." He chose us for the purpose of giving glory to him. He chose us so that others may see his reflection in us.

So, are we living holy lives? Are we blameless? Do we control our tongues? Are we honest? Do we tell the truth? Are we harboring bitterness? Do we respect

our parents? How is our thought life? Do we spend more than we earn? Do we love our neighbors as we love ourselves?

Let us live in a way that will bring glory to God. The Bible says that we are the salt and light of the earth. In Matthew 5:13 and following, Jesus says, “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

Now, inevitably, the question comes up, “If he has elected me, that does mean then that I don’t have free will?” Yes, you do. The Bible contains many verses that talk about making a choice between following God and rejecting God. Like in John 6:37 where Jesus says, “the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out”.

Admittedly, God’s sovereignty and human responsibility are hard to reconcile. But let me illustrate it this way. Imagine that as you enter heaven, you go through a huge arch and you look at the top and the sign says, “Welcome. You who have chosen to enjoy eternal life with God.” So, you go through and once inside, you look behind and the sign on the top of the arch now says, “Welcome. You who have been chosen to enjoy eternal life with God.”

Finally, you can be a Super Champion because

4. God loves you and he secures your salvation.

Now, verses 35 through 39 talk about the undying and steadfast love of God for you. You know why he chose you? Because he loves you. Going back to Ephesians 1:4 and 5, it says

“In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ.” In the beginning of time, God has established already a loving relationship with you. You were already in his mind and he has decided to love you. This love is unconditional. His election of you is unconditional. It has nothing to do with who you are or what you did or what you were going to do. He did not look in the future and because he saw that you were good that he said, “Ok, this guy is so nice I’m going to choose him.” No, no. The Bible says even before the creation of the world, even before you were born, he already chose you.

Because he chose you, you are secure in your salvation. This means you will never lose your salvation. Once saved, always saved. You have eternal security. The apostle Paul says that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ.

Let me read again Romans 8:35-39: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Folks, that is one of the most reassuring and encouraging verses in the Bible about the enduring love of God. God promises to love you – through thick and thin, come hell or high water, under all circumstances. So, take heart, his love will carry you through and his promises to you are as good as his love--they are enduring. They will last. Nothing can ever stop them from being fulfilled.

The story is told of a monastery in Portugal, perched high on a 3,000 foot cliff and accessible only by a terrifying ride in a swaying basket.

The basket is pulled with a single rope by several strong men, perspiring under the strain of the fully loaded basket. One American tourist who visited the site got nervous halfway up the cliff when he noticed that the rope was old and frayed. Hoping to relieve his fear he asked, "How often do you change the rope?" The monk in charge replied, "Whenever it breaks!"

That's how many feel about their salvation. They think they will lose it at the slightest trouble. If they do something wrong or they think they're not being good Christians, they begin to doubt that God loves them and, therefore, he will remove them from his presence because they're unworthy. But the Bible doesn't teach that. Our salvation is not dependent on us. But on the fact that God has called us to be his own and so, he will never deny us like a father to his child.

Watchman Nee tells about a new convert who came in deep distress to see him. "No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm losing my salvation." Nee said, "Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ's heir because it is for you that He died."

Folks, we are Christ's heirs, not through our perfection but by means of His grace. This life we have is temporary. There is a better life ahead of us. The grave is not our final destination. Our final destination is heaven. Jesus is waiting for us. The Bible says that after he died on the cross, he was buried and then rose from the dead, went to heaven and sat at the right hand of God the Father. That means he is watching over us and has control over our lives here on earth. All we need to do is turn over our heartaches, our pain, our suffering, our problems, our difficulties to him.

He says in Matthew 11, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Folks, with Jesus by our side, we can conquer anything. We can be champions because of him. So, as I end, let me repeat, “We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.”