



**ELMWOOD**  
MB CHURCH

**December 22nd, 2024**  
**“The Panorama view of God’s love”**  
**Romans 8:37-39**  
**Pastor Ken Stoesz**

I recall back in 1997 while on a missions trip to Nepal, we woke early one day at 3:30am to begin a hike in the dark up a high ridge to a place called ‘Poon Hill.’ What was special about Poon Hill was that it gave a panoramic view of the Annapurna ranges, and the view is magnificent...there is really very little to say. The sun slowly rises, revealing shades of pink, blue, great as the mountains are slowly emerge from the darkness into a pale light. It’s magnificent. There is really so little to be said...just take it in. Today is our last sermon on Romans 8. We’ve ascended to the final verses and the passage basically gives a panorama of what we have been studying—there’s not much extra to say. Just take it in.

But Romans 8 is not Poon Hill, and we all have pretty distracted minds and likely have forgotten some of the high viewpoints of Romans 8 thus far. What we have been doing during advent is looking at these final 10 verses of Romans 8, which boldly sums up the chapter, which sums up the New Testament, which sums up the whole Bible. It really is a high panorama. And looking from this vantage point, days before Christmas, I’m going to suggest that these three verses can change your life. How?

**Confidence:**

First of all, the passage begins with Confidence. ‘We are more than victors’...how? ‘If God is for us, who can be against us?’ ‘There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus—for what your good deeds/religion could not do, God did! ‘The Spirit that raised Christ from the grave is in you...you need not fear death’ ‘you are sons/children of God, adopted into his family’—you belong, you are known, your life matters, your experiences count and have meaning. Even suffering and pain are used for your good, you are not living in a vacuum of random blind forces. Now, he says in light of all of these things—he is confident that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Confident. Are you confident, convinced that God loves you? Or is life making you rethink that? You need confidence when life makes you doubt. What about Christmas?

Christmas can have a reputation of being full of ‘merry’ and ‘holly’—not sisters, but nostalgia and good feelings. Which is easier when all is going well, but it fully misses the point. It makes one assume they are not in the Christmas spirit if they do not ‘feel’ a certain way. That comes from Hallmark, too much chocolate and holidays. Not Christmas.

The first Christmas was a declaration of war—it was an invasion of sorts, the nativity was a ‘true idea of an outpost, of a piercing through the rock and an entrance into an enemy territory.’ **“Christianity is the story of how the rightful king has landed, you might say landed in disguise, and is calling us all to take part in a great campaign of sabotage.”** C.S. Lewis

There was no ‘figgy pudding’ and no holiday wreaths, no warm family gatherings or silent night by a choir. It was a powerful invasion into our world, where God became man. John’s gospel says that **“Through Him (Jesus) all things were made...In Him was life, and that life was the light of the men.”** (John 1:3-4)

What do you think will happen when the creator of the universe steps into his universe? And isn’t it a curious thing that he would take on human flesh, the vulnerability of a baby to a poor, obscure family in a very dangerous time? What does that mean? **“The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.”** (John 1:5) That first Christmas was an invasion, a determined act of God to begin a rescue, to look death, Satan and hell straight in the face and forcibly bring the kingdom of God to earth.

**“When he drew his first breath, the depths of hell trembled.”** And the powers of this world took notice. The king of the land would not settle with being usurped, so he sent his military hordes to Bethlehem to destroy the baby king. But to no avail. God’s plans were set, and the pieces were being moved as He ordained.

If you are left to think that God does not care or see or act, then Christmas is for you. His title was ‘Emmanuel’—God with us. It reminds me of the hymn from Horatio Spafford, ‘Thou Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control: that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and has shed his own blood for my soul’...that is confidence!

Though trouble comes, though even death crouches at our door and threatens to turn off all the lights of hope, it is Christmas—perhaps more than any other time—that says not powers, not angels or demons, not future events or political powers...not even death can separate us from God’s plan unfolding.

**“Nevertheless in all these difficult situations we are winning an overwhelming victory through the one who has proven his love for us (v. 37.) It is the love of Christ that supports and enables the believer to face adversity and to conquer it. Christians are not grim stoics who manage to muddle through somehow. They are victors who have found from experience that God is ever present in their trials and that the love of Christ will empower them to overcome all the obstacles of life.”** Robert H. Mounce

Christmas, among all the emotions it brings up—allow it fasten confidence back into your life, that God has extended his love to you through Jesus Christ, you are more than a conqueror, more than victorious because the King has come and He knows your name. Which leads to a second response to this panorama:

### **Wonder:**

We would all do well to hang out with children a little more at Christmas, for it is the time when God became a Child; children know what it is to be full of wonder—for children have yet to learn the unfortunate habit of being unimpressed and cynical.

Children **‘have the serious and even solemn sense of the great truth; that Christmas is a time when things happen; things that do not always happen.’** G.K. Chesterton

Kids see this: sparkly trees, fragrant kitchens, colourful packages etc. even Santa Claus only comes around once a year. We lose our wonder when things become commonplace, ordinary...predictable.

I think one of the reasons why children are so good at wonder is because their brains haven't fully grasp details. I put a stocking out on Christmas Eve, it's empty and then in the morning...voila, its full of treats and presents!

Children are great at wonder because they are vulnerable; they have no power and little wealth (if any) and so when they get something, it is pure benevolence. I recall going to my grandmother's place on Hartford Avenue. She worked for the Bay and throughout the year would slowly collect presents. I remember when I was small kid, and the biggest present under the tree was for me. I opened it...it was beyond what I had ever 'asked or imagined'...a GI Joe jet airplane with action figures. It was the best present I ever got—beyond what my parents could afford. I was a helpless kid, if a 'gift' depended on me, I was helpless—beyond ability to provide and in that poverty, vulnerability that wonder emerges.

But adults easily lose this sense of wonder, especially when it comes to the issue of God's love for us. Somehow, we harden, get calloused and lose that wonder. Why?

On the one hand, we have such a shadowy past that we can't believe God would love us; forgive perhaps, but love? No. Because you don't love yourself, you would never extend that kind of love—you don't have wonder; you have cynicism, skepticism. This person needs to hear, "Your past, your record does

not place you in some sub-part category that God now barely tolerates you, that He is forced to show love but deep down would rid himself of you.” This person needs to hear grace. You have not deserved this love and you know it. Yet He showers it upon you. **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)**

Your sins are real (true), but that does not separate you from His love. His love motivated Him to come and pay for your sins. If Jesus chose to reside in a violent, obscure, poor part of the world, how dark is your heart/past that he would not enter in? Let your doubts be changed to wonder

On the other hand, is a self-righteous attitude, “Of course God loves me—I’m good; I’m not like all the other problem people in the world.”

This is the real danger. We lose our wonder of God’s love because we start to think that we have earned His love, that His love is commonplace, deserved/entitled. And there is no wonder. This person needs Romans 1: there is no one who does good, everyone has gone after their own way, the human heart is corrupt beyond measure who can discern their ways—your ‘righteousness’ is as good as dirty rags; in fact, Romans 5 says you are helpless (like a child.) Your problems are more sinister than the previous person because you have pride in your heart. Pride says, “You don’t need God. You’re doing quite fine on your own.” Pride refuses to bow its knees and submit to Jesus. The wise men did it; King Herod could not. The wise men brought their gifts and gave what they had—Herod sent his strength to try to snuff out the baby king because there was no room for two kings in Israel. If this is you—if wonder has escaped you and the presence of Jesus actually threatens you—‘I might lose this, or need to give up that, or what about this plan I have...?’ These are signs that you have more ‘wonder’ about what is in the world, than He who made the world. If this is you, let your righteousness be traded for wonder of love.

This week a friend of mine stopped by and passed on this poem that seems to fit:

**“I’ve nothing to offer  
to ransom my soul.  
But wonder of wonders  
so great to behold  
My God chose to save me  
with method so bold  
What I could not render,  
God fully has done  
And doing, He rendered it  
all through His Son.**

**He sent Christ to die  
on the cross for my sin  
To suffer my anguish,  
my pardon to win.  
(Milton Vincent)**

This is the panorama from Romans 8: Neither life nor death, 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

Mortality, spiritual forces of good and evil, present realities and future uncertainties, physical realities or anything else created can separate you from the love of God.

If this is pondered, considered and weighed, then only wonder can come from this.

### **Gratitude:**

So now that we're at the end, at the peak, what should we 'do'...what is the application? When you receive a gift what is the first thing you do? Let me rephrase that, parents: when your children get a gift, what is the first thing you tell them to say? Thank you. Isn't gratitude our right and honourable application to this?

'What shall we say to this, if God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare even his own son, how much more will he give us all things?'

**'Thanks are the highest form of thought and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.'**

I wonder how many of us may benefit from a recipe of gratitude this Christmas, more than food or presents—but gratitude. Remember the carol:

**God rest ye merry, gentlemen  
Let nothing you dismay  
Remember Christ our Saviour  
Was born on Christmas Day  
To save us all from Satan's pow'r  
When we were gone astray  
Oh tidings of comfort and joy  
Comfort and joy**

## **Oh tidings of comfort and joy**

You can rest, nothing to dismay; remember Christ was born on Christmas day to rescue you. To do for you what you could not do for yourself. He came to reveal the love of God in profound and ongoing ways. So you can rest. You can be grateful.

When is the last time you slowed down and stopped and made a list of all that God has given you.

### **“What do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7)**

Perhaps this Christmas. whatever you are facing, you can not only marvel that Christmas fills the stockings at the end of our beds, but that there is a bed to hang the stocking on, a room to put the bed in, a house about the room, a planet about the house, the great void of space about the planet...and that God who created all things, who holds all things together, with a word makes nations rise and fall...this same very God has declared a steadfast statement as true as the ground you walk on, as true as the air you breathe, as real as the pews you sit on. That God has given you the unmerited gift of His love that cannot be taken away, cannot be removed, cannot be ripped away, cannot be shaken...

**“For I am convinced 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.”**

For that—what shall we say? How about we sing—‘Hallelujah’?