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## 7<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

JULY 27, 2014

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### IS SPIRITUAL WARFARE REALLY WAR?

Pastor Jim Dunn

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#### **Romans 8:28-39**

**28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. **29** For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. **30** And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

#### **God's Everlasting Love**

**31** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

**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? **33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **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. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

**37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

**38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** 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.

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Several years ago the British TV network, ITV, ran a very interesting news story. It was about the connection between the Irish Republican Army and former Libyan leader, Colonel Gaddafi. The news story reported that Colonel Gaddafi had provided the IRA with heavy machine guns. The IRA used these weapons to shoot down four helicopters of the British army in 1988. The news story even showed footage of soldiers on a hillside pointing weapons up at a helicopter, firing at it, and watching it spiral down to earth and crash.

What made this news story especially interesting was that the footage was not real. After the broadcast, angry viewers got on the Internet and complained that the footage of the helicopter being shot down was actually a clip from a video game called *Arma II*. ITV admitted the error. They said that the shooting down of the helicopter had really happened. The original footage had been broadcasted in 1989, but, somehow, the correct footage was not selected for this news story. Instead, the show's producers mistakenly used a video clip in the news story. In response, the CEO of the company that produced the video game said, "We are surprised our games apparently look real enough to some users that they cannot tell it is not real life footage."

Well, if a video game clip could be mistaken for real war footage, could the opposite happen? Could real war footage be mistaken for a video game? Could the real blood and horror of war ever look like it was just a video game?

When Paul said that the Christians in Rome were more than conquerors, he was speaking of war. When this inspired Word of God in Romans 8:37 says that we are more than conquerors, Paul is using the language of war. But we are not soldiers. He is talking, though, about spiritual warfare. And that spiritual part may be misleading. The spiritual part of that may make spiritual warfare seem not real, otherworldly, and distant from what's really happening in this world. The spiritual part of spiritual warfare may make it sound like it's happening in some spirit world, among angels and demons in a realm that we cannot see.

So, spiritual warfare may sound as if it is bloodless. Compared to the wars going on right now in Ukraine, Syria, and Gaza, compared to the images being broadcast from those places, spiritual warfare may seem about as unreal as a video game.

Isn't spiritual warfare real, though? Paul calls us conquerors, more than conquerors, super-winners, super-victors, and there is a lot of defeat going on around us. There is a lot of the devil winning. Because the devil is winning in people's lives, blood is being spilled. Folks are getting shot. No one's saying in the news that there is war going on today in this urban community, but there is so much defeat here. When people live on the losing side of life, then the devil has a ready breeding ground. When people live on the losing side of life, then they may do strange things.

When King Saul knew that he had lost the kingship, he started doing strange things. One moment he's listening to David play music, and the next moment he's throwing a spear at David. 1Samuel 18:10-11. When people live on the losing side, they do strange things. Like in a basketball game or in a football game. When a team is losing and they're so far behind that they've given up on catching up, what do they do? They start playing mean. They start fouling the other team and taking cheap shots at the other players till they foul themselves right out of the game. Some in our urban community are so defeated they are fouling themselves, fouling their lives and fouling up the lives of others with destructive and sinful ways of dealing with life. That is the devil at war.

Yet, religion cannot be just another drug to make people feel good about losing in life. The "health and wealth gospel" may provide folks with temporary relief from the pain of defeat, but it is not the Good News. The proclamation of the Christ of the cross and the resurrection can transform people's lives, because it is the power of God. Romans 1:16. And we are enlisted to do this work. We are enlisted to fight "the good fight." 2Timothy 4:7. We are conscripted to confess the faith. Romans 10:10. We have been drafted to declare the joy, "to declare the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness and into His marvelous light." 1Peter 2:9

But we get confused about our marching orders. That Paul calls us conquerors does not mean that we are the cavalry swooping in to save folks. But being called conquerors also does not mean that the battle is already over, does not mean that we can go back to our foxholes, does not mean that we can finally get away from reality and from this real world.

When Paul calls us conquerors, he's not saying the battle's over. He's saying the outcome is certain. He's saying, therefore, go and fight accordingly. As when before the battle of Jericho, God told Joshua that He had delivered the city of Jericho into Israel's hands. Joshua 6:2. The outcome was certain. Because Israel had been drafted by the real, living, and powerful God. The God who had the power to deliver Jericho into their hands. The same living God who lives in the words of the Bible, who lives in Baptism, and who lives in the wine and the bread. The living God who when He fought the devil at the cross in history's key battle did not bleed spiritual blood, but shed His real blood that outweighs our real sins. The living God who is not only the Lamb of God but is also the Lion of Judah. Revelation 5:5. Who allowed Himself to be crucified. No one made Him. But in His conquering death, He mauled and massacred the devil. Micah 5:8. The Lion of Judah laid down His life voluntarily, only to take it up again. John 10:10. For He is the real, living, powerful, and conquering God.

The outcome is certain. We are conquerors with Him, more than conquerors with Him, for nothing shall separate us from Him. "Nothing can separate us from His love which is in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:39) Sin, death, and the devil will be delivered into our hands as Christ's death and resurrection promises. As God had promised Joshua that Jericho would be delivered into Israel's hands, so the outcome of our battle is certain.

So, now go and battle as the Lord has instructed. March around the city and blow the trumpet. *Take up again, oh take/ The trumpet none can silence or mistake/ And blow once more for us and all the world to hear/ Living and clear/ The feast is ready/ Come to the feast/ The good and the bad/ Come and be glad/ Greatest and least/ Come to the feast.*

Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim the feast of victory for our God, of His death and resurrection that give life. Blow the trumpet in Zion! Proclaim the news that is Good News, so that eternal death may turn to eternal life, so that defeat and brokenness can be transformed into hope and healing. This is the feast of victory for our God. Alleluia. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. So, let us fight the real fight.

AMEN