



We are more than conquerors
through him who loved us!

December 31, 2021 (New Year's Eve)

Theme: We Can't Lose!

Romans 8:31–39 (NIV) ³¹ **What, then, shall we say in response 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, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written: “For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered 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 convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ 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.**

My dear friends in Christ,

Tonight we stand on the brink of another year. In a few hours, we'll watch the ball drop in Times Square, NYC (if we can stay awake long enough). 2021 will give way to 2022. Were there some bumps and bruises along the way, and maybe even a few scars to remind us that 2021 wasn't the best year we've ever had? Was there ever a year where we could look back and say, “Boy, that year was perfect. I can only think of good things to celebrate!”

Not 2021. Even if we personally had a great year, not everyone can say that. COVID and its variants remain at the top of every news report we see. Maybe it wasn't as bad as 2020, but it didn't make for a great 2021.

In January protesters stormed the U.S. Capitol building, causing about \$1.5 in damages. Not a great start to the year!

In March, a bad job of steering the massive cargo ship *Ever Given* caused 60 day shipping delays for about \$60 billion worth of products. It was a bad year for that ship captain.

In June a condominium in Surfside FL collapsed, killing 98 residents.

Tornadoes ripped across Arkansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky and Tennessee in early December. Not a great year for those who lost homes and businesses, along with families who lost their loved ones..

We haven't touched on all the cases of domestic violence, abuse, and murder-suicides that have happened over the past year. We haven't even started talking about the ways we've been touched personally. Let's not forget all of the notable deaths listed for 2021. We here at Christ the Rock have lost loved ones who went home to heaven. Here are a few more: **John Madden**, football coach and legendary commentator, 85; **General Colin Powell**, former Secretary of State, 84; **Ed Asner**, Emmy winning actor, 91. **Anne Rice**, author of *The Vampire Chronicles* and other paranormal stories, as well as books about her rediscovered faith and love for Jesus late in life , 80. These are all notable deaths, yet not something to make us look back on 2021 and say, "What a great year!"

Here's the bottom line: 2021 was a rough year, just like 2020, and every year before that. We can face 2022 with all kinds of hope that it will be a better year than 2021, but what are the chances that will happen? Did you catch what Paul said right in the middle of this section? **"As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered'"** (Romans 8:36 NIV). Paul quoted the words of Psalm 44, written almost 1000 years before Paul was born. These are the words of a psalmist who is struggling with his own "year in review" summary. As he looked back, he remembered his own faithfulness to the LORD and his Word. He trusted the LORD's promises, yet his enemies were winning the battles, they were taunting and mocking him on account of his faith, and he was living in disgrace. All of it seemed like it was coming from the LORD's own hand, and so he cried out, **"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."**

It's not fair! Why doesn't the LORD give us a good year, with all kinds of blessings? We come to church. We listen to his Word. We follow him. We serve him day and night, whether here in his house or in our homes and workplaces. Why do so many bad things seem to happen to us, Lord? What will your answer be?

Let's not forget why bad things happen to good people. The simple answer is one word: "sin." Sin is the reason why 2021 was such a mess. Sin is the reason why our lives are far from perfect. Sin is behind terrorism, war, disasters, plague, and discord. Sin is the ultimate cause of death—the deaths that we see in the news, and the deaths that have touched our lives. Maybe the most frightening part of 2022 is not knowing whether death will touch us or not. Will today be my final day on earth? I don't know. It frightens us, because we don't want to lose anything—our families, our possessions, or our lives.

We can't lose. Did you hear me? We can't lose! 2022 will be the best year so far. I can guarantee it! Well, I can't guarantee it, but God does. Let's get back into these words from Romans 8. They give us the perfect ending to a year filled with God's grace and mercy. Paul began with a question. **"What, then, shall we say in response to these things?"** (Romans 8:31 NIV). What "things?" Jump back to the first verse of the chapter. Paul said, **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"** (Romans 8:1 NIV). No condemnation! Jesus died for us. He set us free from everything, including God's judgment and anger over our sin! As a result, **"The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."** (Romans 8:16 NIV). We are all members of God's family, and Paul goes on to say that we are waiting for the day when our adoption will be completed in heaven. Now the question in verse 31 makes more sense: **"What, then, shall we say in response to these things? 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, graciously give us all things?"** (Romans 8:31–32 NIV). How much does God love us? So much that he is on our side and no one can stand against us. God the Father was willing to give up the one thing that meant the most to him—his one and only Son—so that we could be saved. If he was willing to send Jesus, won't he also be willing to take care of us in 2022?

What if we don't believe enough, aren't good enough Christians, don't have a strong enough faith? Who decides that? Do we? Does someone else? No one can accuse us of not being good enough, not even our sinful hearts. **"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. 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"** (Romans 8:33–34 NIV). The only one who can declare our faith "not enough" or our Christianity "not good enough" is God himself. He won't say that about you and me. Did you catch why? God is the one who justifies, who declares "not guilty." He declared it at our baptism. We are not guilty, and no one can change that, not even the voice of our guilty conscience. Jesus himself stands before the Father's throne. When we cry out in guilt and shame, wondering if we are good enough, and if we can ever be good enough, Jesus speaks to the Father for us. He points to his perfect sacrifice and says, "Look, Father. I did it for them!" We can't lose in 2022 because we have already started the year with a clean slate and a perfect record, thanks to Jesus!

As 2021 draws to a close and we head into 2022, Paul asks the key question: **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?"** (Romans 8:35 NIV). Which of these things can destroy our relationship with Jesus and take away our faith? None of them, unless we let them take over and win. That's what makes Paul's final paragraph so incredibly powerful. He wrote, **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us"** (Romans 8:37 NIV). **"More than conquerors."** The Greek Paul used is "Hyper Nike." **"Nike"** is the Greek word for victory. Literally the phrase means **"to be completely and overwhelmingly victorious."** Everyone here tonight has fought some tough battles in 2021. Everyone here tonight will face more battles, old and new, in 2022. No matter what happens any time in the future, we can't lose. We are completely and overwhelmingly victorious **"through him who loved us."**

That is why we can say, **“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.”** (Romans 8:38–39 NIV). **“I am convinced.”** I haven’t convinced myself. God’s love and mercy, sent physically in Jesus Christ, has convinced me. **“Neither death nor life.”** There isn’t a funeral I attend or a hospital bed I lie in that can separate me from God’s love. **“Neither angels nor demons.”** No perfect messenger from God or one of Satan’s evil minions can drag me away from God’s forgiveness! **“Neither the present nor the future.”** 2021 couldn’t steal God’s love from me, and neither can 2022! **“Nor any powers.”** No politician, no executive order, not even a law that contradicts what God’s Word clearly teaches can take God’s love away from us. **“Neither height nor depth.”** If I travel to Mars someday, or fall into the deepest trench in the ocean, I can’t get away from God’s love. Nothing. Nothing! Nothing can ever separate us from God’s love that he showed us in Jesus!!! We can’t lose!

We can’t lose. No matter what happened to us in 2021, we can’t lose. No matter what happens to us in 2022, we can’t lose. Make Romans 8:38-39 your “go-to passage” for 2022. Write it down on a note card and put it on the mirror, or in your wallet or purse. When your conscience troubles you, when the news reports are grim, when the doctor’s diagnosis comes, when the phone call announces a loved one has died, pull it out and read it. Remember our victory chant: “I am convinced! I am convinced that nothing will be able to separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus my Lord.” We can’t lose! Amen.

To God alone the glory! Pastor Jon Brohn