

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

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Brethren, thank you for picking this theme text for our service today. I'd like to read it out of the Phillips translation. I know you all have a handout, but we're not going to refer to that for a half an hour, so I'll ask Brother Jerry not to put it up on the screen until a half an hour. But I'd like to read the theme text out of the Phillips translation, and it's In Romans, chapter 8, verses 38.

And this is what the Apostle Paul said. I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of heaven nor monarch on earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

What a beautiful sentiment.

Now, I'd like to go back to some words from the Apostle Paul from earlier in his life, and this is what he said in First Corinthians 15, verses 9 through 10. Now, we remember First Corinthians 15 because it's a beautiful ransom. Scripture 21:22. But this is what he says.

Just a few verses before that. He did a little self reflection and a little self testimony. He became vulnerable before the brethren and before you and me. We get to develop our opinion about him, and this is what he says.

First Corinthians 15, 9, 10. For I am the least of the apostles that am not meet to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God, but by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace, which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all. Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me. What a beautiful presentation.

And what a beautiful vulnerability that showed the brethren how to act with the power of the Holy Spirit. Miraculous gifts. Now the Apostle Paul knew all too well what it was like to be separated from the love of Christ, to not know Christ, to violate his conscience, to please his flesh.

As Saul of Tarsus, his secular work involved persecuting Christians. That was his job, to go up and beat them up, throw them in jail, persecute them. He was trying to exact justice in the streets, which was actually a scripture in Zechariah, maybe chapter eight. The Saul of Tarsus had every reason to be satisfied with his accomplishments. He was a Pharisee.

He was raised in the Hebrew tradition in Tarsus by Gamaliel. It's like kind of going to Harvard or Yale or Brown University.

He was a favorite among the high priest and the associates that he had in Jerusalem. He was exalted in his own mind. Have you ever been exalted in your own mind?

I have.

He was revered by important people.

He was diligent about his career as a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He had arrived, but this exaltation separated him from the love of God, and that's what he's reflecting on in the scripture. In Romans 8, 38 and 39, he's saying, Carm, nothing can separate you from the love of God. Danny, nothing can separate you from the love of God.

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

And he's telling this to you from experience.

He was lifted up by his pride by serving the Pharisees system of religious powers that held total religious control over the people, and these powers that he served separated him from the love of God.

His lust for affirmation by his fellow Pharisees worked his spirit to keep him from seeing the truth of the love of God in Christ, and that's the pinnacle of the scripture. In Romans 8, 38, 39, it's the love of God and Jesus Christ, and then it happened. He was touched by the love of God and Christ on the road to Damascus.

You know, God sent Jesus to him. God is the one that calls each one of us, and then he sends Jesus to our side, and then Jesus marshals the talent that exists among his church.

And that's how we participate in doing the witness work as we serve the truth to God's people.

Jesus directly touched Saul of Tarsus. Jesus didn't have to go through a priest to get to Saul of Tarsus. Jesus didn't have to go through the Pharisees to get to the Saul of Tarsus. You know, those are the powers that be among the religious world. Jesus didn't bother with the powers.

Jesus didn't even have to go through the angels in the spiritual realm to reach Saul of Tarsus. He didn't have to go through principalities, and I think these are influences both in the spiritual world, the good spiritual world and the bad spiritual world. He didn't have to go through principalities to get to Saul of Tarsus. Jesus wasn't hindered by any of these in any way.

And that's what the apostle Paul was reflecting on in chapter eight, 38 and 39. He said, you don't have to worry about principalities and powers. Death nor life, angels, these can't keep you from the love of God in Christ, and he had direct experience with that.

But you know, it was Saul's exaltation in his own mind that temporarily kept him from the love of God. It was Saul's chosen profession that temporarily kept him from the love of God. It was a violation of his own conscience that separated him from the love of God, and this was the vantage point that he was speaking at in verses 38 through 39. This is what it says in the King James.

It says, Todd. For I'm persuaded that these. That neither death nor life nor angels. You know, notice how I made this scriptural personal to me.

It could have just said Brother Larry. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth or any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

I think the powers that he was talking about were the deceptive powers.

I think the principalities he was talking about were earthly governments.

And I think that the angels he was talking about were probably mostly fallen angels.

But during the life of Saul of Tarsus, he delayed letting his conscience respond to the love of God and Christ. Did you see some of the hints that maybe God dropped in Saul of Tarsus life about the love of God and Christ? Do you remember that time, Sister Carm, where Saul of Tarsus was aiding and abetting those who stoned Stephen? And he held the cloak of them? And he probably was

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

there when he.

When Stephen said, I see the heavens opened and Jesus Christ sitting on the right hand of God, well, that was kind of a pretty forward hint that the apostle Paul had. He's probably not the first one. He probably heard about the ministry of Jesus Christ. He probably heard about the miracle of the tongues, the descent of the Holy Spirit. But still he was persecuting the church.

He was exalted in his own mind, and I think that's what the apostle Paul was talking about here. Height nor depth, I think is an exaltation or an abasement in our experience, in our Christian experience. But the Apostle Paul said, you know, Todd, you can get through that. That's not going to keep you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

So I think the key insight here is that Saul of Tarsus was the only one who could separate himself from the love of God and Christ, and that's true with us too. We are the only ones who can separate ourselves from the love of God and Christ. Jesus knocks on the door to our heart.

Does he get a crowbar and open it up? No, he waits for us to open up that door, doesn't he, sister? I like the way you think.

Sometimes we hear that knock, sometimes we don't. Sometimes we hear that knock at work.

Sometimes we hear that knock when we're among our families, during our daily activities, in our prayer time, in the height of our joy and in the depth of our sorrow.

I've been sharing at lunch. I shared my nine month slide at my previous employer, nine year slide, and it was a really interesting experience for me because I was angry for the first two years of those nine years. I was angry for two years and finally I had to dig into the scriptures and look at my personal experience and realize that if God was. If I was going to claim God's providence in my joyous times, I had to acknowledge him in the depths of my sorrow.

Yeah, hot water works.

So I think when the apostle Paul says to us, for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor personalities, principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, I think he's providing comfort to us.

He's providing comfort to us in our uncertainty and in our sorrow. He's providing comfort. He speaks to us from his experience. He anchors his insights on scripture. You know, he quote, he uses Romans 8, 28.

All things work together for the good for those who love our Lord Jesus Christ. Right? And we have several examples of that through the Bible. David, Daniel, Esther, Abraham and many others that the brethren could relate to, and so he was sharing that experience with us and saying, all things work together for good.

For the good. In verse 36, he actually quotes Isaiah 44:22, which says, for thy sake are we killed. All the day long we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. So he's driving them back to the scriptures, to the place where they would be comforted, and then Romans 8:37, nay, in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

Now what does this mean, to be more than conquerors? Have you ever thought about what it means to be more than conquerors? Do you have an idea? Okay, well, I'm going to share with you my idea and you can do this or that.

I think it has to do with being faithful in thought, word and deed. I think that our children. Is this your child here? Beautiful child. What's your name?

Stefana. Savannah. That's a beautiful name. Now you know what I like about you, Savannah? You have a wonderful spirit.

And one of the things that you'll appreciate about your mommy growing up is that she has a wonderful spirit too, and she will feel that Integrity in her mother, and when she sees her mother make a mistake, I'm sure she will. She will give her grace. But that's the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

And I think that's how we become more than conquerors become we. Savannah, your mother's going to become more than a conqueror because she's going to be faithful in her mind first, and then her words second, and then what she does. Third. Does she make you good food? You like macaroni and cheese?

And I think that's what the Apostle Paul was trying to encourage us to do. Number one, engagement. Did you see that engagement? That is worth something right there. She'll remember that for at least a week.

But ultimately, Savannah is going to have three questions that she's going to ask herself when she becomes of age, and these are the same questions that the Apostle Paul asked himself, and these are the three questions that God answered for Saul of Tarsus on that road to Damascus. These three questions are universal to all of us. So, Savannah, listen up.

You're going to have three questions. The first one is, who am I? You want to know who you are? The second one is, what should I do? And the third one is, where should I go?

Those are the three questions that every young person asks themselves when they become of age. Now, the answers given to the Apostle Paul were different from when he was. From what he was used to. So the answers that were given to Saul of Tarsus or the Apostle Paul on that fateful week, remember what Jesus said.

You need to go into this town and go to a road straight, and then somebody will meet you and tell you what you should do. But this was the answer. Paul was a chosen vessel.

Where should he go? He should go into the city for a message, and where should I? Where should he go? And from Ananias the messenger, Paul was told that his mission was to bear God's name, Jesus name, before the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Isn't that fun?

Do you like how God answered those questions to Saul of Tarsus?

Saul of Tarsus had an identity crisis. He was barking up the wrong tree. He was kowtowing to the wrong people. He was seeking affirmation in the wrong circle of friends. Now, Savannah, here's another secret for you as you grow up.

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

How old are you? Four. Okay, so when you become about 12 years old, you're going to have five close friends. You're going to have five close friends, and the secret that you need to know is that you're going to Become just like those five close friends.

So the power of your life, though, and your mother will help you with this, is to make sure that you choose the right friends, and that's what was happening. Saul of Tarsus wasn't among the five closest. His five closest friends were not good people, and so they were not helping him along his mission.

But now Saul of Tarsus, as Paul the Apostle had new friends.

So I think, as I look back in the Scriptures, and I look for scriptures that might have inspired the young Saul of Tarsus. These are the scriptures that I would think about in Proverbs chapter three. We were talking about this at lunch today.

Proverbs chapter 3, beginning with verse 13. Listen to these words and see how they would maybe be available to Saul of Tarsus. Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getth understanding. Wow. Saul of Tarsus wanted to be wise.

He wanted to get understanding. He went to the best schools. He was schooled by the best pharisee teachers. Verse 14. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandiser.

Merchandise of silver and the gain thereof than find gold. She is more precious than rubies. Now, rubies was the most precious thing. It was the most constant, universal monetary source that people traded with because their value is universal across all cultures. Rubies.

And Solomon says that wisdom and understanding is more precious than rubies.

And all things that thou canst desire are not to be compared to. Her length of days is in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honor. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is everyone that retaineth her.

Do you see that? Direct connection to the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden. So King Solomon tells us that, hey, you know, our. Our Father Adam sinned at the tree. But we have a tree of life that we have access to, of wisdom and understanding.

And this wisdom and understanding is more valuable than rubies. So this kind of gave maybe the song Tarsus, the potential that through his hard work and determination, he could do well. He was just barking up the wrong tree.

So all of us stand before that tree of life. It's called the Holy Bible. It's called the Word of God.

And these three questions we ask ourselves, who am I? What should I do? And where should I go? And as we grow in grace and faith and knowledge and wisdom, these questions, they always remain the same. I was telling some people that I didn't really feel comfortable in my own Skin until I was 35 years old.

I didn't really learn who I was until I was 35 years old.

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

Now think of that. I consecrated when I was 19 years old. I got married when I was 19 years old. What do you know when you're 19? Nothing so.

But I had those same questions. Who am I? What should I do? And where should I go? And I answered the call.

And that's the neat thing about life, Savannah. As you get older, those questions will always be there. But your mama's going to help you see the answers in a different light, and that's what was happening to Saul of Tarsus. These answers grew in his faith as he became closer to God.

They tell us who we are. Well, we're men and women of understanding. We are the sons and daughters of God. Number two, they show us what we should do. We should pursue wisdom and understanding.

Number three, they show us where we should go. We should walk in the way safely and not stumble. Isn't that fun? How the questions always stay the same, but the answers change.

It's almost a little bit like sitting in a class by Albert Einstein, isn't it?

But we think these words were probably available to Saul of Tarsus. But he was distracted by the powers. He was distracted by his own fleshly feeling of being powerful, his desire to be exalted, and Saul of Tarsus, he led principalities and angels and powers. He let the prince and power of the air cloud his judgment, to blur his spiritual vision.

And that should be a cautionary tale for us. Now, here are a few phrases later in Proverbs 3 that he kind of ignored, and he directly followed the wrong path. Proverbs 3. 29.

How about this one? This is in that same chapter about the tree of Life. It says, devise not evil against thy neighbor, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee. Well, isn't that what Saul of Tarsus did? He devised evil against his neighbor, verse 30.

Strive not with a man without cause if he have done thee no harm. Wow. That's exactly what Solomon doesn't want us to do. But Saul did it because he was exalted in his own mind. Do you see how earthly satisfaction and earthly success cloud our spiritual mind?

It did to me until God took that away from me nine years ago. He put me on a downward slide, and I struggled, man. I struggled. Have you noticed me change over the last nine years, Sister Carnage, what you are seeing is the benefit of God's work in my heart.

But it was hard. It was really hard.

How about verse 31. Envy thou not the oppressor and choose none of his ways. Saul of Tarsus ignored these things. How about this one? For the froward is an abomination to the Lord.

Saul of Tarsus was froward. So Saul of Tarsus finally made the right choices, and he gives us the encouragement in our theme scripture to ignore the temptations that befuddled him for so long.

Let's read that Phillips translation again.

I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life, neither messenger of heaven nor monarch on earth, neither what happens today nor what may happen tomorrow, neither a power

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

from on high nor a power from below, nor anything else in God's whole world has any power to separate us from the love of God and Jesus Christ our Lord. Do you see an awakening in the Apostle Paul now? The infographic. Maybe we can show that infographic now, Brother Jerry. This is the infographic I kind of used to show this.

The concepts in this scripture. I kind of use a cedar tree, and the cedar tree is supposed to represent us. Okay? We're that cedar tree.

And if anybody can help me understand cedar trees, I think that they grow to a height of 120ft, but their height is determined by how deep their roots are. So if they don't dig deep roots, their height doesn't go very high. So if anybody knows anything about cedar trees and horticulture, I'd like to know more. But that's a wonderful metaphor because our height in doing the will of God only works in proportion to the depth of our spiritual roots. So we're kind of lonely.

We're kind of on this outcropping here, and the height of that tree and the depth of that tree kind of represents our heights of exaltation, feelings of exaltation, and our depths of sorrow, and the horizontal arrow represents things present and things to come. Did you realize that what's missing in the scripture, the Apostle Paul doesn't tell us that anything about our past. He says things present and things to come.

So the past is like a rear view mirror that we look at every once in a while. But we should be looking forward to that big windshield in front of us, and I think that's what kept the Apostle Paul on track.

We see that nothing can separate that cedar tree from the sky, which represents the love of God in Christ Jesus. It's cut off there because of the realities of the devilish. But we also see that surrounding that tree are death and angels and powers and principalities. That's kind of a metaphor for how I kind of charted out this verse to see how we fit into it, and that's all we need to share with the brethren.

Brother Jerry, thank you. The point of that infographic is that we are only in charge of us. We're not in charge of angels, principalities, powers. We have no control over death. We are only in charge of us.

How deep of spiritual roots we can dig.

Our mission is to dig spiritual roots deep, to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. To provide strength and shade by our example.

To live a godly life in the footsteps of Jesus Christ our Lord.

To leave the past behind and to live in the present with our spiritual eyes on the prize of the high calling of God and Jesus Christ.

Now, the past is a real deal killer. It's there for our education, it's there for context. It's there to help us understand who we are and where we came from. But our past leads to self judgment. Our past leads to self doubt.

And our past leads to procrastination in spiritual matters. You know, there's four different ways that we learn. Brother Larry, as a teacher, knows what these ways are. The first way is by reading. The second way is by observation.

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

The third way is by intuition, and the fourth way is by experience.

Can you guess what the most effective teacher is? Experience. That's the most powerful effective teacher, but it's also the hardest, and that gives us a past that will pull us right down if we let it. But the apostle Paul had faith in you.

And he said that none of these things can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

But he was in constant danger of being dis. Disappointed, Discouraged. Wow. He put himself right on the front line of God's Christian army. Remember when he was stoned and left for dead by the brethren in Lystra and Iconia?

And then he walked right back into the city. He wanted some more.

I think he had to remind himself every day to leave the past behind and press towards the mark of the high calling in Christ Jesus, and I think that's the context for this theme scripture that our Jacksonville brethren chose.

He tells us something interesting in Philippians 3.

Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended, but. But this one thing I do. Forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before. I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

He continues, let us therefore as many as be perfect, be thus minded, and if anything ye do otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Have you ever had somebody come to you for advice and you kind of knew what direction they should take, but instead of telling them that, you kind of maybe ask them a question like, what do you think God's telling you? And what scriptures do you have that are guiding your judgment right now? And then you try to guide them into their own solution rather than just tell them the solution, and I think that's what the Apostle Paul is telling us.

He's guiding us into the solution that we find in the Scriptures.

The Apostle Paul's words of hope give new meaning to these favorite things that he had in his life. His.

He knew of all the difficult experiences. He knew of all the joys and all the sorrows, and then he writes, and we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. The Apostle Paul was persuaded he was called according to God's purpose. He knew who he was.

He was a chosen vessel. He knew what he should do. He should preach the gospel. He knew where he should go to Kings, Gentiles and the Jews. He was persuaded that even his difficulties helped him dig deeper spiritual roots.

To grow taller in grace, to grow taller in knowledge, to grow taller in wisdom, to grow stronger branches and to provide more shade for you and for me.

Shade from principalities, from powers, from angels that would hurt us.

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

I forget what time I'm supposed to end this service. How much more time do I have?

10. Okay, thank you. So we had an experience that I shared with a few brethren. About 23 years ago, our son was beat up and almost killed. He almost died on the operating table.

And we tried to do the right thing, and it was a big dust up in the community, and anyway, we found one. One boy that was responsible, and at the sentencing, I noticed that he was over there crying about where brother Bob Whitaker is. He was over there in the.

In the lobby crying with his parents. Pretty big guy. He was 6 foot 4, 260 pounds, and my son is a little bit bigger than me, but I'm. I probably got him by £70.

So my son was just £140, all wet, and anyway, I left my family in the corner here, and I went over there and I started talking to the boy that was crying and his parents, and I saw that he was contrite, and so I said, ben, today's the first day of the rest of your life. Without consulting my family, I said, we're going to drop all charges and we're going to tell the prosecutor that we're not interested in charging you with this anymore.

And so we did that, and then the prosecutor said, are you sure? I said, yes, and, and best decision I ever made for my family, it was for me trying to take that.

You know, we were exalted at that point. We had power over this young man. We could have put him behind bars, but we chose loving kindness and we chose mercy. We chose to try to follow the principles of righteousness, and instead, he was just sentenced to 319 hours of community service.

Well, here the reason why I'm telling you this story is because just this past Thursday, we hired a landscaping company that is owned by seven brothers, and one of the brothers in this family of seven boys was the boy that came forward and gave us the information we needed to convict the perpetrator of my son's harm. So anyway, this past Thursday, my wife and I were talking to this young man, and I said, hey, are you the one that helped us out 23 years ago and did this? He says, yeah, I'm the one, and he told me that his mother found out that he was the witness and he didn't speak up.

So they're a righteous family, a good Catholic family, and the father took the boy down to the police station, made a statement, and then in the next few days, the defense attorney had his way with the witness, and this boy told me just this past Thursday, he said, man, that defense attorney had me turned upside down like a pretzel, and I didn't even know. I didn't remember what I knew to be true anymore.

And I think this is what Satan does to us. He's the defense attorney of evil. Satan is the defense attorney of evil, and he wants to switch us up and make us question what we know to be true. He wants us to question who we are, what we should do, where we should go, and he wants to redirect us to go the wrong way, and sometimes that happens through the doorway of our own exaltation.

Sometimes that happens through the doorway of our own sorrow. Sometimes that happens through the doorway of our own abasement. Sometimes that happens at the hand of fallen angels. Sometimes that happens at magistrates that are not interested in trying to do the right thing. They're trying to please their neighbor.

I like that smile, brother. I have to come talk to you about that afterward.

Todd Alexander - I Am Persuaded

But the Apostle Paul knew that in each of our hearts there would be three things that would be actuated. I think he knew that there was a physical dimension to our suffering and exaltation. There was a psychological dimension. To our suffering and exaltation, and then there was an experiential dimension to our suffering and exaltation.

And he was trying to guard you against all of these nefarious influences by telling us that we don't have to worry because Jesus is not beholden to any of those. He wasn't beholden to any of those when he came to the side of the Saul of Tarsus.

So the apostle Paul was not Saul of Tarsus anymore.

The only way he could refer to solitarsis was in his really small rear view mirror.

And he was now persuaded of who he was, what he should do and where he should go.

And I think this is the context for the Apostle Paul helping us, and as we look at different areas of the Apostle Paul's ministry, we can look to the armor of God that he details for us the loins girt about with truth that we need to make sure that our foundation is the word of God. It's not anybody's opinion, it's not my opinion, it's not my feelings, it's the word of God, and my opinions melt before the word of God. You know, the loins girt about with the truth.

It was like a belt, and that belt was the basis for several of the weapons that would be at the Christian soldier's side. That's where they stood. The breastplate of righteousness to quench the fiery darts of the adversary. The breastplate of righteousness protects our heart from the deceptive influences of powers, principalities and evil angels.

The sandals of the preparation of the gospel of peace. Where we go, what we say, what we do, our interaction with the world, our contact with the dirt should be one of peace. The shield of faith that we hold out before us to stop the fiery darts of our adversary, the helmet of salvation that protects our head from intrusion of the adversary, a psychological protection, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and then he provides that context in the context of prayer, and prayer is the tool that we can use anytime, anywhere, anyhow, say, God, we need help.

I need help right now. I need help in thinking how to engage that little girl in this service. I need help by telling her one thing that she might remember next week.

And then watch how God opens the door to our understanding. Because I think that this is the understanding, the door that was opened for Saul of Tarsus, as the apostle Paul would later testify, with a ministry that outpaced all of his peers and gave us such a rich heritage of the truth. We'd like to thank the brethren for inviting me down here to speak. Like to thank the Orlando brethren for opening up their home, and we wish you the power of the word of God as it lives in your heart and is manifested in your life.

Amen.