

This sermon delivered by
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“Since Jesus Is Lord...Of My Future”
Romans 8:31-39

Tom Sine is a fascinating man. He is one of my favorite authors, he’s a professor, and, along with his wife, he is the head of a non profit group called The Mustard Seed Association.

What’s really fascinating to me is that Tom Sine calls himself a “futurist.” He even has a degree in “future studies” from the University of Washington. Now that seems like an interesting degree to me. After all, who could tell you that you were wrong?

I mean, when you study history, there are some objective facts to learn. Sorry, kids, when you learn history, you just can't avoid having to memorize certain dates.

But when you are a futurist, well, I suppose you spend all day speculating about the future, and who's to say you're right or wrong? The world is changing so fast – all around us.

The change in our world has been well documented. Some of you know that my grandmother turns 103 next month. I used to be amazed talking to her about the changes she has experienced in her lifetime. Now just talking to my children about the changes in the world in their lifetime is pretty amazing.

And it’s not just communication and technology that are changing. The whole culture is changing around us. Some of those changes are outstanding advancements. But some of the changes are shaking the very foundations of our society. And it’s not just the culture that is changing. Each of us is changing... in good ways and bad ways.

Every one of us is getting a little older every day. Many are facing life changes in the makeup of their family. Our health changes. Our job situation changes. Let’s face it. Change is a fact of life in the world in which we live.

But change brings uncertainty, and sometimes that can be unsettling. So we need to ask ourselves, “What does it mean to trust in Jesus as Lord of the future?”

That's our subject for today. We're wrapping up our survey of what it means to call Jesus Lord. We've been talking about what it means to say that he is in charge ... that he's Lord, not just of my spiritual life, but of all my life. We began by talking about his Lordship over our physical body, then our emotions, our home, and today we ask about the future.

What does it mean to say Jesus is Lord of my future? To deal with that question, we look at a well-known and powerful passage of Scripture – the eighth chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans. Listen now to the Word of God.

— Read Romans 8:31-39 —

We make decisions all the time based on our projections of the future.

Which product will be the best bargain? Which car will serve me best over the long haul? Should I buy that stock or is it time to sell? Which type of insurance is best for me? Which college is the right one for me to attend?

The questions go on and on. So many decisions would be easier if we knew the future.

But let's make this point right from the start: There is not much the Bible says specifically about the future. Oh, the Scriptures make lots of promises, very important promises, and we can count on those promises, but very few of them are specific predictions with exact details about the future.

In fact, the Jewish rabbis talked about the future being behind us. You know we normally say, "Your future is ahead of you." But the Jewish rabbis said, no, it's exactly opposite. The past is ahead of you – you can see it. The future is behind you -- we have no idea what's there.

I like that image. But our culture doesn't like it. We want to know. We expect the economists to tell us what's going to happen to interest rates. We want our doctor to give us an exact time line. "How much time do I have?" We want to know.

Astrology feeds that hunger for future knowledge, and Americans are buying into astrology like never before, hoping that someone can tell them the future. Our culture has an insatiable appetite to know the future. But let's be clear. God in his wisdom has chosen not to tell us the details of tomorrow. I suspect he knows we couldn't handle it. The astrologers and those who claim some clairvoyant powers are wrong.

And it's not just the non-Christian world in which people are clamoring for details. Christian bookstores are filled with literature on the end times. But God, in his wisdom, has chosen not to tell us the details. I'll remind you of something I have said before. Read the "Left Behind" books if you want to, but remember, you purchase those books in the fiction section of the book store, not the non-fiction.

But millions want to know -- What does the future hold?

Well, let's resist the temptation to speculate. The fact is, the Bible offers few specifics about the future. Jesus himself said no one knows the hour of his return.

But what do we know? What does the Bible say about tomorrow? One thing is clear—the Scriptures affirm loud and clear -- when all is said and done -- God will be victorious.

Now that's not just empty speculation. We're not just having to guess about that. We have some evidence from the past. That's what Easter's all about. Jesus rose from the grave. God conquered death once, and he's going to do it again.

Easter is the preview of what's to come. God won that battle, and with that assurance, we have the confidence that one day he will win the whole war.

And not only will God be victorious, but he promises to give that victory to us. That's the whole theme of this Romans 8 passage. The victory God will win is going to be shared with his followers. Even when we face trials, Paul says, we are "more than conquerors through Christ who loved us."

Paul uses a word there that is very rare -- in fact, this is the only time it's found in the New Testament. The word is "hupernikos." It's really two words -- "huper," the prefix meaning "super"; and "nikos," as in the shoe company -- Nike -- which means victorious. We are literally, Paul says, "super victorious," even in the face of disaster.

More than conquerors -- super victorious over persecution ... famine ... nakedness ... peril ... sword. Now I don't know about you, but those aren't problems I've faced too often. Sadly, there are people in our world who do face those challenges. And let's never forget their faithfulness in the face of those devastating struggles.

But here's the good news in our lives. We can take that list and fill in the blanks. What shall separate us from the love of Christ? You fill in the blank. Shall cancer ... or bankruptcy ... or divorce ... or death ... or disappointment ... or failure ... or _____ ? You fill in the blank.

And the answer is -- No, none of these things will separate us from God. In all these things, we are super victorious -- more than conquerors. Oh, the victory may not come exactly as we want it, but it will come. It will come.

So what does all this mean to us -- practically, on a day to day basis?

Well, in business planning, they talk about a "worst-case scenario." If we make this decision, what's the worst that can happen?

So let's apply that to our lives. I hate to even think about it. But what's the worst that can happen? Well, Psalm 46, one of my favorite Psalms, has done that for us. Even if the earth should change, the Psalmist says, even if the mountains fall into the sea, even if the very foundations of our lives should shake, we will not fear, for "God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble."

There's the good news. Since God is in charge, since Jesus is Lord, if we put our trust in him, then the future is nothing to fear. I wish I could tell you what tomorrow holds. I wish I could wave a magic wand and make it all perfect.

But even though the future may be unknown, one thing is known -- Because Jesus is Lord of even the future, the future is nothing to fear. Now don't forget -- If our ultimate trust is in our money or our appearance or even something good like our health, we have a great deal to fear. For nothing in all creation will last except God. But do you hear the words of comfort in this passage?

"I am sure," Paul says in verse 38, and the word is one of great confidence and conviction -- I am sure that nothing -- not even the worst-case scenario -- will be greater than God. Let your fears and anxieties go. Even after the worst can happen, God will still be our strength.

But there is something else we need to affirm. Because we know the end of the story -- because we know that God will be victorious -- we can affirm that the future presents opportunities today for faithful living.

Let me see if I can explain this. It's easy to be pessimistic in today's world. The bad news is all around us. Some people claim things have never been this bad -- that morality is at an all time low. I don't know if that's true or not.

I hear people long for the good ol' days. But let's be honest. The good ol' days weren't all that good if you were an African American in this country, or if you were handicapped, or a woman trying to rise to the top in her profession. I hear some people say that it's never been this difficult to be a teenager. But then again, trying to even live to the teenage years back during the Dark Ages wasn't so easy either.

So, are these the worst days ever? It's hard to say. But I'll agree, it is easy to be pessimistic. It's easy to throw up your hands and say, what's the use? For some, I suspect, it's easy to become pessimistic about your personal lives -- except that we know that God is going to redeem his world. We are going to super-conquerors.

So when some people see pessimistic bad news, we Christians need to see opportunities for service. When we get involved to make this a better world, we're not just polishing brass on the Titanic -- we're not just helping out on a ship doomed for disaster -- we are joining God's victorious army!

When we hear the reports of rising crime rates, of increases in divorces, of discouraging economic reports, rather than get depressed, Christians get motivated... Christians see opportunities for service. That's why sharing the Good News with our children and young people is such a high priority for us. That's why we encourage people to be involved in the community, to help out in any of a number of great agencies. That's why we support missions. We're not giving up on the future, because we know God hasn't given up on the future.

We watch the news and we say, there's another place we need to be at work. There is another opportunity to bring hope, to bring light, to bring good news. When we hear that nurses and school teachers and fire fighters and police officers can't even live in this community anymore because of the cost of housing, we get involved. We get motivated and begin to work to preserve and create affordable housing in our neighborhood.

It's easy to be pessimistic, but this world and our lives are not going down. Things may falter. We may hit some rough seas, but God will not let us sink. Oh, I know sometimes the future looks bleak. And for some individually, it seems like there will be no tomorrow.

But the good news is that the future is nothing to fear ... for God will give us victory. We may face trials before that victory. We may face setbacks, disease, we may even face death. But God will give us that victory. We need not fear the future.

And because of that victory, the future presents us today with opportunities for faithful living.

Throughout history, every war has had a turning point -- a point at which the tide was turned. After that turning point, there are still battles to be fought -- still hardships to be faced -- still soldiers who will lose their lives -- but the outcome of the war is no longer in doubt, the tide has been turned.

In World War II in Europe, the D-Day invasion was that decisive turning point. Oh there were plenty of battles to fight, but historically we can look back and see that the tide was turned with the success of that invasion. Well for the Christian, Easter is that D-Day. Oh, there are still battles to be fought, but the tide has been turned. The war is being won.

But during World War II, all over France, there were pockets of resistance fighters -- men and women who remained faithful to the cause of freedom even in the face of overwhelming odds. Sometimes their cause looked hopeless. Sometimes it seemed like a waste of energy.

But they fought on. They held on to their faith. They remained confident. Imagine their joy on that day when British and American tanks rolled into their town to bring liberation and victory!

Well, friends, you and I are those resistance fighters -- standing up for God's truth, hanging in there when the days grow long, taking care of problems and facing up to the struggles of life, dealing with setback and trials -- remaining faithful even against what seems to be overwhelming odds.

And one day ... one day ... imagine our joy when God's army rolls into town and says, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You've fought the good fight! You have kept the faith! You have finished the race! You are more than a conqueror."

God wants us to be a part of that army. He wants us to be his disciples. He wants us to live today as his followers. The future is nothing to fear -- that's the good news. And the challenge of the future is to live faithfully today -- to be a part of God's victorious, faithful family.

Well, whenever you talk about the future, it's hard to talk in just normal prose. Paul couldn't. He broke into poetry ... I am confident ... "I am sure," he said, "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."

And here is the most amazing news of all. The Lordship of Jesus is given to us as a gift. We don't earn it. We don't deserve it. God, with his amazing grace, reaches out and says to us, "Come live your life knowing that I walk with you every step of the way. Come live your life knowing that I want the best for you. Come live your life knowing that I care about not only your spiritual life, but all of your life... your physical body, your emotions, your home, your future."

The Lordship of Jesus... the loving, powerful presence of Jesus... is given to us all as a gift of grace. May God grant us the wisdom to welcome that gift and the strength to be the people God calls us to be. AMEN.