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NOBODY KNOWS THE TROUBLE I'VE SEEN

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There's a Negro spiritual that begins quietly with the words: 'Nobody knows the troubles I've seen; nobody knows but Jesus'. Then, all of a sudden the mood changes. The song bursts into a shout of triumph: "Glory Hallelujah!"

In the Bible the Apostle Paul goes to great lengths to assure his readers and us that those who put their trust in Jesus Christ can also shout "Glory Hallelujah!" despite all the struggles they might have from day to day. He says, *So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen? Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us—who was raised to life for us!—is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture where it says:*

They kill us in cold blood because they hate you.

We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one.

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors because Jesus loves us. I'm absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us. Romans 8:31-39

The truth is that even though God is fighting on our side we don't always appear to be victors. Often we seem to be victims. Nagging coughs and colds, bronchitis and asthma, stress and worry, severe sickness, depression, conflict and fear all seem to loom large on the horizon and threaten to take control of us. Children get on our nerves; their music blares at us and at times almost drives us up the wall; young people threaten to leave home. Natural disasters, global warming and the financial crisis, home invasions and threats of terrorist attacks continue to be very real. And we don't seem to be able to do much about it.

It's into this situation that our loving and caring God speaks this good news – the good news that you and I can get on top of all those things that threaten to drag us down – the good news that you and I can be more than conquerors through Jesus Christ.

More than conquerors? Does Paul know what he's talking about? Is he really trying to suggest that, no matter what happens to us, God is still there fighting for us?

I have to say that is exactly what Paul is saying. He's not suggesting that we won't have our struggles. Faith in Jesus is no guarantee of that! But he is saying with absolute confidence that God is always there for us. He's suggesting that faith in Jesus enables us to get on top of our struggles. It enables us to be more than conquerors.

A few years ago a woman who was suffering from serious emotional problems made this comment; "After 27 years I'm just beginning to see that there are no panaceas for problems, no Cinderella type of existence where everything sooner or later goes away like a bad dream."

There are struggles. There are hardships. There are disappointments. There's loneliness and frustration. There's all that and more. The shocks of life are real. None of us can escape them. They're there and they're real.

But so is God. God is real. His love for us is real. We can see just how real God's love for us is when we look at Jesus. He came to this earth. He died on the cross. He rose again on the third day. God's love for us runs very deep. It's real. And no-one can take that away from us. As St Paul says:

"I am absolutely convinced that nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us."

A woman was visiting a little girl who had a beautiful doll collection. "Tell me," the woman enquired, "Which of these dolls is your favourite?"

"Promise you won't laugh if I tell you" the little girl replied. "I promise," the woman was quick to add. The little girl then showed the woman a doll that was the most tattered and pathetic looking doll you could ever imagine. The nose was

broken off; one of the arms was cracked; a leg was missing; and the face was disfigured. "Why do you like this one the most?" the woman asked. "Because she needs it the most," the little girl replied. "If I didn't love her nobody would."

In a sense Jesus Christ is like that. As the parable of the Prodigal son suggests Jesus loves us most when we need Him most. He loves us when we are feeling battered and bruised, by the trials of life. He loves us when we're feeling lost and lonely. And no one can take away his love from us.

We may get sick and the strength is drained from our bodies. We may fail an examination. We may lose our job. One of our relatives or friends may die. But the good news is that God's love is there for us in the person of Jesus Christ. God's love is there for us no matter what experience we may have to go through. God's love for you and me remains constant. As a result we can be more than conquerors.

The good news that nothing can get between God's love and us is a power that works. Any Christian pastor can tell you that. Each day they're privileged to see God's people become more than conquerors. One day they stand at the altar with a young couple and share their joy as they become husband and wife. The next day they're out at the cemetery providing words of comfort and assurance for a family who's just lost a loved one. One moment they stand at the bedside of a brand new mother and share in the joy she and her husband are experiencing. Later on, in the same hospital, they sit with a family who's just received the news "It's malignant." But in all this they share the same Good news- that God's love is there for people during the storms as well as during the sunshine. And this message works. It does its job. It enables us to cope with our problems. It enables you and me to become more than conquerors, even over those things that have threatened to tear us apart.

There's a poem which sums it all up. Its title is "*What God has promised*"

*God has not promised
Skies always blue.
Flower strewn pathways
All our lives thro'
God has not promised us
Sun without rain
Joy without sorrow
Peace without pain;
God has not promised
We shall not know
Toil and temptation
Trouble and woe;
He has not told us
We shall not bear
Many a burden,
Many a care.*

*But God has promised
Strength for the day
Rest for the labourer
Light for the way,
Grace for the trials
Help from above,
Unfailing sympathy,
Undying love.*