

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Lent 1

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Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

***We are super-conquerors in Christ!***

—Romans 8:1,31-39

Do you watch the Olympics at all? Of course, the last Olympics took place in 2018. One of my favorite stories of that Olympics was Shawn White. At the time, Shawn White was a 31-year-old who won gold on the snowboard halfpipe. In the halfpipe competition, athletes get three runs, and their best score is counted.

I don't know if you remember the story or not. Shawn was the last snowboarder to go. And just before his third and final run, Shawn was losing to Japan's Ayumu Hirano who posted a 95.25. Shawn needed to be flawless if he was going to take the lead. And he needed to take some risks. On his final run he did back-to-back 1440s. It was one of the most challenging runs he ever did. And he nailed it. He won gold with a score of 97.75. Afterwards, you could just feel the emotions that Shawn White experienced as he hugged family, crying with victory. It was such an awesome feat.

But if you Googled "Shawn White" after his accomplishment, do you know what popped up as one of the main storylines? "Shawn White and sexual harassment allegations." Do you remember that? That story broke shortly after Shawn had won the gold.

Now I'm not here to criticize nor to defend Shawn White. I just find it very intriguing that at a high point of his career and life, a story surfaces and is pushed to the forefront regarding a very low point in his life. It's as if that dark spot in his past overshadowed his victory.

But you know, my friends, that is exactly what the devil and all his allies want to do with you and me. I don't know what you thought of earlier in the service when Pastor Buchholz announced to you God's forgiveness, but God has promised that there is absolutely nothing that can separate you from his love and mercy. Your sins are absolutely gone. They're gone.

But the devil wants you and me to question that truth. The devil and his allies want to surface some dark spots in our lives to overshadow that truth.

For that reason, I want to share some amazing words from God with you today. These words are from Romans 8. I'd like to go all the way back to verse one first. Paul writes, "**Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**" (Romans 8:1). No condemnation! Wow! That is an awesome sentence. For anybody who is connected to Jesus through faith, for anybody who believes that Jesus is the Son of God who has given his life as the payment for all sins, for anybody who believes in Jesus as their Savior, there is absolutely no condemnation for them; there is absolutely no separation from God, no sentencing of hell.

Now that's a big deal. And I'll tell you why. Right now, you are standing on the podium of God's grace, with a gold medal hanging around your neck. Because of Jesus, you are the champions. If today is your last day in this world, you will stand before God as Judge and will hear the gavel slam down, "Not guilty! Welcome home!" That is your status right now because of Christ. Right now you are standing on the podium of God's grace as a champion because of your Savior Jesus.

But do you know what the devil and his allies want to do? The very same thing that the media did to Shawn White. And the devil is good at it. He storms into your life and there are things he loves to do. He loves to tempt us to sin, and when we give in, he smiles and laughs. And then there are three things the devil loves to do.

- 1) He loves to accuse (bring charges).
- 2) He wants to see you sentenced (condemned).
- 3) He wants to see you executed (separated from God).

He will drag your past sins right before your eyes. And it appears as though the devil might have something to stand on and hang over us. What did you post online about someone? Did it reflect that you were a child of God? Or did you give God a bad name? Where would your search history take someone? Would they see that you are a pure internet surfer or do you go down some really dark paths?

And the devil loves to stir up guilt on your conscience. Why is it that we want to hide sins? Why do we want nobody else to know? Why do we feel guilty? It's clear. Just look at everything that is on the evidence board. It's all right there. There is nothing hidden. The reason we FEEL guilty is because we know we should be clobbered for our sins.

And when we stand in the presence of a holy and perfect God, it is clear that's what we rightly deserve. We deserve separation. We deserve to be cast away from God presence forever. And the devil loves to drag all of that garbage of our lives into the courtroom. He accuses us. He wants us to be sentenced. He wants us to be separated from God forever. And the devil would have something to stand on ... if it weren't for JESUS.

Look at how Paul describes that sequence of events in Romans 8. "**What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?**" (Romans 8:31). Actually, a better translation of that would be "**Since God is**

**for us, who can be against us?"** And the answer? No one. ... **"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?"** You have the gold medal around your neck. You are the champion because of Christ. God took his righteous wrath out on his Son, not you. Jesus stood between us and God. God gave his Son up for you. And what do you have? Forgiveness is yours. Life is yours. Eternal salvation is yours.

And look at how Paul addresses the three-fold attacks against us. Remember Satan wants to accuse us, sentence us, and see us executed. **"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?"** (Romans 8:33). Oh, Satan will try. He is the great Accuser that loves to stir up our past and bring charges against us. He loves to drag our sins before our eyes and God's. But look at this: **"It is God who justifies"** (Romans 8:33). It is God who slams the gavel down and says, "Not guilty." Silenced are Satan's accusations. **"Who is he that condemns?"** (Romans 8:34). Well, the only one who rightly can and could condemn someone is a holy and righteous and perfect God. And what was his solution for us? **"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 8:34). Isn't that an awesome thing? Jesus died for our sins. He is the payment for my sins. And nobody can hold your sins over you anymore.

I once had a professor (his name was John Lawrenz) who told the story of visiting a man who was demon-possessed. He walked in the room, and even before he began to speak, the man said, "I know who you are." And then the man continued to rattle off all the sins that my Professor Lawrenz did in his life, things that nobody else could possibly have known.

Do you know what my professor did? He said, "You are right. I did all those things. But Jesus has lived and died for me. And in him I am forgiven. So you have nothing over me." And he turned around and walked out.

Jesus died for you, and even more than that. Jesus was raised to life guaranteeing that our sins are gone. Jesus is at the position of power and authority ruling over all things for our benefit. And Jesus continues to speak to the Father as your defense attorney.

When I sin, Jesus says to his Father, "Father, remember what I did for Gary. He is your child." Wow! Such amazing love! ... **"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered"** (Romans 8:35,36).

Is there anyone or anything that can separate us from the love of Christ? This is a love that is so foreign to us. It is a love that burns its way into our hearts. It is a love that wraps us with forgiveness. It is a love that binds us to God for eternity. It is a love that comes from the will of God into the work of God for you.

And if you haven't memorized the next words, let me encourage you to do so. Commit them to your head and heart. **"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors (super-conquerors) through him who loved us. 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 8:37-39).

Do you see it? You are standing on the podium of God's grace right now. You have the gold medal around your neck. And no matter how much the devil and his allies want to ruin your reputation, your worth, your status, who you are as a person is centered in God's never-failing love for you. And do you know what you can do with that?

You can boldly live every day of your life as the victorious champion Christ has made you to be. When Satan comes stirring up your past, you can say, "I was that. But I am no longer. I am a baptized child of God. Leave me alone!" When temptations come dangling before your eyes, you can walk away and say, "I am no longer your slave. I am free from you." You see, you are super-conquerors through Christ. Can I give you one more illustration of that?

Do you know who Chloe Kim is? She was a seventeen-year-old USA athlete who also won gold in the snowboard halfpipe in 2018. But her road to victory was a little different from Shawn White. You see, on her first run, Chloe scored a 93.75, which gave her a huge lead over the rest of the field. Over the next two runs, the rest of the competition tried their best to get a higher score than that, but they came up short. The closest was Liu Jiayu from China who had a score of 89.75. Essentially, Chloe Kim had won the gold medal on her first run.

All she had to do was just snowboard her way down the hill. She already had the gold. But that's not what happened. No, Chloe Kim gave it her all on her third and final run, even though she already had the gold. And she executed her tricks with such precision that she finished with a whopping score of 98.75, beating the closest competitor by 9 points. It was such an awesome achievement for that young athlete.

My friends, that's how you and I can live right now. We already have the gold won. Jesus our Savior has won the gold medal for us on his first run through life. His love has sealed your place on the podium of God's grace. The gold medal is secured for you. And right now you are standing on top of the hill, getting ready for your final run. What will it be? How about going for it? How about living your life as the victorious super-conqueror you are through Christ? Amen.