

# Love - Romans 5:6-8

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## ROMANS SERMON #14 - Advent Week 4 - Love

**December 24, 2017 (AM)**

When people invent gods and religions, they usually invent gods that reward and punish for our behavior. They reward us for doing good, and punish us for doing evil. If there's a heaven it's full of good people, and if there's a hell it's full of bad people. God rewards the good guys and punishes the bad guys.

In buddhism, the sum of peoples' past actions come back to them in Karma - the good are rewarded and the bad are punished. And each year at Christmas time, we gather across the world to be reminded that there is a dark side and light side of the force. Good guys and bad guys - reaping what they sow. The good will finally win out in the end, once Disney has wrung every last dime out of that storyline. The good will be rewarded.

But Christianity says that God is very different than these impersonal, retributive gods and forces in the world. God is a just God. But God is also a gift-giving God.

And gifts, graces, are not deserved or earned. Tomorrow morning, our kids won't be earning gifts. They won't be told - OK, if you want to pour out your stocking go scrub the toilets! Here's a big one, clean the basement and you'll

be able to open it! I'll give you this stuff when your rent check clears. Those wouldn't be gifts, they'd be wages. That's how paychecks are given, not presents.

Presents are unmerited. Not-worked-for.

You don't receive gifts because you're deserving, you receive them because you are loved.

You don't give gifts to people who have worked for them, you give them to people you love.

And in Jesus, we are shown that God is a gift-giving God. He isn't only just,, paying out what is owed. If that's all He ever did, He never would have sent His son - none of us deserved to have him live among us. The shepherds didn't deserve to know God's plan. Mary didn't deserve to have the Savior in her womb. We didn't deserve a Savior. We deserved God's total abandonment, we deserved punishment.

But He sent His son - to be born in Bethlehem, to live a perfect life on our behalf, to teach us his ways, and then, in the greatest of all possible gifts, to die for us on calvary and rise again.

He didn't give these gifts because we earned them or deserved them. He gave these gifts because He loved us. Because, as 1 John 4:8 says, "God is love." He's not a God who only punishes and rewards, but a God who gives gifts because He is love and we are loved.

**Passage:Romans 5:1-8 "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2**

**Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. 6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

It's easy to doubt the love of God for us. In the tragedies of life, in what seem to be unanswered prayers, even just in life's complexities and the daily grind we can doubt whether there's a God who loves us.

It's easy to maintain faith that there's a God who made us - a few glances at nature can restore that kind of faith when it wavers. It's somewhat easy to maintain faith in a God who rewards and punishes in the end. That's the default religion of all of our hearts.

But a God who loves us is easy to doubt.

Because we don't always feel that or believe we're experiencing it. **But verse 8 here says, " but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

When our hearts and attitudes are right, we can see all kinds of ways He is actively loving us in our circumstances. But the place we are called to look for the evidence that God loves us is the cross.

You give gifts because you love. And the greatest gift ever given was the gift of God's son. So God loves.

I. **His Love Gives** - and God gave more than anyone.

Look at this love:

**A. His Love Gives Freely**

**6 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.**

The gift of Christ's death for us was well-planned. It wasn't just some accident that happened to Him, it wasn't a rebel's mission gone wrong that ended in death. He died at an appointed, planned time for us.

Remember from the very beginning, there were people who wanted to take Him out. When the wise men came from the east and told King Herod that a new King of the Jews was born, Herod panicked. If you're the king, it's not good news that there's a new king. So Herod, the most powerful man in Israel, scrambled to take Him out:

**Matthew 2:7- "Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him." 9 After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their**

treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. 12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." 14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son."

This child wasn't going to die before His appointed time.

His death was planned, and it happened at the right time.

Nobody took His life from Him, he laid it down. Love gives freely.

When He had finished His work of teaching and healing, He allowed Judas to betray Him, He allowed soldiers to arrest Him, and He went to the cross and died.

He planned it out and did it at the right time. And the right time was when He chose to die, not when we finally deserved it.

## **B. His Love Gives to the Undeserving**

He wasn't waiting for people to be worthy of this gift, or waiting for us to achieve anything or understand anything, or for us to be moral enough.

Verse 6 says "while we were still weak" he died. And that He died for the "ungodly." Verse 8 says He died "while we were still sinners."

God wasn't waiting for us to achieve something and then He paid us for in by sending his son. This was a pure, unadulterated, unmerited gift given, not to His friends, but to His enemies.

Look at verse 7 again:

**7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—**

He is saying that sometimes a person dies for a righteous person - this is the kind of person that is moral and upright, but fairly cold and unattractive<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes a person will give his or her life for a person like that. A little more often they'll give their lives for a good person, a person who is virtuous and more attractive and warm.<sup>2</sup>

**8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

This wasn't God giving his life for noble people to rescue them. This was God dying to rescue sinners, the ungodly, the weak, rebels. Think of the person you have the hardest time loving - that was us times 1000 when God gave His son.

Think of how huge of a gift this was.

### **C. His Love Gives Generously**

When somebody dies, you feel the loss in proportion to how close they were to you. A distant friend affects you, but a sibling or parent or spouse affects you far more. And here is God, capable of far more love than we could ever know, in the closest of all possible relationships: Father, Son, and Spirit in the perfect godhead from eternity past.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, *Romans for You* (Round Hill: The Good Book Company, 2014), 117

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

And God gives His son to die.

What a generous sacrifice!

So when there's doubt about God's love, the place to look first isn't your circumstances. The place where he indisputably demonstrates His love for us is on the cross.

And looking to the cross and seeing His love there STEELS us up for the Christian life.

## **II. His Love Steels**

### **A. It steels us for when we are tempted doubt whether He could still love us because of our sin.**

He loved us while we were sinners to begin with. Why would our next failure put us outside His love. He proved in the Gospel that He loves us where we are, not where we should be.

But after this long and when I've gone this far, how could God love me? You have never been able to earn His love, on your best day.

God is not weary of you. Not sick of you. Exhausted by you. He loves you.

### **B. It steels us for when we doubt whether He loves us because of how we feel.**

There are times we feel His love, but His love for us is far more than a feeling. It's an historical reality - He died for us. History isn't true or not true based on how we feel. Just because you don't feel like Abraham Lincoln exists has absolutely no bearing on whether or not He did. Feelings are never the final judge of reality.

And in the dark times when we don't feel His love, that doesn't prove a thing about whether He loves us or not. **God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

Don't look inside your heart for proof that He loves you. Look to the cross! He freely, generously gives to the undeserving there.

Know that He loves you, even when you can't feel it.

It steels us for when we doubt whether He will continue to care for us.

### **C. It steels us for when we doubt whether He will provide**

When we doubt whether He will provide emotionally, spiritually, or physically. When we wonder whether we are going to reach the end of His generosity and the provision or the patience runs out:

**Romans 8:32 "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"**

If He gave us His son, an infinitely valuable gift, of course He'll give us every other accessory we need to enjoy Him fully. We can approach the future with courage because we have the backing of a God who showed His love for us by giving His son.

### **III. His Love Shows**

This shows us how to love.

- A. In marriage and family - I love who you are, not who i want you to be. Just like God's love meets me where I am, my love meets my spouse

where my spouse is. We don't love some future perfect version of our spouses, we love the one God put us with. It isn't a conditional love, but a laying down of our lives like Christ loved.

B. In church - love the people while they are weak and insufficient and goofy - it's not I'll love and be committed to these people *if*. That's not how God loves. While we were weak, ungodly sinners God gave His son.

C. In neighborhoods and campuses

D. In workplaces

We love as we were loved in Christ.

Jesus was at a Jewish leader's house for a feast:

***Luke 14:12-14 "He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give ya dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. 13 But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."***

When you throw a feast, invite the people who can't love you back. Because that's who you are. Christ has thrown a feast of grace and mercy, and He didn't invite the winners. He didn't invite the achievers. He didn't invite the people who were holy on their own. He invited us!

And in response to a love like that, we open our homes and tables and lives to those around us, especially when they can't give back.

We are quickly wearied. Exhausted. We are quick to cut people off because they are too difficult. But responding to God's love calls us to love people who are wearisome, burden, and even toxic like us.