

I am LOVED

November 29, 2020

INTRODUCTION

Do the first two statements with hand motions:

- I am NOT GUILTY. God Himself has declared me “not guilty”. Therefore, I will reject every voice of shame, fear, or condemnation.
- I am LOVED. There is nothing I can do to make God love me more. And nothing I can do to make God love me less.

When I logged onto biblegateway.com this morning, the verse of the day was Psalm 136:1 which reads:

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. *His love endures forever.*

I literally cannot think of a better summary verse than this for the message today.

Give thanks to the LORD.

- We just came through this Thanksgiving season in which we have sought to intentionally be thankful.
- Give thanks to the LORD the psalmist said. Why?

For He is good.

- I have been struck more and more by this biblical phrase. He is just so good.
- At first glance, it may seem like a rather bland phrase. But as you meditate more on the phrase, becomes, at least for me, such a beautiful summary statement of who He is.
- He is just so good. So generous. So kind. So patient. So loving. And speaking of His love, the psalmist says...

His love endures forever.

- That’s what we’re going to talk about today. His love. And that His love is not like human love.
- We tend to project onto God what is true of us. And our love for one another tends to be very conditional, whereas His love for us—at least those of us who are in Christ—is unconditional and eternal.
- Put another way, there is nothing you can do to make God love you more. And there is nothing you can do to make God love you less.
- And it will never ever, ever, ever stop.

Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. *His love endures forever.*

I had a breakfast with a young man from LBC earlier this week and he asked how he could pray for me and I said that I was very nervous to preach this message. He said, “Really?” I think he was surprised that I still get nervous to preach sometimes. And I suppose that might be surprising.

But as I told him, it's not so much of this idea of getting up in front of you my church family, but the topic itself was a bit overwhelming to me.

- How do I properly preach this kind of love?
- How do I do in such a way that does it justice?
- How do I get across to you something that I myself struggle to comprehend?
- How do I teach about a truth that the apostle Paul said that no one can fully grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ?
- How do I communicate this truth which has the capacity and ability to radically save the unbeliever and continue to dramatically transform the believer into white-hot followers of Jesus, but NOT done well, could simply be another lesson that could lull the believers into a sort of self-complacent apathy?
- How do I preach this in such a way that I am actually changed by it too? That like Paul, I can say with integrity before you and most importantly, before the Lord, that the love of Christ compels me to share His love and the good news of His Gospel with the unbelieving world that's all around me?

So, yeah... I'm nervous.

But as I have brought this before the Lord multiple times, I have sensed He wants to speak to us today a simple message but one that apart from the ministry of His Holy Spirit may not hit the mark, so I pause with you now to open my heart and my ears to His Spirit and His Word, and invite you to do the same.

[Pray]

Let's turn together to Romans 5.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we¹ have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we³ boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹ Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Two weeks ago we spoke about the justification that we have in Christ. And Romans 5:1 is one of those big THEREFORE's. Remember, Paul has been laying out his case like a lawyer. And he has successfully made the case up until this point that ALL have sinned and fallen desperately short of God's standard. That ALL are in need of salvation and that salvation cannot be achieved somehow by good works.

No. Salvation is by grace through faith. By grace (motion) through faith.

And that act of faith, which even that is not fully of ourselves, is what allowed Him to declare us "not guilty". And if God is for us, that is, if God the Judge has declared us not guilty, who will can possibly condemn us?

And remember, when God declared us not guilty, it was not based on my track record. He who is eternal saw my whole life—every sin—and yet still declared me "not guilty" because I placed my faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone for my salvation.

And now, for those of us who are in Christ, Romans 5:5, let me read it again to you:

... God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Now let's be honest, this could sound somewhat "Hallmarky" right? A bit sentimental.

Hear me clearly. You and I get sentimental. And our sentiment is often fickle or changing. I remember being at a wedding one time in which the vows spoken were changed. Instead of the traditional phrase, "Do you take this man, this woman to be your husband, your wife... etc. For as long as you both shall live" the priest said, "For as long as love shall last."

And I remember thinking "Wow... I mean, that might get you to the end of the honeymoon."

But here's the thing, I think subconsciously, we feel like God made this kind of vow with us when He saved us.

I shall love you , forgive you, be patient with you, care for you, provide for you, lead you, protect you, and ultimately save you from your sins.... *For as long as love shall last.*

I do.

What?!? What?!? Is this the kind of vow that God has made to us?

Hear me clearly, God is never sentimental, only serious. Dead serious. Literally. Look at verse 6 again...

⁶ *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

Paul says He died *at just the right time*. And what was that right time? On our good day? When we were strong? When we were seeking Him? When our hearts were soft toward Him?

No. *When we were still powerless* in our sins. When were still completely unable to seek Him. When we were still rebelling against Him. When we were still enemies of God. THAT's when He died for us!

And then Paul gives this sort of common-sense illustration:

⁷ *Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.*

In other words, he says, “Listen here’s the fact. It’s pretty rare that people would willingly lay down their life for someone else, even for a righteous or good person. That’s just a fact. Most people are trying to save their life. Very few will willingly lay down their life for someone simply based on their virtue. Simply because they are a good person.”

BUT... and this has to be one of the biggest comparison statements in the whole Bible.

⁸ *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Church... I don’t know what to do except to purposely slow this down for us to try and let it sink in. Paul says, “We wouldn’t even do this for each other even if we were good. But God...”

This is the kind of love GOD has.

There are actually several phrases that Paul uses in this larger passage to describe us:

- *Powerless*—without strength or power to do what was right. We could not even want to want to.
- *Ungodly*—This refers to a total irreverence. This would be like someone going up and urinating on the casket at your grandmother’s funeral. And laughing about it the whole time they’re doing it.
- *Sinners*—We have missed the mark. Fallen desperately short of God’s standard.
- *Enemies*—This speaks of an actual animosity toward God. A hatred toward God. Not that God was an actual enemy toward us, as the cross has proven, but that we in our stupid, crazy, pride-soaked, irreverent audacity somehow had the nerve to declare God our enemy and to heap insult upon Him, and flagrantly disobey Him, mock Him, and worship other creatures beings instead of Him, in spite of His continued care and concern for us.

THAT is who God was willing to die for. And you were just as bad. No, you weren’t around before the cross, but if you had been, you would have been right there with them. And apart from God’s gracious intervention, you would have still been powerless in your sin, ungodly, falling desperately short of His standard, even having the audacity to declare God your enemy...

Even AFTER the cross, you and I were doing this in His face. And He was still willing to draw us to Himself, bring someone across our path that could clearly communicate the good news of the Gospel, grant us by His Spirit the ability to understand and respond to that Gospel, and then grant us faith to believe in order that we might be saved.

THIS is the kind of love He demonstrated to us even BEFORE we were justified. Even BEFORE we repented of our sins and He saved us.

And now Paul, the lawyer, still building his case that will eventually culminate at the end of chapter 8, goes on in verse 9:

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Do you see what he is doing here? It's the principle of the lesser to the greater.

He is saying, "Listen... if God is willing to love you to this degree even BEFORE you repented, BEFORE you were justified, BEFORE you became a child of God. If God was willing to love you some much that He was willing to die for you—even while you were still a powerless, ungodly sinner who had the audacity to somehow declare God the enemy?!? If He was willing to do that... how much more will He not save you at the end of all things?

In other words, for those of you my dear readers who wonder and worry about whether God might change His mind, and decide in the end that you didn't live a good enough life... that:

- you weren't godly enough
- you wasted your spiritual gifts and resources
- you continued to screw up in that one area that you never ended up finding victory in
- you struggled with faith right up until the day you die

If God loved you enough to die for you even when you were still a powerless, ungodly, sinner who was declaring Him the enemy, and not only die for you but justify you and reconcile you to Himself... how will He not also save you on that day?

Of course He will. Of course He will.

Church, if Paul was standing here today, I think he would say, "Brother, sister, if God loved you so much that He sent His One and Only Son Jesus to die on the cross for you even while you were still a powerless, ungodly, sinner who in shameful audacity was declaring God Himself the enemy... then

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more. And there is nothing you can do to make God love you less.

He cannot demonstrate a stronger, purer, more passionate, sacrificial, love than this:

⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

King David was someone who understood the Gospel in powerful ways, even BEFORE the cross. In Psalm 32:1-2a for instance, he said these words:

¹ Blessed is the one
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

² Blessed is the one
whose sin the LORD does not count against them...

But the one I want to land with is found in a very familiar passage to you, Psalm 23. In these few verses I sense someone who “gets” the fact that God’s love is not like our love. God’s love is strong, it is eternal, it is generous, it is compassionate, it is unconditional toward those who are His sheep.

¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,

³ he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths
for his name’s sake.

⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,^[a]

I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.

SONG: “Goodness of God”

CONCLUSION

You know, a natural response for children, even adolescents is to have a pretty self-centered view of their parent’s love.

And part of their growing up and maturing properly is to become increasingly aware of and grateful for the love, sacrifice, etc. of their parents.

Similarly, I think many Christians still have a pretty childish, adolescent-like response to God’s love. Jesus love ME (hug yourself), for the Bible tells me so. (finish the hug)

Well... yes. Yes He does. But let’s not forget what else the Bible had said:

For God so loved *the world* that He gave His One and Only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

¹³ for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."¹³

¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"¹⁴

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul said:

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Behind me and surrounding me are flags that represent entire people groups, some of which barely have a Gospel witness. Billions of people who still have never heard the Gospel.

We don't know how to wrap our head around a billion. Think of it this way... Million 11.5 days. A billion? 31.5 YEARS. Times 2? 63 years.

That's how many people who right now have never heard the Gospel. Probably more.

Paul said, the love of Christ compels me. That is a mature response to the love of Christ. What will you allow the love of Christ for you to compel you to do:

1. Salvation
2. Rededication to Personal Holiness
3. Rededication to His Service
4. Pray, Give, Go

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