

## Romans, Part 25 12-4-22

### Dying For Love

Romans 5:**6-11** *For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. <sup>8</sup>But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup>Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. <sup>10</sup>For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. <sup>11</sup>And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. This is the word of God.*

In his book, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*, John Piper writes this: *Preaching aims to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.* Of those three aims, today I emphasize the third one -- *to open the heart to the love of God.* This seems to be in accord with Paul's purpose in the fifth chapter of Romans. He is continuing to unfold for us the majesty of the gospel. He has told us already in this chapter that we have peace with God, because we have been justified by His grace in Christ, and so have been given this amazing access to God which we had lost through sin. Paul says that, as a result, we are a people who exult in hope and even in our tribulations because we are recipients of this extraordinary, unquenchable love of Jesus. Verse **5** *The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit.* Then, we get this connection made between the atoning death of Christ and our assurance of the saving love of God. Here is what we receive as believers in Jesus – we not only get an eternal, powerful, intimate love. We get assurance of that love for today and tomorrow. Paul says that assurance comes in two ways. First, as verse five tells us, the Spirit testifies in a very subjective way to our spirits, affirming that we are savingly loved by God. Then, secondly, Paul goes on to argue that the death of Jesus for us, is a super-abundant proof of God's love. So, just as we worship in spirit and in truth, so we have assurance because of the truth of what Christ has done for us and because the Holy Spirit enables us to see that truth despite Satan's attempts to blind us and block us from the liberating vision and comprehension of the saving work of Jesus. How are we to grow in grace? How do we become more like our Lord? We fill our

minds and hearts with the gospel, with the content of the good news, even while we seek the fullness of the Spirit.

Look with me please, at the prayer of Paul in Ephesians 3:**14-19** *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, <sup>15</sup>from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, <sup>16</sup>that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, <sup>17</sup>so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, <sup>18</sup>may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, <sup>19</sup>and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.* The central longing of that prayer accords with Paul's goal in Romans five. It is for a deep knowledge of how and how much we are loved by our Savior. There are few things in the world, maybe none, we need like we need this. To be rooted and grounded in love, to know the love of Christ - and how is that love described? As something that surpasses knowledge. It is a mindboggling love. And the apostle is praying that we would come to grasp it in its breadth and length and height and depth. Personally, I know of no better way to develop an appreciation for the love of Christ than to look carefully at the cross, which is where Paul points us in Romans five.

In his book "The Miracle on the River Kwai" Ernest Gordon tells the true story of a group of POWs working on the Burma Railway during WW II. "At the end of each day the tools were collected from the work party. On one occasion a Japanese guard shouted that a shovel was missing and demanded to know which man had taken it. He began to rant and rave, working himself into a fury and ordered whoever was guilty to step forward. No one moved. 'All die! All die!' he shrieked, cocking and aiming his rifle at the prisoners. At that moment one man stepped forward and the guard clubbed him to death with his rifle. When they returned to camp the tools were counted again and not one shovel was missing." What is it that motivates an innocent man to give his life in order to save others? Jesus says in John 15:**13** *Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.* The Lord points to the motivation of love. This is using the word "love" in its purest and most godlike meaning. This is not the love of pizza or the love of football or the boy-girl love of pop music. This is the self-giving quest for the ultimate well-being of another. This is what Lincoln referred to as *the full measure of devotion*. And nowhere in human history, nowhere in the stories of men, either true or imaginary is there a greater testimony to true love than the

cross of Jesus. For there the perfect Son of God suffered and died in our place, paying the penalty for our sin, taking upon himself our punishment, in order to free us from our bondage and give us life abundant and life eternal. The more we understand the cross, the more we perceive in it the incredible love of our Savior. When the New Testament talks about the love of Jesus or the love of the Father, it can hardly do so without joining that thought with the historical demonstration of that love at Calvary. On occasion, I have asked a person if he or she really believes himself to be loved by God. Often the answer is, "Oh sure. God has given me a nice wife, a job I enjoy. Pretty good health." And you know, those things are nice. They are expressions of God's love. But, the supreme expression of Christ's love is the pouring out of his life, the giving of Himself as our sacrifice for sin. Listen to the Scripture. I John 3:16, not John 3:16, but I John 3:**16ab** *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us.* Ephesians 5:**2** *walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God.* Sacrifice and love are brought together in every verse and the cross is the sublimest display. Galatians 2:**20** *I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.* Therefore, it is to the cross that we turn to discern God's heart toward us. It is to the cross we go when we wonder if the Lord cares. One of our hymns asks the question, *Does Jesus care when my heart is pained too deeply for mirth and song? Does Jesus care when my way is dark with a nameless dread and fear? Does Jesus care when I've tried and failed to resist some temptation strong. When for my deep grief I find no relief, though my tears flow all the night long. Does Jesus care when I've said goodbye to the dearest on earth to me, and my sad heart aches till it nearly breaks, is it aught to Him, does He see?* The refrain says, *O yes, He care; I know He cares.* And my friend, the way we know He cares is to look to Calvary. There he forever sealed His love with his blood. John 15:**13** *Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*

But doesn't the love of Jesus go a step further than that? Isn't the astounding thing about the love of our Lord that He actually exceeded that highest standard of love by laying down his life for His enemies? Romans 5:**6** *while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.* This is what blows our minds - the rotten nature of the people Jesus died to save. **8** *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* What is a sinner? A sinner is someone who has rebelled against God, who has trampled

the Holy One under unholy feet, who has rejected the Lord and His law. In Romans 5:10 we are called enemies of God. Paul says the demonstration of divine love is found in this suffering on behalf of sinners, on behalf of those whom he calls God's enemies. Did Jesus die for his friends or his enemies? Well, He died for those He loved, but those he loved didn't love Him. It was for some of those who had yelled "Crucify Him!" It was for some of those who had jeered and mocked as He was nailed to the tree. These are the kinds of people that Jesus loved and died for. People like you and like me. In his famous hymn, Charles Wesley puts the astonishment of this into words for us. He says, *And can it be that I should gain, an interest in my Savior's blood? Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me who Him to death pursued? Amazing love! how can it be, that Thou my God shouldst die for me!* I would note that he says the one who died for him is and was God. Romans 5:8 says that Christ's death for sinners proves whose love? God's love. If Jesus isn't divine, His sacrifice only proves His love, not God's. But since He is God, His death for us proves God's love – the love of God the son, the love of God the Father. Amazing love!! How about you? Are you amazed at what our Lord did for you?

Paul says Christ died for sinners, for enemies, for the helpless. Remember what we have seen already in Romans – what we learn about our capacities. I am nothing, I have nothing, I can do nothing and I stand in need of all things. Helpless. So, verse 8 supplies us with another one of those spectacular *But Gods* of Scripture. We can do nothing for ourselves. Oh no! *But God. But God. But God.* He is our only hope. And the best reminder of that hope is this - the cross. If you were to do a survey at some busy intersection in Pittsburgh, asking passersby what a Christian is, you would get so many varied and uninformed answers. People will say, *Oh, a Christian is someone who does a lot of good for others. Or, a Christian is someone who tries to keep the commandments.* And those are the nice answers. But most you ask would not say anything that relates to this (the cross) – the cross. The meaning and message of the cross is not that Christians are nice people trying hard to do good, but that they are corrupt people who have broken God's law and God's heart and can only be rescued by the sacrifice of God's own perfect son in their place. Jesus died for us not because we are worthy or wonderful but because He is worthy and wonderful and there was no other way to cover our sin. So, He died for us while we were yet sinners because it is sinners who need His blood shed on their behalf.

Maybe you wonder to yourself, *Am I loved? Does anybody, does God, love me? Really care about what I am going through?* Sometimes, in difficult circumstances, we struggle to believe God really cares. That is not uncommon. We can all understand it. But, this we can understand too. Our Lord has testified us of His love in as strong a terms as it could possibly be said. At times though, we, the sinners for whom the Creator has crushed His own Son, find ourselves engaged in self-pity, thinking or feeling that we have been mistreated. God help us. God forgive us who live in the shadow of the cross, sprinkled by the blood of God's Son, for doubting that He cares, for daring to accuse God even of injustice, unfairness, toward us. That's how bad it gets - that we think the Lord who mercifully sacrificed His son for us has not even given us a fair shake. Oh yes, there are circumstances of life that can make us wonder. And, for times like that, we have Jesus. For times like that we have Jesus. And we have a word that banishes the notion that our problems are associated with some supposed lack of love in God. No way! For times like that especially we must stand or fall down and gaze in wonder at the cross. Don't let the hour of your suffering eclipse the hour of Christ's suffering. Don't let the hour of your suffering eclipse, block from your soul's vision, the hour of Christ's suffering. Let your heart be renewed, your soul be refreshed in the miracle of Calvary. More than any place I know, it is there at the cross that we learn about the breadth, and length and height and depth of God's love. It is there the Son laid down His life for us in bloody agony. It is there the Father crushed His dearly beloved under the weight of our sin, that we might be reconciled to Him. All of love. All of love for the helpless, sinful enemies of God who are also the elect objects of His unspeakable grace. Many there are in this world who have been given numerous reasons to believe they are loved, but somehow they still don't see it, don't feel it, don't know the love. That is precisely where Satan wants them to be. They have listened to his lies and they lack the assurance that they are secure in the hands of a merciful Father. The most consequential battle in your life is the one happening in your head and heart over this very question. Am I loved by the king of heaven? Lucifer argues one way. The cross argues another. Let's look to the cross. Listen to the cross. Embrace the cross.

Because we need so badly to run repeatedly to the cross, the Lord has given us the ordinance of communion – the remembrance of His sacrifice, His body broken, His blood shed. Let's prepare ourselves now to remember Jesus together so that we leave here today with cups running over with the joy of being loved by the Father and the Son.