

To Die For

Romans 5:6-11

August 13, 2017

Introduction:

Have you ever heard a person describe something as “to die for”? Perhaps a friend of yours came back from a vacation and said the oceanside view from their resort was “to die for.” Or when asking about the dessert options at a restaurant, the waitress described the triple chocolate cake as simply “to die for.” The phrase is a compliment of the highest order. It means that whatever it is being described is so desirable or attractive that it would be worth giving up your very life to obtain it. Not that you should take it literally, of course: I don’t care how deliciously rich the triple chocolate cake might be, I’m not going to lose my life just to have a slice! But nevertheless, we all understand what the phrase means: if something is “to die for” then it must be exceptional indeed!

In light of this phrase, what we find in the passage we’ll be looking at today is surprising because this popular phrase is absolutely turned on its head when it comes to Christ. We are the ones for whom Christ came “to die for” and yet, there was not one thing about us which was desirable or attractive or worthy which would motivate Christ to give his life for us. Jesus didn’t look at us and think to himself, “You are such wonderful and delightful people that you are just ‘to die for.’” Quite the opposite.

Let’s take a look at what Scripture has to say about Christ dying for us by opening your Bibles to Romans 5, which can be found on pg. 942 of the pew Bibles, should you be using one of those. Our attention today will be focused on v. 6-11 so let me read through the passage in its entirety as we begin. Again, we’re in Romans 5, reading v. 6-11. **“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”**

This passage is rich in encouragement for us and I hope that your hearts would be filled with joy over the glorious assurance God has for us in his Word this morning. I think we can consider this paragraph in three parts that flow logically from the first point to the next, so the three points I have this morning really serve as a progression that move from one idea to the next. So let’s dive right in with our first point, which is this...

1. **Christ’s sacrificial death for sinners is unlike any sacrifice we might make for another**

In v. 6, Paul makes a statement that serves as the foundation for everything else he’s about to say in this paragraph. He says, **“For while we were still weak, at the right**

time Christ died for the ungodly.” First, let’s ask the question, what does Paul mean by calling us “weak”? It’s not a statement about our physical condition but rather our moral and spiritual condition. We were “**weak**” in that we were unable to do anything to rectify the situation we were in before God. As you might recall, the point of the first three chapters of Romans was to demonstrate conclusively that all of us were under the wrath of God, responsible for our sin, unable to seek God or do anything to merit his favor towards us. In fact, the word “**weak**” is really an overstatement; think of it more like what Paul says in Ephesians 2:1 when he says, “*As for you, you were dead in your trespasses and sins...*” We were weak like a dead person is weak. Go play a game of tug-of-war against a corpse and you’ll always win. That’s the kind of weakness Paul is talking about: not a little bit of strength; no strength whatsoever. No power. No ability. Utterly helpless.

Besides calling us weak, Paul goes on and uses another term to describe us at the end of v. 6, referring to us as “**ungodly.**” Again, Paul is alluding back to what he said in Romans 1-3, specifically in Romans 1:18 when he started off the whole section by saying, “*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...*” We were ungodly because we neither honored God, nor gave him thanks, and we repeatedly disobeyed his holy Law.

So we’re weak and ungodly, justly under the wrath of God for our sin, totally unable to escape it by any power within us, and yet what does Paul say Christ did? “**At the right time Christ died for the ungodly.**” That is astonishing news. God sends his Son to save us at the very moment when we cannot save ourselves, while we are under the threat of God’s anger. Why in the world would God do something like this? We were guilty of rebellion against him, of treason of the highest order because we turned from him and began to worship the creation instead of our Creator. What could possibly cause God to offer up his Son to suffer and die by crucifixion in our stead in order to redeem us from our sin?

For a moment, let us entertain the possibility that there was something about us that brought about this unexpected turn of events. For example, when your kids were really little, did they ever do something bad that you fully intended to punish them for but then the little tyke did or said something so sweet and adorable that it just melted your heart and you decided to let them off the hook? I’ve often said one challenge of parenting small children is not smiling or laughing when trying to scold them for being bad because they can be so crazy cute when they do it. So maybe that’s how it was with us: in spite of all the bad we’ve done, perhaps there was just something about us that in spite of our sin, God just couldn’t help himself.

Paul considers that possibility by means of a couple of analogies he brings up in v. 7. Look back in your Bibles at just v. 7 for a moment. He writes, “**For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die...**” Reflecting for a moment on human history, Paul recognizes there have been times when a person has been willing to lose their life for the sake of another. It does not happen often, but on rare occasions you’ll find a soldier willing giving up his life in order to save a well-loved king or a family member might make risk his or her life to

save a loved one from certain death. But the two central ideas in v. 7 is that when it happens, it is first, very rare and second, only would happen to someone who was regarded as exceptionally righteous or dear to the person making the sacrifice. In other words, while it's possible that someone might have been willing to take the bullet on behalf of a righteous man like Martin Luther King Jr., a truly evil man like Adolph Hitler would likely have far, far less volunteers. A truly good and virtuous man is someone we could at least conceive as being worth dying for: a villain, not so much.

So in light of that fact, what Christ did for us is amazing. Look now at v. 8. **“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** It is absolutely not the case that there was anything about us which made us worth dying for. We were not so good nor righteous nor beautiful nor rich nor charming nor influential nor anything else that might give God reason to send Christ to the cross. Unlike the good or righteous man for whom someone might possibly dare to die, Paul says **“that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** While steeped in our rebellion and driven in our willful pursuit of wickedness, Jesus died so that we might live. He took our punishment for us while we were still actively engaged in sin. Why in the world would he do that? It certainly isn't from anything that we've done to merit it or move him to look upon us favorably. So what motivated Christ to die for us?

Paul tells us at the beginning of v. 8. **“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** God's love is the reason Christ died for us. God didn't send his Son because he saw in us something that moved him; what moved God was his own divine love that is so grand and so generous that he would choose to love those who sinned against him while they were still sinning against him. As the old hymn says, that is a “love so amazing, so divine, it demands my soul, my life, my all.” God's sacrificial love wasn't reserved only for those whom he deemed good enough or righteous enough; God loved us while we were still sinners.

What this means is you have no reason to ever doubt God's love for you. He chose to love you and give up his Son to die for you even while you were dead in your sin. His love is not conditional on anything in you. You didn't gain his love by any virtue you possessed nor will you retain his love by anything you are doing or will do. God didn't look down the corridor of time and chose to save those whom he saw would first chose him or who lived a good life or who had some extraordinary talent God wanted to use. Divine love alone motivated him. As Paul said in Eph. 1:3, *“In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...”* The only reason why God chose to save you is because his love motivated him.

So let me say right here that you cannot earn the love of God. God has given it to you freely in Christ. The gospel doesn't teach us that God loved us because we're lovable; the gospel tells us that in our sins we were utterly unlovable and yet astonishingly God loved us anyway. God's love to us in Christ is a free gift given simply because God is a loving God who chooses the save weak and unworthy sinners.

But one might ask, “If God's love for us in spite of our sin is what saves us initially, is it possible that his love is contingent upon us in order for to remain?” For example, it is

an act of grace to adopt a child from an orphanage, but if the child doesn't behave, one could theoretically kick them out or return them to the orphanage. Could God's love be like that, such that once he does save us it's our responsibility to behave in such a way to stay in his good graces? To answer that question, I would call your attention now to our second point this morning where Paul takes up the certainty of how his love shown to us in our justification will inevitably lead to our ultimate glorification. So moving on now, our second point us this...

2. So if God would justify us while we were sinners, how much more can we be assured of our ultimate salvation.

Look back now in your Bibles at v. 9. **“Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”** Paul is making an argument from the greater to the lesser, meaning if the greater or more difficult matter has been accomplished, then how much more certain is it that a matter less difficult would also be done. So in this case, the more difficult matter is that God needed to justify us. Because of our sin, we faced the just wrath of God, and as a just and righteous God, he couldn't just ignore our sin. In order to be just, sin needed to receive it's due. But the only way that could happen was for God to take his wrath upon himself, sending the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ to become a man, live a sinless life, and then suffer the wrath of God as our substitute. Our justification, while given freely to us, was extremely costly to God the Father. He had to forsake his Son and treat Christ as if he were sin itself. I love my children, and I couldn't imagine giving them up to die on behalf of anyone, much less an unrighteous person. Could you do such a thing? We who are imperfect and evil find the thought nearly impossible, yet the Father loved the Son perfectly since before creation, and yet, he gave him up so that we might be saved.

So then, if God did the far more demanding thing of pouring out his wrath on Christ in order to save us, **“how much more can we be assured of our ultimate salvation,”** that is, our glorification. What difficulty is it for God to see to it that we persevere in our faith to the end? What power is there that can oppose him? As Paul will say later in Romans 8:32, if *“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 God would go so far to punish Christ in our stead on the cross, how we can possibly think he would be unwilling or unable to finish in us what he started?

Paul then goes on to argue from the greater to the lesser once again in v. 9. Look there with me. **“For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”** You were once an enemy of God. That's the default relationship between us and God as a result of our sin. To say that we were **“enemies of God”** is the nutshell summary of our condition before God as described in Romans 1-3. But we became reconciled to God through faith in Christ because God's wrath against us was satisfied and our hearts were transformed by the Holy Spirit so that we no longer hate him but instead desire to know and love God.

So then, arguing from the greater to the lesser, if God reconciled us to himself while we were his enemies, how much more, now that we've been reconciled to him, will he save us finally and ultimately in heaven. Because of Christ, you are no longer God's enemy; you are a son or daughter of God, adopted into the family of God, loved by him. Is God going to turn his back on you and not bring you into the fullness of heaven as a child of God when he was willing to do so much more for you back when you were in open rebellion to him? Of course not! If he was willing to justify you when you were his enemy, how much more will he save you from sin and death if you are his child!

And I need to add that I love what Paul says here: he says we were reconciled to God by Christ's death and will be saved by Christ's life. How does the life of Christ help to save us? There's a clear and wonderful answer given to that in Hebrews 7:25. Keep your place in Romans and turn there in your Bibles for a moment. It's on pg. 1005 of the pew Bible if that helps you. I want you to see how the author of Hebrew explains how Christ's life helps to save us. Look at Hebrews 7, just at v. 25. It says this, *"Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."*

Jesus didn't just die and stay dead. He rose again, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty and now serves as our Great High Priest who eternally makes intercession for us. Think about that: Jesus is alive and is interceding for you before the face of God. Talk about the ultimate prayer warrior! So then, if Jesus lives to intercede for us, God's adopted sons and daughters, for whom Christ gave his life to reconcile us to God, is there is any possibility whatsoever that the salvation God began in you won't be brought to completion in glory? Is there anything in all creation, be it heaven or on earth, be it kings or angels or poverty or illness or even our own sin that could interrupt the process of salvation and cause us to be separated from God's love for us in Christ?

My friends, if God saved you initially, how much more can you be assured that he will save you finally! You don't need to fear that somehow you won't finish the race. You need not have any anxiety that you will slip up into sin such that God will wash his hands of you. If he saved you when you were his enemy, how much more can you be confident he will save you when you are his child! This means regardless of what we are going through, we can have absolute assurance in God's faithful love towards us. He will bring you to your heavenly home. Your salvation wasn't dependent upon anything in you initially and neither is it contingent upon you to bring it to completion. Rest assured that God will complete what he started.

So in light of this glorious assurance that the God who has reconciled his former enemies to himself will also save them to the uttermost, what should be our response? To that matter, we need to move on now to our third and final point, which is...

3. Therefore, let us rejoice in reconciliation we have received in Christ!

Look back in your Bibles at v. 11. **"More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."**

Honestly, what other response can you possibly come to after such glorious news? You who were once God's enemies have now been reconciled to God, so then we're to **"rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ."** Joy is the natural response to the grace of God given to sinners like us. We can be joyful people in spite of what happens in the circumstances of our lives because we have rock solid assurance in this truth: we have been reconciled with God. He who was once our enemy is now our Father and we his children. God's wrath against us has been appeased and now we stand before him justified, forgiven, loved, adopted, and promised eternal life with him. The war is over. The dread of our doom has dissipated. Peace has been made, an eternal peace that will never be broken. What other emotion can we feel once the glorious weight of that truth sinks into our hearts and minds other than joy!

Yet we can seek to find our joy in so many other things, all of which can and will fail us. So many people try to find their happiness in relationships, but eventually every person will fall short because they will sin against you, you leave you, or die. Others try to find joy in their careers, but can become discouraged when others are promoted ahead of you or you eventually have to face the fact that your skills and talents can only take you so far up the corporate ladder. People will seek happiness in wealth and all those things that money can buy, only to find that they never have enough, or what they do have is taken from them when the stock market crashes or unexpected medical bills drain your savings. Anything in creation we look to for joy will eventually fail us, but if we look to our Creator and the promises he has given us in Christ, our joy will never fail. Only in Christ will our hearts find rest and joy and peace. As Augustine, the fourth-century bishop famously said, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

So my friends, do not look to the stuff of earth for your joy. Here is where joy is found: in knowing that God has reconciled himself to you in Christ, in that he has adopted you into his family, that you have been justified by faith in Christ, who died for you not because of what you did or didn't do but simply because God in eternity past chose to set his love upon you, even when you were a sinner. That is where we are to find our joy, a joy unshakable because it rests upon the certainty of the promises of God who, now that he has saved you, will never leave or forsake you. That is why we can rejoice in all circumstances, because whatever else may come, nothing can alter the fact of God's love for us in Christ.

Conclusion

So as we close, I want to encourage you to drink deep of the truths of this passage. This is a well-spring of joy, so think deeply about what this is saying about God's love for you. Allow these wonderful truths to take root deep in your hearts so that it might overflow with rejoicing. Let us be people who are characterized by joy because we of all people have reason to rejoice: because while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2017.