

## GOD'S LOVE – CHRIST'S DEATH

### Introduction

1. Lucado story (*In the Grip of Grace*, pp. 95-97). Hang on to that we will revisit it at the end of the message.
2. I am not particularly good at it, but I am intrigued by logic stuff. I like looking at arguments and how they fit together. I enjoy listening to someone build a case, developing each part, so that eventually a clear and convincing conclusion can be drawn. People who are good at it appear at times to ask non-relevant questions and gather seemingly insignificant information, but then they bring it all together and it is a beautiful sight to behold! And when they present their final arguments, the conclusion is very hard to dispute.
3. That is what I see here. Here the Apostle Paul develops the amazing truth of our sin and Christ's salvation. Basically, at the risk of sounding too simplistic, I want to tell you what I am going to tell you, then I will tell you, and then I will try to conclude by telling you what I told you – not to insult your intelligence, but to make sure we get it.
4. The passage before us today breaks down like this. Paul explains to us that at just the right time **Christ died** for the ungodly. Using a human analogy, Paul says that it is not likely that one would actually die in the place of another. It has happened - probably many times, but it is not the norm. To enforce the impact of that statement, Paul reminds us that in fact **someone might die** for a good man. While that is true, Paul comes full circle and reminds us that Jesus Christ did not die for a righteous man or a good man. **Jesus Christ died** for vile men. He died for sinners. And included among those sinners are you and I.
5. So here we go. Let's consider Paul's logic as he builds his case toward revealing the love of God that has been poured out on us (v. 5).

### I. CHRIST DIED ... FOR THE SAKE OF THE UNGODLY

#### A. At just the right time

1. This is not the first time a phrase like this has occurred. The basic meaning has to do with a strategic time - a time determined by a particular set of circumstances. Galatians 4:4 says, "In the fullness of time, God sent his son, born of a woman, born

under the law, to redeem those under the law." The time was right. In God's plan, it was time for Jesus to come, and it was time for Him to die for the ungodly.

2. It was not according to a particular date, but in accord with particular circumstances. Those circumstances had to do with the condition and the position of people. At the point of weakness and hopelessness, He came and He died.

#### B. For just the right people

1. Depending on the intent of the passage, the Bible describes people in various ways. Sometimes we are referred to as "without hope". Other times it is "spiritually dead". Here the ungodly are referenced as "without power" (weak).
2. There was nothing that the weak could do to get out of the predicament they were in. When we read verse 6, it goes like this: **For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.** Literally, it could be translated as follows: "Indeed, Christ, who at just the right time when we were still powerless, on behalf of the ungodly, died."
3. Paul does two things here. He identifies us as powerless and he says Christ died for the ungodly. Would you care to guess how Paul sees us in Romans 5? We are without power to do anything about our situation, because our situation is ungodly. But it was for the ungodly that Christ died!

#### C. In just the right way

1. We might not understand this if we did not have the benefit of knowledge of the gospel. I know most of you know the story, but allow me to retell it.
2. Basically, we have to go all the way back to Genesis to understand how we got into this predicament. (Explain). The penalty of sin was death. Death was the only means to satisfy the righteous judgment placed on sin. We were already sentenced to die physically and there was nothing we could do to get us out of the eternal mess we were in.
3. But at just the right time, in just the right way, Christ died for just the right people - and that included us! Jesus died on the behalf of - both in place of and for the benefit of - the ungodly. But is that so unusual or amazing? Paul continues his argument.

## II. ANYONE MIGHT DIE ... FOR THE SAKE OF THE GOOD

#### A. Very rarely for a righteous person

1. Paul uses the illustration that very rarely would someone actually die on behalf of a righteous person. It might happen, but it would not be commonplace.
  2. Righteous people (whatever that might mean here) usually end up dying for themselves. It would be breaking news for someone to step forward and actually take the place of a person who was righteous, but scheduled to die. Righteous, here, would refer to someone who was doing what justice or the law required. So Paul is saying that a law-abiding, justice-minded, person could be spared from the sentence of death by another law-abiding, justice-minded person, taking that first person's place. That's possible. Something even more probable follows.
- B. Possible but unlikely for the good person (Is this the same truth restated or is Paul intensifying the argument)?
1. There are law-abiding, justice-minded people who are also benevolent, kind and generous. Paul would describe them as "good." He may be suggesting that it would be just as unlikely for someone to die for a good person.
  2. There are some who would see a kind, benevolent person who was facing death, and they would change places with them, actually dying in their place, in order to set them free. We might hear about such heroics once in a while. Thus Paul's point is, "for a good man one might possibly dare to die." It is not beyond the realm of possibility. So what is Paul's point?
  3. This is one of those "what is Paul doing here?" situations. At first it might be confusing, but he is setting up a contrast for the real focus of this passage. It certainly would be rare for someone to offer to exchange life for death with a righteous (someone who is law-abiding) person. Who knows, maybe it would be slightly more likely for someone to do the same for a good person (one who has demonstrated benevolence throughout life). But for a low-life, the scum of earth, a condemned, wicked loser - no way! We might well conclude, "I'm not giving my life for anyone like that! They deserve to die!" In the words of Ligon Duncan, ***The gospel is not just 'God loves you.' You see, 'God loves you' might convey the idea that well, we're fairly loveable people. Pretty nice guy, he's reasonable, it's a nice thing for Him to do. It's not even 'God's loves you at the cost of His Son.' God loves you in this magnificent way. That's true. It's 'God loves you, sinner, at the cost of His Son.' And it's precisely there that Christ dies for the ungodly. He doesn't die for those***

**who've got everything together. They're clean, they are well scrubbed; they have prepared themselves. He doesn't say, I'm going to die for everyone who's going to help themselves. I'm going to die for everybody who at least makes the effort to do what they ought to do. He says, 'I die for the ungodly.' Christ died for the ungodly. God's love has been shed abroad not merely in the death of Christ, but in the death of Christ for sinners. Paul is saying, "Do you want to see the love of God? See it in who Jesus dies for." He dies for people who don't deserve it, people who are totally unworthy of it.** Some might die for another – a righteous or a good man – but not for an ungodly, ungrateful, unrepentant lowlife!

### III. CHRIST DIED ... FOR THE SAKE OF US (Why?)

#### A. As a demonstration of love

1. Keep in mind all that has gone on before in this letter. Paul has proven conclusively that we are all sinners and we are all worthy of judgment and we have all broken the law and we all are bankrupt and deserving only of hell itself. **But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**
2. The point here is that God's love has no human parallel. It is divine. "What men could scarcely do for the good, God has abundantly done for the vile and the despicable." It is a colossal demonstration! God "stood up and introduced His love" to us! And that was supremely demonstrated in the death of His Son. And here it is described in the present tense! "God *continuously* establishes His love in that the death of Christ remains as the most striking manifestation."
3. James Boice suggests that the love of God seemed so great to the Biblical writers that they in effect "invented" or at least raised to an entirely new level of meaning a rather obscure word for love. The Greek language was rich in words for love. The word, "storge" referred to affection, particularly in the family. And "phileo" was love between friends. "Eros" was more of a sexual love, which may or may not have been perverse – but none of those were quite right. Instead the NT writers took another word without strong associations and poured their meaning into it. The new word was "agape", which, in the minds of the Bible writers, came to stand for "the holy, gracious, sovereign, everlasting, and giving love of God." That is what was poured out for us in the death of Christ!

4. Charles Hodge wrote, "If (God) loved us because we loved him, he would love us only so long as we love him, and on that condition; and then our salvation would depend on the constancy of our treacherous hearts. But as God loved us as sinners, as Christ died for us as ungodly, our salvation depends, as the apostle argues, not on our loveliness, but on the constancy of the love of God." God loves us not because of us but because of Him. He loves us because He has chosen to set His love on us.

B. As a demonstration of grace

1. Again, follow the case that Paul is building. Christ died. We know that. He died for the ungodly. We have heard that before. How significant is that? It certainly does not compare in any way with the occasional selfless demonstration of one human to die on behalf of another. Whereas we might die for a good person, we would not choose to die in the place of an enemy or a vile wicked person who had rejected us and dishonored us at every opportunity. But that is what Jesus did. There is no human parallel to His love. Nor is there a parallel to His grace demonstrated in that act on our behalf.
2. These verses are the explanation and elaboration of the statement in verses 1-2. "...Into this grace in which we now stand" is the result of the demonstration of His own love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That, my friends, is grace at its highest level, in its purest form. And it is the result of this grace that has been given, this love that has been demonstrated, that we can rejoice in the results as recorded in verses 9-11 (which we will study together later, but I will read now).
3. The old, old story of His love need never be stale, but rather should be seen by us as priceless and should continually be cause for great joy and great thanksgiving.

## Conclusion

1. We started out with Max Lucado at a church potluck. He ended that chapter with these words, "our greatest offering is peanuts compared to what we are given." I suggest that he was far too generous with his assessment. We come to the banquet, not bearing a half a jar of peanuts, but rather we come in total destitution. But God stood up and introduced us to His love by giving the gift of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die in our place in order that we might live at His table.

2. **God pours out his love in our hearts, and God demonstrates his love by directing our minds to consider the death of his Son...The experience of God's love has factual, objective content. It is mediated, or communicated, through objective truth about the death of Christ. You don't get the experience by emptying your head. You get it in seeing the demonstration - by seeing the glory of the love of God in the real historical work of Christ (Piper).**
3. I said at the beginning that I was going to tell you what I was going to tell you and then I would tell you and then I would tell you what I told you. We are at the last point now. Listen again to verses 6-8. Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? My guess is that some of you have never trusted Christ. You may have come to church often. Your motives are pure. You want to be a better person. You want to live right. You want your family to have a moral, religious base. But you could not say that you have a relationship on a personal level with the Lord Jesus Christ. God is demonstrating His love toward you even now. Your response must be to trust Him.
4. For us, who have been saved, what is our response toward the love of Christ. I hope it is unchecked obedience and continual adoring worship to the gracious outpouring of God's love through the work of His Spirit. If it is not, there is something wrong.
5. F. M. Lehman, sometime around 1917, wrote a hymn called, "The Love of God." I am told that the final verse of the song was not written by Lehman, but was scratched on a wall in an asylum by a man said to have been insane. I remember singing that as a kid in church. I thought then that it was a little syrupy and I didn't care for it much, but over the years I have changed my opinion. I think the Apostle Paul would have affirmed it as a good song to sing at the end of this section in Romans 5. The words are as follows: **The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell. It goes beyond the highest star, and reaches to the lowest hell. The guilty pair, bowed down with care, God gave his Son to win; His erring child, he reconciled and rescued from**
6. **sin.** (and the last stanza found later) **Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made; were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade; to write the love of God above, would drain the ocean dry; nor could the scroll contain the whole, tho stretched from sky to sky.** (And then the chorus...) **Oh, love of God, how rich and pure! How measureless and strong! It shall forevermore endure – the saints and angels song.** (Conclude with the reading of the text).

