

The Triumph of the Cross

Romans 5:6-11

As we were driving down to Missouri on Tuesday, we stopped for a short break at McDonald's. The news was highlighting the devastation caused by tornados in the Dallas/Ft. Worth area occurring earlier that day. They showed hail stones as big as Washington's picture on the dollar bill. Its powerful winds lifted a semi truck and trailer 100's of feet in the air as if it were a helium filled balloon. Dark menacing clouds churned through the sky. Unless you have been in one, I can't imagine what it must have been like for the residents of that area to experience such a horrific day.

In his recollection of the event as he writes about it decades later, Matthew describes that at noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. **(Matthew 27:46)** From his interviews Mark records the same thing. Luke sheds some additional light when he notes that **"the light from the sun was gone."** Whatever kind of darkness it was it, he doesn't say. **Does he mean that there was just a physical darkness requiring manufactured light from torches that were then needed to penetrate the darkness that now shrouded the scene? Was it just local around Jerusalem or did it cover the entire earth? Was it a deep darkness much like you experience in a cave where you cannot see your hand in front of your face? Or did he mean that it was it also a spiritual darkness that now covered the place because the One who was the hope of mankind for their lost spiritual condition now hung seemingly helpless and desperate on the cross?** After all, He cried out in agony about being abandoned by God. He longed for something to wet his parched lips and throat. Maybe He thought about the cool waters that came from the well in Samaria where he met a woman and introduced her to the living water. What He wouldn't give for a taste of something that would refresh His body and spirit. Here the water of life remarks about the human condition of thirsting. The One who split

open the rocks in the time of Moses refrained here from speaking a word that would quench His thirst. Perhaps this darkness was a combination of both. Physical darkness can cast long shadows that cause the soul to despair bringing emotional even spiritual darkness. If the hope of many now hung agonizingly limp on a cross, no wonder there was darkness – at least for His followers who were gathered at that place of His execution. Perhaps the darkness of the sky was just symbolic of the darkness of man's heart due to sin.

About this darkness from what is recorded in Scripture there isn't much to go on. We can only make some inferences about what that scene must have been like. These few words along with a very active imagination are all we have to go on to envision the scene on the day of this crucifixion. As graphic as it can be, not even Mel Gibson's portrayal of "The Passion" fully depicts the dark despair that hung over the land that day. Hollywood might add clapping thunder and driving rains. A bolt of lightning might split the dark skies at the precise moment above the cross when Jesus' lifeless body slumped in death, but it can never adequately or accurately portray either the physical elements or the spiritual ramifications of what took place on that hill called Golgotha.

Our hymnals include many songs about the cross and its significance for the Christian. In that day when all wanted to avoid it, Jesus willingly went to the cross and songwriters bid us to run and hide in its shadow, to cling to it because we now know the spiritual life it gives rather than the life it takes. They challenge us to consider what it symbolizes with the rewards for those who turn to the One who was hoisted on its rough planks, nailed there with the crude spikes of a blacksmith. Hymn writers alike all recognize its importance. They underscore the battle that was waged and the victory that was won the day Jesus died there for us.

In the span of time since it was conceived in the minds of man to use as an instrument of torture and death perhaps thousands and thousands of those who were considered enemies of the state for some crime they had committed had succumbed to the icy grips of death due to exposure to this form of capital punishment. At that time the cross would never have been worn as jewelry to adorn the neck.

Jewelers would not have set up tables to sell on the day on an execution.

Even in those days when tattoos were rare it would never have been etched into the skin and proudly displayed as an emblem of honor as some do today. Unlike today, the cross was not embroiled in legal controversy between whether or not it should stand as a symbol of religious faith and freedom or if it should be torn down because of its direct link with a religious group. Its only image was that of death.

There were no picketers lining the streets on the day Jesus walked through Jerusalem carrying His cross to the place where it would subject Him to pain and death. No one stood outside the governor's hall holding a candle light vigil demanding His release or that the cross was too cruel a punishment for anyone to endure.

Because of its intended purpose it was not an icon that many thought should be dismantled like so many today who clamour for their removal from government property. It stood for justice and judgment. It stood for authority and power.

But then, in an entirely different context don't we as Christians also believe that the cross stands for justice and judgment, authority and power? Isn't it there that we believe justice was brought to bear on our sin? Isn't it there that judgment was meted out for our sin? Isn't it there that the power of sin lost its grip on those who come to it? So why did Jesus do it? Why did He go to the cross?

Some of you may have watched the "Bucket List" that came out several years ago starring Jack Nickelson and Morgan Freeman. It's the story about two men who are unexpectedly brought

together due to one thing – they both shared a room while getting treatments for cancer. They came up with a list of things they called the bucket list that they wanted to do before they died. Because the one was wealthy beyond means they were able to trot the globe in a short span of time and experience the thrill of fulfilling their dreams.

Jesus had a short bucket list. They weren't the kinds of things that would appear on our list. Ours for the most part are the things we would want to do for ourselves. Jesus did things for others and because of others. As a matter of fact He didn't do anything for Himself. **Mark 10:45** explains it this way: **"For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many."** His list was short:

Do the Father's will;

Prepare a rag tag group of men to step out of their world and into His in order to teach others how they could have eternal life;

Die on the cross.

That was His list.

The cross then is no longer an emblem of defeat or death, its victory and life. The cross is not the end, but the beginning. Death for the One who bore the sins of the world meant life for all who would believe that His death conquered the grave and sin and well, death itself.

No other man could accomplish the same results on the cross that Jesus did. The cross with Jesus dying on it became a symbol of hope. It was hope to the man dying next to Him, that he would live again, not in this world but in the world to come. Along with the hymn writer, he too, would "cling to the old rugged cross." It was on that old rugged cross that we receive pardon. But to the other man and to those who ignore it and continue to scorn it, it is a symbol of despair. It is both a symbol of salvation and of judgment. **How do you see the cross?**

For many the cross has become a symbol of God's love to mankind. With our focus today on the cross and the resurrection, turn to **Romans 5:6-11** this morning.

It is in Scripture that we see several things about what took place 2000 years ago on the cross.

We see:

The degree of God's love

The depth of God's love

The demonstration of God's love

The desire of God's love

The destination of God's love

I. THE DEGREE OF GOD'S LOVE

Notice first of all how this passage describes us. It's the reason we need God's love in the first place. In verse 6 it says we were powerless or utterly helpless (NLT).

In verses 6 and 8 we are called ungodly and sinners. In verse 10 we are described as God's enemies.

From our perspective, man looks pretty good. We like to give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, especially when it comes to character. We give to charity when earthquakes or tornados rip homes apart. We loan our mower to the neighbor or watch his dog when they're vacationing. We help at a soup kitchen or donate used unwanted clothing to help the homeless. Compared to others, we look pretty good. Compared to my own standard of yesterday, which may be different today, I look even better. [Working in quality assurance years ago I saw a t-shirt in a Quality product catalog that read "when all else fails, change the data."](#) That's what man has done to sin. We no longer consider it an issue of concern. We call them mistakes or excuse them away as character idiosyncrasies. If someone doesn't like that something is called sin they change it to be more acceptable. There is no longer any accountability for actions. We blame others for our actions or how we were raised. Sin is no longer sin.

Man has even declared that God doesn't exist and without God, man then creates his own conception of what is considered wrong.

We think we're better off than we really are. God has another view of us and it's outlined in Scripture. That's the reason for Easter in the first place. **Romans 3:23** defines God as the standard of morality and we have all fallen short of that standard. He is the only perfect, holy being and so consequently we don't measure up and therefore we are helpless to enter heaven into His presence because we have sin. In ourselves we are powerless to do anything about that lost condition, helpless to save ourselves or do anything that would merit God's favor toward changing His mind about our sin. We are depraved and destitute. We are called to be holy, but in our own strength we fall far short.

That is not a very glowing report on the welfare of man. His condition is terminal. This condition that man is in has not changed. It is the same for those who came before us and it will be the same for those who will come after us. We are all under the same curse of sin. It's outlined throughout Scripture: we have all sinned, we have all gone astray whether we want to admit it or not. We can attempt to change the data on sin all we want, but it won't change the reality of who we are from God's perspective or according to His standard. In school some teachers would grade on a curve. If no one met the standard of 100%, the highest grade became the standard. 90% might be the new standard. 60% would then become a passing grade instead of a failing grade. God won't lower the grade on sin. It's always been the same and He is the standard.

Here's where we see the degree of God's love. We are in this helpless, hopeless condition called sin. God saw us in that condition but was unwilling to leave us in that condition. Notice again what it says in **verse 6: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly."**

Psalm 145:14 – “The Lord helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads.”

That’s where the cross comes in. Here’s what Charles Stanley has to say about the matter. “The cross was God’s perfect answer to a terrible dilemma. Because the Lord is holy and just, He hates sin and must respond to it with punishment and wrath. Yet He also loves sinners and wants to be reconciled with them. The cross of Christ was the place where God’s wrath and love collided.

“The only way to rescue fallen mankind from eternal punishment was to devise a plan whereby the Lord could forgive sins without compromising His holiness. There was no way to overlook transgressions; His wrath had to be poured out – either on us or a substitute. But there was only one possible substitute: the perfect Son of God.

“So Jesus came to earth as a man and suffered the Lord’s wrath for us as He hung on the cross. Sin was punished, divine justice was satisfied, and now God could forgive mankind without compromising His character. His wrath was poured out on His Son so that His love and forgiveness could be lavished upon us.”

In John Bunyan’s classic work *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian is seen beginning his journey carrying a very large pack on his back. It’s his burden, his sin, his worries. It’s a heavy load, much too heavy to carry on his own and quite unable to take it off himself no matter how hard he tries. And as he continues onward the burden becomes heavier and heavier. But one day he comes to the cross and when he bows before the cross and asks the Lord to help him carry the heavy burden, the pack slips right off. He is at last free of it.

Isaac Watts wrote of it in his classic hymn “*At the Cross*.” You have sung it dozens if not hundreds of times (It’s Ken’s favorite song): “At the cross, at

the cross where I first saw the light, and the burden of my heart rolled away.”

Has there ever been a time when you felt weak or powerless, incapable of doing something for yourself? Maybe you couldn’t lift a heavy piece of furniture. Maybe you couldn’t fix a broken water pipe. In those times of helplessness you had to call someone to fix the mess you might have been in. If you have trusted God’s Son as your Savior you had to come to the realization that because of sin, you were totally helpless, incapable of being able to do anything about it. You came to realize that God sent His Son to die for you when you were helpless to save yourself. That is the extent of His love – when you were helpless, when you were ungodly, when you were His enemies, as a sinner – His Son died for you on the cross.

And isn’t that the point Paul is trying to make?

Now when he says that Christ came at just the right time, he is not meaning that Jesus came swooping in to save you much like movies depict the Cavalry in the days of the great expansion across this continent when robbers or Indians attacked and the Cavalry came riding in just in the nick of time to save the day. Instead, Paul means that Jesus came at the appointed time. It was a time that had been determined even before the earth was framed. God knew what would happen and why it would happen and had a plan before it happened so that in man’s helpless condition a time was appointed when Jesus would come to earth and be the sin bearer. Notice again the degree of God’s love. It was for all sinners and we are all sinners, every one of us. He died for the helpless. He died for the ungodly. He died for the enemies of God.

He did not leave out a class of people or a gender of people. He did not leave out any certain countries or those who had physical deformities.

Paul both qualifies and clarifies this in **verses 7-8**. Let me read it from the NLT. “**Now, most people**

would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”

That doesn't put us in very good light does it? It says that given human nature as it is, I would probably only choose to die for someone who was a really good person, but even then I might think twice about it. I might die for a friend, but if you're just an acquaintance or if I don't know you at all, odds are you're out of luck. But the degree of God's love is that Christ died for all and not just all the good people, He died for God's enemies. That's all of us because we are all sinners, all enemies.

Perhaps the best known and most quoted verse of all explains it **“For God loved the world so much that He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, NLT)**

On the cross Jesus died for all to show us the degree of God's love. Scripture also shows us the depth of God's love.

II. THE DEPTH OF GOD'S LOVE

Christ not only died for sin, He died for all sin. Listen carefully to the words of **Hebrews 7:25**. **“Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.”**

The NLT puts it this way: **“He is able to able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through Him.”**

The Amplified Bible describes this act of salvation through God's love as being perfectly, finally, and for all time and eternity.

There is no sin so egregious that He won't forgive. There is no number of sins that a person can stack up for which God has a limit. All sinners and all sin are forgiven through the blood shed on the cross.

Romans 4:5 says that if you, and that means anyone, if anyone trusts God, He will be credited with righteousness. You are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. Because He was sinless, His death on the cross is sufficient for anyone and any sin. It satisfied the demands of God's judgment. His death and our faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross mean that we are saved from God's wrath. That's what we find in our passage according to **Romans 5:9** **“Since (because) we have now been justified (made right) by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him!”**

Have you experienced the depth of God's love?

III. THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S LOVE

That God loves us is clearly seen in **Romans 5:8** **“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”** Paul had just stated that it would be difficult to find someone who might even die for a friend who was morally good. That's a noble act, but it is rare. We don't see it too often. **I heard of a story last week where a couple of guys down in Florida on spring break witnessed an accident. They called 911 but before the emergency crew could arrive they realized the passengers were in danger because they were unable to get out the vehicle on their own. These two guys risked their own lives to get the people from the car. As they led them to safety the car was instantly engulfed in flames.**

If my family were in jeopardy I would do what I could in order for them to live. But here Paul clearly identifies someone who went beyond what would be admirable and died not for friends, but for enemies.

Galatians 4:4 underscores this for us when Paul again states that **“God sent His Son.”**

John 3:16 is the complete picture and demonstration of God's love reminding that God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son so that all who believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

We can't get any greater picture of love than God sending His Son to die for us the ungodly. There is no greater demonstration of love than His. God cannot love you any less and He cannot love you any more. **William Hendrickson has written that God's love is "both unprecedented and unparalleled."** The degree and depth and demonstration of His love had never been seen before and it cannot be equaled by anyone else.

John MacArthur has written that "natural human love is almost always invariably based on the attractiveness of the object of love, and we are inclined to love people who love us. Consequently, we tend to attribute that same kind of love to God. We think that His love for us is dependent on how good we are or on how much we love Him." But as we see in this passage Christ died for us when we were helpless and ungodly, the very enemies of God. That God sent His Son to die for His enemies certainly defies logic.

We clearly see the demonstration of God's love. Now ponder for a moment the desire of God's love.

IV. THE DESIRE OF GOD'S LOVE

Notice the pronouns used in our passage.

- v. 6 – "when we were still powerless."
- v. 8 – "God demonstrates His own love for us."
- v. 8 – "While we were still sinners."
- v. 8 – "Christ died for us."
- v. 10 – "we were God's enemies."

Maybe we should circle them to remind us that they refer to us. Or maybe write your name above them so that it becomes personal.

When Howie was still powerless

Christ died for Howie

Christ demonstrated His love for Howie

While we're at it make **II Peter 3:9** personal: "**The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He was patient with Howie, not wanting him to perish, but (He) wants everyone to come to repentance.**"

Claim that verse for someone you are praying for this Easter who needs to know and experience the love God demonstrates. We, His enemies, are the desire of His affection. That doesn't make sense, but then, that's why He's God and I'm not. He loves you as much today as He ever will and He showed it when Christ went to the cross.

Lastly, I want you to notice the destination of God's love.

V. THE DESTINATION OF GOD'S LOVE

v. 11 "Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

We receive joy through what Christ did on the cross. Instead of despair and hopelessness we now have hope and joy. We have the assurance of eternal life in a place Jesus has prepared for us. We have received reconciliation. That means that instead of being the enemies of God we are now brought together and there is peace between us. At the beginning of Romans 5 Paul sheds some light on our destination. "**Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.**" **Romans 5:1-2**

John 3:16 describes it as being a place where you will not perish because of God's wrath. Instead you have been given eternal life and it's all because of the cross. It's because He didn't remain in the grave but on today, this day 2,000 years ago He rose from the grave. Paul declares that because He lives we too, who believe in Him, will also live. **Is that the kind of assurance you have today? Have you experienced His great love? Do you have a heart of joy because of the resurrection of Jesus?**