

TBC – 3/23/03 p.m.

THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

Romans 5:8

Intro: I am taking you tonight to another of our *Bible Verses Everyone Should Know*: Romans 5:8. Please quote it with me. (Quote.)

Often when we encourage anyone who has just been saved, to read the Bible, the question comes up, where should he, or she, begin? I had a professor in seminary who said, “Begin where God begins, in the book of Genesis. Probably the most recommended book is the Gospel of John because of what we can learn there about the Lord Jesus Christ. I don’t know if the book of Romans should be the first book, but it should not be very far down the list. It apparently was placed first among the NT epistles, not because it was written first (because it wasn’t written first), but because it is so foundational, so basic, to all of the other epistles of the NT. In the book of Romans God has given us through the Apostle Paul the most complete explanation and exposition of the Gospel that is to be found anywhere in all of Scripture. Every book of the Bible is important, but it would be hard to overemphasize the importance of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome. Here Paul discusses the sinfulness of man and his need of a Savior, and then he shows that salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ, God’s Son, Who died to save His people from their sins. Paul also shows in Romans what salvation means. It includes justification before God, sanctification, and ultimately glorification. And then Paul, as he characteristically does in all of his epistles, told the Roman believers how a child of God should live on the basis of his justification before God.

Two Sunday nights ago I spoke on Rom. 1:16 and some of the verses which led up to it, and we saw how prepared and how eager he was to go to Rome so that he could preach the Gospel to the believers there, and also so that he might, under the blessing of God, be used by God in his preaching to see others in Rome turn to the Savior. He felt a deep obligation to preach the Gospel in Rome. He had never been to Rome when he wrote this epistle, but he had been praying, and he asked them to pray, that he “might have a prosperous journey by the will of God” to go to them. He had been set apart as an apostle to preach the Gospel, and that is what he wanted to do everywhere he could, especially in places where the Gospel had not been preached before. But even though the Gospel had been preached in Rome, he wanted to go there also, and felt that he should go to that great center of Gentile population because his calling

from God was to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Regardless of where you might touch the book of Romans, it is very likely that you will be confronted with some aspect of the Gospel. Would that we were as anxious to preach the Gospel today as Paul was in his day! And we should be. Every generation needs to be reached with the message of the Gospel.

Tonight, then, we are going to be looking at chapter 5, focusing our attention on verse 8. But let me begin by reading the first eleven verses. (Read Rom. 5:1-11.)

The word “Gospel” is not found in these verses at all, but the Gospel is here several times. The Gospel, Paul said in Rom. 1:16, is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.” It is the message of the death of Jesus Christ for sinners, and the salvation that it brings to all who believe it. To preach the Gospel is to tell people that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, came to earth to die as a Substitute for sinners, suffering the penalty of their sins when He died on the Cross. And as evidence that God was pleased with His work which He accepted on behalf of sinners, the Lord Jesus was raised physically from the dead, and shortly afterwards returned to heaven where He is now seated at the Father’s right hand where He lives to intercede for those who believe in Him.

And so Paul was preaching the Gospel in verses 6, 8, 9, and 10 where he mentioned the death of Christ. In verse 9 our Lord’s death is indicated by the word “blood.”

But verses 1 and 2 all speak of what is true of all believers because of the Gospel. Verses 3 through 5 speak of the outworking of the Gospel in the lives of the Lord’s people as we move toward our final glorification.

In verse 9 we are told what we are saved *from!* We are saved from the wrath of God, from eternal judgment in hell. So God sent His Son, as our Lord Himself told Nicodemus, “that whosoever believeth in Him,” in Christ, “should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Immediately after Paul wrote those tremendous words in Rom. 1:16, he followed it by telling why he was not ashamed of the Gospel. This is what he said: (read Rom. 1:17). But then he went on to speak immediate-

ly about the wrath of God. (Read verse 18.) People don't like to be told that they are sinners. They are like a person whose doctor has told him that he has a certain disease, but he doesn't want to believe his doctor, and he refuses to do anything about it. We say that he is "in denial." Most people are "in denial" about their true condition before God. If a person is in denial about his physical condition, does that mean that he is not sick, or does it make his disease go away? No! If a person denies that he is a sinner under the judgment of God, does that mean that he is not a sinner, and not under the judgment of God? No! His denial, unless he is changed, leads to eternal death and judgment.

In verse 10 we see that the great truth of our reconciliation with God is the result of the Gospel. And in verse 11 we see how the Gospel has completely changed our attitude toward God. In verse 5 Paul said that "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which," or Who, "is given unto us." So in these eleven verses we see that God, the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, His Son, and the Holy Spirit, all have a part in our salvation.

So the Gospel is not a message of what we need to do in order to be accepted by God and forgiven of our sins. It is the message of what God sent His Son to do for us that we might be forgiven of our sins, reconciled to God, and saved.

But now let us look at the text I have chosen. Romans 5:8 is one of many verses in the Bible which gives us *the message of the Cross*. *The message of the Cross is that there Jesus Christ was dying for sinners in order that they might be saved*. But that raises a question which is answered by our text.

I. WHY WOULD GOD SEND HIS SON TO DIE FOR US?

It certainly was not because He wanted to humiliate His Son by making Him become a Man so that He could die the terrible death that He died. Nor was there a great outcry among men for a Savior. Nor was it because God saw something in us that He liked, and He felt obligated toward us to do something about our salvation. If we need evidence to the contrary, we will see that in just a moment.

God is a holy God. God is a righteous God. He cannot tolerate sin of any kind. But the Bible tells us also that God is good. God is merciful. God

is longsuffering. God is gracious. And it is all summed up in what the Apostle John said about God: “God is love.” Here the Apostle Paul said, “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The Lord Jesus Himself explained it this way: (quote John 3:16). For some reason locked up in the heart of God, He determined before the foundation of the world that He was going to save a great host of people in every generation throughout the whole world *just because He loved them.*

But notice that verb “commendeth” – “But God commendeth His love toward us.” It means that He proved His love, He gave practical evidence of His love. It was not just something that God said (although if God said it, it had to be true), but He proved it. How did He prove it? By sending His Son to die “for us.”

Do you get what the Apostle Paul was saying here? Did he mean that God loved us so much that He would send His Son to die for our sins so that we would not have to die for them? That is exactly what He meant!!!

But now let me take you a step further to help us understand how deep, how real, His love for us was, and still is!

II. THE DEPTH OF GOD’S LOVE.

Paul gave us four words in these first eleven verses to describe those of us for whom Christ died. They are “without strength” and “ungodly” in verse 6. In our text he used the word “sinners.” And in verse 10 we have the word “enemies.” What a motley, unattractive, even offensive people we are by nature, without a single attribute to commend ourselves to God for salvation. Let us seek to understand what each one of them means.

A. “Without strength” (Rom. 5:6).

These two words are the translation of one Greek word. Probably its use in Heb. 7:18 gives us one of the best examples of its meaning. There it is translated “weakness,” and it is used to show that the Law of Moses was not able to save a single soul. Thayer says that it speaks of a person who is “unable to achieve anything great” (p. 80 under ἀσθενής). Paul was not speaking of physical weakness, but he was speaking of the ability to save oneself. It shows man’s helpless condition spiritually. He may try to do what he thinks will result in his salvation, but he does not have the

capacity to do it. All of the works a man may do fall far, far short of salvation. It is “not by works of righteousness which we have done” that we are saved (see Titus 3:5). Man is helpless to bring about his salvation. If God had left man dependent upon himself for his salvation, no one would ever have been saved.

But man has more than the problem of inability.

B. “Ungodly” (Rom. 5:6).

This is a person who does not fear God. He has total disregard for the Person of God. And he feels the same about God’s Word. It does not bother him if he is doing that which is forbidden by the Word of God. He doesn’t even think of pleasing God and is not interested in knowing what pleases God or displeases Him. This is not a different class from the first, being “without strength.” It is a second characteristic of any person who does not know the Lord, and who doesn’t want to know the Lord. He is the kind of a person who suppresses the truth. See Rom. 1:18.

But there is a third characteristic of a person who does not know the Lord.

C. “Sinners” (Rom. 5:8).

The Greek word is ἁματωλός. He is one who is not only free from sin, but devoted to sin. It can be by omission or by commission. Sin can be in thought, or feeling, in speech, or in what we do. Sin is any violation of what is right in God’s sight, or the doing of anything that is contrary to His will as expressed in His Word. It is rebellion against God. People don’t like to be called “sinners,” but they constantly demonstrate by what they say, what they do, what they seek, and what they support that they are “sinners,” anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Bible, and anti the people of God.

So the picture gets darker and darker, doesn’t it? Some people can be very respectable in their rejection of the truth of God, but it is because they don’t want to give up their sin. The attempt to make truth relative and not absolute, is what sinners are intent on doing.

But we have one more word:

D. “Enemies” (Rom. 5:10).

Basically an enemy is a person you hate, one to whom you show hostility. An enemy will fight you, and will join with others who hate you. The greatest enemy the Lord has is the Devil. So if you are an enemy of God, you have sided with the Devil. To be a friend of the world is to be an enemy of God. See Jas. 4:4. Perhaps you remember the account of Gamaliel warning the Jews about their opposition to Christian in Acts 5 of the possibility of fighting against God.

Now when you put this all into the context of what these people were, and what God had done for them in Christ, it makes us marvel even more that the Lord would ever have saved them. But let's make a personal application to our own hearts. Paul was not just writing about what those Roman Christians were, but he was detailing what we all are by nature, too weak to save ourselves, without any desire to know God or to please Him, actually devoted to that which was contrary to God and his Word, and in reality, God's enemies. And we wouldn't have given it much thought if the church had been obliterated. In fact, it would have pleased us.

Now Paul was not saying that each one of us demonstrates all of these characteristics to the full, or even any one of them. But the potential is in our hearts, and that is what God sees.

Now let me call your attention to what Paul said in verse 7, to further prove his point of the grace of God (see Rom. 5:2). Let's call it:

III. WHO WOULD YOU BE INCLINED TO DIE FOR? (Rom. 5:7).

Would you die for a righteous man? Maybe, but probably not. Would you die for a good man? We would be more like to, but still it is doubtful. But what about a person who did not have the ability to please you, and had no desire to be like you, and who persisted in doing what he knew would aggravate you and make life difficult for you; actually, one who hated you? What would your answer be? NEVER! We wouldn't give such a person a moment's thought.

Now let me explain.

When Paul was talking about a righteous man in verse 7, and then a good man, he was not talking about believers. He was talking about people on a human level. A righteous man would be one who obeyed the law, paid his taxes, and who tried to keep everybody else in line. Probably Paul

was thinking of a self-righteous person. You are glad that he is law-abiding, but such a person usually would be very critical of others and so would not have many friends. It might be hard to give your life for such a person.

But a good man would be a different situation. He is kind, thoughtful of others, loving and considerate, the kind of a person who gets a lot of pleasure out of doing what he can to make life easier for others. He is the kind who would take you grocery shopping if your car was being worked on, or he would mow your lawn if you were sick. He is a good man. Paul said some might risk their lives, or even die, for such a person.

But that isn't what the Lord did. He died for people who could not and would not please Him. He died for people who did not care for Him, but who seemed intent on doing any and every thing that displeased Him. He died for those who were His enemies. He died for those who were under His condemnation. He took their sins upon Himself, died in their place, so that He could save them from "the wrath to come," that was certain to come. They were the kind of people He loved, and died for, and saved. He gave His life for them, and then He gave His life to them.

But instead of speaking in the third person, about others, Paul spoke in the first person, about himself, about the Roman Christians, and about every child of God who would ever read this epistle. (Read the passage again emphasizing the we's and the us'es.)

But what about us now? Are we still without strength to please God? No, because we have His strength, and we can do all things through Christ Who strengtheneth us. Are we still ungodly? No, Christ has made us godly. We want to please Him. We want to do His will. We want to be like Him. Are we still sinners? We have to say "yes" to that, but we can add, "sinners saved by grace." And our hope is that some day we will be transformed into His likeness. Are we still His enemies? No, we don't hate Him; we love Him. And "we joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ by Whom we have received the reconciliation. So instead of being God's enemies, we are His friends, and He is ours.

Concl: So this is *the message of the Cross*. It took the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to move us out of the category in which we were born into this world, and by the new birth to make us the children of God. And all of this is because of His love for us, a love which we could never deserve,

but a love which will never change.

The Bible does not teach that this salvation is for everyone. The key to salvation was announced to Jeremiah long ago, but which applies to all of the children of God, all who will ever be saved. This is what the Lord said then:

3 The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee (Jer. 31:3).

Before Paul got through dealing with the Gospel, he sounded this same note. As I close, let me read to you what he wrote:

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

30 Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Rom. 8:28-32).