

Love Demonstrated

Romans 5:1-11

One of the themes of Jesus' ministry that we find in the gospels is people asking Him questions.

Some people like his disciples and those coming to Him for help ask questions because they have a real desire to know what is right.

Other people like the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees asked Him questions hoping to either make Him look foolish or to get Him in trouble for saying something wrong.

One of the things I love about those interactions is they always end up showing Jesus' wisdom and authority.

They always show that He is far superior to His opponents in His knowledge and application of God's Word.

That is the case when someone tries to test Him in Matthew 22.

The LORD had already dealt with a question about paying taxes and a question about the resurrection at the end of the age.

It was clear to everyone who heard the questions and the answers that Jesus had prevailed.

After a short conference a Pharisee who was also a lawyer comes up with another question for the LORD.

He says to Jesus, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus answers by quoting God's Word from Deuteronomy 6:4 and Leviticus 19:8.

He says, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the great and first commandment.³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

If one keeps the letter of every command without love for God then he is perpetually breaking the greatest command.

If one truly loves God he will seek to keep God's commands which will be plainly evident in how he cares for others.

Love for God and love for others are the bedrock of what it means to belong to the LORD.

That being the case, it is really important for us to have a clear idea in our minds of what love means.

From Deuteronomy 6 it seems clear that love and devotion go hand in hand.

With every aspect of our being (heart, soul, mind) we are to treasure the LORD.

Love for God then must mean to delight in and value the reality of the LORD being far above all other things.

To love others as yourself means to desire what is good for them.

Of course that brings us back to the LORD because it is impossible to have anything good without God.

So to truly love someone from a biblical perspective is to want what God wants for their life, which is to love God with all their heart, soul, and mind.

I don't know about you but my first thought when I hear that is, "Impossible!"

Our natural bent as human beings is to love tonnes of stuff before God which kills our ability to truly love others.

[What hope is there for us in keeping the greatest commands in the Bible? I believe the bible's clear answer to that question is God's love for His people. That is where we want to turn our attention this morning on this fourth Sunday of Advent. Through this season we have looked at hope, peace, and joy. This morning we are looking at love, specifically God's love for His people. To do that we are going to look at **Romans 5:1-11**. In these verses we will see that everything in the Christian life depends on the LORD's love. These verses begin by showing us the ground upon which we experience the love of God. We learn that...]

Point #1 – We need to be right with God to know the love of God. (Verses 1-2)

While it is certainly true that God shows love to all people, no one can enjoy being the object of His eternal affection apart from dealing with the things that separate us from Him.

Verse 1 begins with these powerful words. (Verse 1a...stop at faith")

The word 'justified' here is a legal term meaning to be in right standing according to the law.

In the first four chapters of Romans Paul clearly and carefully shows that all human beings break God's law which means no one is right with the LORD.

He also shows us that any thought of fixing our own problem is completely hopeless.

Even if someone could stop breaking God's law and start keeping it perfectly, how can the previous crimes be erased?

What can a person do to make up for all of their law breaking?

The bible's answer is nothing.

Now most people have a hard time with that.

Most people want to think of themselves as good.

Most people want to think of being right with God as a balancing scale with good deeds on one side and bad deeds on the other and as long as the good deeds outweigh the bad then we are ok in God's books.

There are two big problems with that. One is it doesn't work like that because God is perfectly just which means He must deal with every violation of His law.

[Quick show of hands, how many people would want a judge to let someone off who knocked down and elderly lady and stole her purse because he helped a different elderly lady across the street?]

When we think of God's justice as a balancing scale we make a mockery of both His laws and His glory as the law giver.

The second problem with that is it is delusional to think we could ever get the scale to balance in our favour.

Every time we do anything apart from loving God with our all our heart, soul, and mind we are breaking God's greatest commandment.

There is an elephant of bad on the scale and apart from being born again there is nothing on the good side of the scale.

What can we do in the face of that?

Nothing! So if we are to be right with God we need another way.

The bible says here there is another way. "Since we have been justified by faith" It says.

We gain right standing with God by believing/trusting in what the LORD has done.

Now let's look together at the effects of being 'justified' for the believer (**verse 1-2**).

We have peace with God through Christ.

We are no longer at war with the almighty.

We have obtained access, again by faith, into grace.

Commentators point out that the word 'access' here is a word most often used concerning access to the presence of the Lord.

The idea is through this justification by faith we are now welcomed into the presence of God.

This sense of belonging with God leads to the end of verse 2 where there is 'rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.'

In other words the thought of God making His glory visibly present in the world is something the believer looks forward to with joy rather than dread.

There is an expectation of God acting in a loving way towards us when we are in His presence.

That can only be true if we are right with God.

It is impossible to be the object of God's eternal covenant love if we are under the penalty of God's law.

[Justification by faith is the ground upon which we can know the love of God. We are not loved by God because of what we do. We are not loved by God because we are good or special. We are loved by God because of what He has done for us. If that ground has been established in our hearts, then we are ready to see this next lesson concerning God's love. Here is the lesson, that...]

Point #2 – God's people are sustained by God's love. (Verses 3-5)

Faith that makes us right with God puts us at odds with God's enemies. Because that is true we can expect to experience challenges as we walk with the LORD, but knowing His relentless faithfulness will carry us through.

Looking forward to being in the visible presence of God is certainly a reason to rejoice, but Paul gives those of us 'justified by faith' something else to rejoice in. (Verses 3-4)

Rejoicing in suffering seems like a bit of a head scratcher at first. I don't know of anyone who stubs their toe that says, "I'm just so happy my toe is throbbing."

I've never heard anyone step on a piece of Lego and say, "Praise the Lord for that!"

Why is that? Because the only thing we see and feel in moments like that is the pain and if we fail to see anything beyond that we will never experience joy in it.

In order for us to get what the apostle is driving at here we need to understand the kind of suffering/hardship he is talking about.

He is talking about suffering that has purpose.

Most commentators think that Paul is speaking specifically about suffering or hardship that believers face specifically because they believe in Jesus.

Rejoice in that, he says, because good stuff is happening because of it.

'Suffering produces endurance.'

Getting through hardship actually gives the believer a greater ability to keep going in their faith.

[It is similar to physical exercise. If it's been awhile the first session hurts and leaves you in pain for a couple of days. If you endure the pain and keep at it though you get stronger and faster and you can endure more.]

Endurance, it says, "produces character."

What kind of character? Almost certainly he means the character of Jesus.

The more we walk through with Jesus the more humility, compassion, grace, and wisdom we develop.

Character, then, produces hope.

The more we walk through trials that shape us to be like our Saviour the more certain we become that the trials are not the end of the story.

To that he adds this in **verse 5**.

Some translations say, "...and hope does not disappoint".

That means no one who suffers for Jesus and endures is going to regret it.

Nobody in heaven is going to say, "I wish I gave up because this is a real let down."

That is certainly true of the future, but notice the phrase here is in the present tense.

It says, "...hope does not put us to shame" meaning in the here and now the hope that we have in Christ is being validated.

How? Look at what it says! It says, "*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.*"

That is the perfect tense in Greek which indicates an action that has taken place in the past that has an ongoing effect.

One of the works of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of the justified believer is making known the love of God.

How does He do that?

I certainly think there are moment where the believer feels God's love and that is a gift of grace, but the most basic way the Holy Spirit teaches us God's love is He causes us to trust in God's word.

How do you know God loves you? He tells you that if you are justified by faith He loves you beyond measure and without end.

That brothers and sisters is why we are able to press on in faith from day to day.

[I know at times that is hard to believe. I suspect there were people in the church at Rome who were wondering if God loved them. I'm sure some of you have felt that from time to time. Paul anticipates that and so he reminds these believers and us of how God has shown His love towards us. He reminds us in the next few verses that...]

Point #3 – God’s love is displayed in the death of Jesus. (Verses 6-8)

If we have any kind of appreciation for the cross and by the LORD’s grace trust in its saving power, then we can be sure that we are the objects of divine eternal affection.

Notice the very important word at the beginning of verse 6. It is the word ‘for’.

It is missing in some translations, but it is there in the Greek and it is very important.

On what basis should we think any of verses 1-5 is true? **Verse 6**

Again we are reminded of our need to be ‘justified’ which means to be made right in God’s sight according to God’s law.

We are reminded that we were ‘weak’.

That something more serious than feeling a bit off.

The word has the sense of being completely without strength.

The NAS translates this as ‘helpless’.

As lawbreakers there is nothing we can do to make things right.

With that as our condition it says, “...at the right time”, that is the time according to God’s plan, “Christ died for the ungodly”.

From the very moment of Adam’s disobedience it was obvious that human beings could not save themselves.

He had graciously made Himself known time and again to people giving His laws and inviting people to life.

What did people do? We broke His laws. That is what it means to be ‘ungodly’. It means to live without regard for the LORD.

That is who Jesus died for. Who does that? (**Verse 7**)

It is very important for us to see that the apostle shifts gears here in verse 7.

He goes from talking about who Jesus died for to who regular people die for.

So when we read the words ‘righteous person’ in verse 7 it talking about man’s standard or righteousness not God’s.

The idea here is if someone is willing to die for someone else they might on rare occasion do it for someone they consider to be worth dying for.

He also says some might give their life for a ‘good person’.

Multiple commentators think the phrase translated as ‘good person’ means a benefactor.

Someone who is seen as having met your needs or someone upon whom your family depends.

[Think of the secret service protecting the President of the United States. The secret service agent might die for the President because he is the President and the agent sees the office of the President as something necessary for the general good of his country.]

The point of all that is to say there are occasions where people die for others, but they only do it when they see the person as worth dying for.

Look at **verse 8**.

God's love is demonstrated by Jesus dying for people who aren't worth dying for!

If you are sitting here this morning wondering if God loves you, I am guessing you are wondering that because you have some doubts about whether or not you are worth loving.

Let me just settle that one for you. You're not worth loving, none of us are.

That is exactly what makes the love that God has for us so amazing!

If you are doubting God's love because of your own sense of self-worth I want you to consider an entirely different question.

Ask yourself, "Do I believe Jesus died for me?"

If you believe that and it has changed your life then listen, "God's loves you!"

[How can we say otherwise? How can someone say, "I believe that Jesus died for me" and then say "I'm not sure God loves me." Those two statements cannot both be true. If you believe the first, then fix your mind there. Look to the cross and see the love that God has for you. Stop looking to yourself and look to your Saviour! We only need to look to the cross to know the love of God, but it doesn't stop there. That is the final lesson from our text this morning. If we have been justified by faith, then we are being sustained by God's love which is demonstrated in the cross of Christ and the very good news of all of this is that...]

Point #4 – God's love never fails. (Verses 9-11)

There is more to the work of Jesus than His dying for His people, there is also His living for His people and His life has no end.

In verse 9 Paul returns the believer's justification.

The key phrase in this verse is the phrase "much more."

It is both a phrase of comparison and emphasis.

If the first part of the comparison is true then the second part of the comparison is all the more true.

The first part of the comparison is the believer being made right by the blood of Christ.

Every wrong is washed away in the blood of Jesus. I have a hard time even beginning to wrap my mind around the

preciousness of Jesus' blood being able to do that for one person let alone everyone who believes.

Is it any wonder Ephesians three says the love of God in Christ 'surpasses knowledge'?

If we are justified by His blood 'much more' it says "shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God."

If we are to understand the love of God, we must also think upon the wrath of God.

God's wrath is the just punishment that He will bring against those who break His laws and reject the work of Jesus on the cross.

It is a terrifying thought the think of getting what we actually deserve.

If we minimize the justice of God then we will minimize the love of God demonstrated through the cross of Christ.

If we turn away from the horror of hell or pretend as though it does not exist, then we will miss the magnitude of the baby in a manger and the man upon Calvary's tree.

But if we can appreciate to some degree the justice of God, then we will see why the prophet Isaiah calls Jesus' a 'man of sorrows' when looking ahead to His death.

Now if Jesus goes through all of that to make us right in God's sight according to God's law, how 'much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.' **Verse 10-11.**

Jesus dying for His people is about more than simply wiping away a debt of sin.

He doesn't say, "You are forgiven so be on your way."

He says, "You are forgiven and now you are reconciled to God."

That is an amazing word in the bible. To be reconciled to God means to have a restored relationship with Him.

In Christ we are no longer God's enemies and objects of His wrath, we are His sons and daughters and objects of His eternal love.

Jesus did more than die on the cross is history, He rose from the grave and He is alive in heaven right now acting on our behalf pleading our case on the basis of His sacrifice.

God would never have sent Jesus to die only to let His people be lost in the end.

[How many of you have ever heard the phrase, "In for a penny in for a pound"? The penny and pound are British currency. The penny is worth a very small amount and the pound is worth more. The phrase means if I'm in a little ways I will go the whole way. If I have come this far I am going to see it through until the end.]

That is a poor comparison of what these verses are saying to us.

It is unthinkable that God the Father would send God the Son to the world to suffer the fullness of the LORD's wrath and then quit and say, "You are on your own."

God is all in on saving His people from destruction.

The Love of God which is demonstrated in Christ never fails.

Because that is true there is hope, peace, and joy for the believer.

The whole of Advent is bound together in the LOVE of God.

Do you know that love this morning?

To know that love you need to be justified by faith in Christ.

If you know God's love it will sustain you through all things until we see His glory.

You can be sure of His love because He has demonstrated it in the death of Christ.

And if God gave His Son to die for your justification He will certainly save you from His wrath forever.

How do we know what love is?

How is it possible to keep the greatest commands to love God and love others to any degree?

Our only hope is that God loves us first and that is what Advent is all about.