

“The Wonder of the Cross” Romans 5:9-11

This evening, as we prepare for communion, I'd like us to ponder *the wonder of the cross*. Our text is Romans 5:6-11. Romans 5 is a perspective chapter. Romans 5 gives us the "big picture" glimpse of the cross. It doesn't address what happened on the cross, but *what difference it makes*. The difference, in a word, is *reconciliation*. At the cross God removed the hostility of sin.

How is it that a sinner can enjoy a relationship with the Holy God whom he has offended with his sin? The answer is the *cross*. According to Romans 5:6-11 when you look at the cross from God's perspective, you see two things.

I. At the cross you see the demonstration of God's love (6-8).

Romans 5 deals with the results of justification. In the first five verses, we discover three privileges that belong to us if we have been justified. We have peace with God (1), access to grace (2), and joy (3-5). And not pie-in-the-sky kind of joy either. Verse 3 says, “We rejoice in our sufferings.”

How is that possible? Verse 5 tells us. It's because of the love of God. “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.” The love of God transforms the way we look at the trials of life.

But how do we know for sure that God loves us? Sometimes we don't feel like it. At those times we need to go up in the tower and look at the cross. That's what Paul does in verses 6-11. In verse 5 Paul mentions God's love. In verses 6-8, he presents the proof of God's love, the cross.

Dear friend, if you want to see God's love in all its splendor, go to the cross. Ponder the cross. In verses 6-8 Paul teaches us two truths about the cross, first of all...

A. Here's what made the cross necessary. In short, we did. Verse 6—“You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” What was true of us? What is true of every person who is born into this world? Paul describes our condition in three ways, in verses 6-8.

1. *We were without strength.* Listen to the KJV rendering of verse 6, “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” That was our condition. We were powerless, without strength. Without strength to do what? To save ourselves, to reach God, to get out of the maze, to straighten out our mess. We were without strength. We were helpless and feeble. We were totally incapable of changing our situation.

We did not know God, nor could we, not in our existing state. 1 Corinthians 2:14 says, “The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and *he cannot understand them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”

We did not have the ability to obey God, nor to please God. We were powerless to change. We were without strength. What else was true of us that necessitated the cross?

2. *We were ungodly.* Verse 6 again, “Christ died for the *ungodly*.” God didn't send His Son to die for a good catch. If you want an accurate assessment of what God saw when He looked at us, check out Romans 3:10-12, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.”

Yes, Christ died for us when we were *ungodly*. What a mind-boggling thought! In the Old Testament, the ungodly died. The prophet stated, “The soul that sins, it shall die.” Even today, what do we do with lawbreakers? We lock them away. The public cry is to make the criminals pay. Stick them in a cell at S.O.C.F. But what did Christ do? He died for the ungodly. He died for us, for we were without strength and ungodly.

3. *We were sinners.* We'll come back to verse 7 in a moment, but for now consider verse 8, “While we were still [KJV ‘yet’] sinners, Christ died for us.” What was true of us when He went to the cross? We were still sinners.

Martin Lloyd-Jones asks and answers the all-important question, “Why did Christ come into the world? Was it in answer to some plea that came from mankind? Not at all! Was it in response to some good in man? Was it because of some divine spark still remaining, and some manifestations of that? Not at all! There was nothing in mankind to recommend it to God, nothing in human nature, nothing in any one of us to recommend us in any way to God and to His love. Indeed, the truth about us was, and is, that there was everything in us that was wrong and vile and hateful, everything calculated to antagonize God towards us—enemies, hateful, vile, ungodly, sinners as we were. We must realize that our salvation is entirely gratuitous, and arises only and altogether from the love of God in His infinite grace.”[\[2\]](#)

We will never appreciate fully our salvation until we grasp what was true of us when Christ died. The *Living Bible* sums it up this way. We were “utterly helpless with no way of escape.”

During the Middle Ages there was a popular story which circulated about Martin of Tours, the saint for whom Martin Luther was named. It was said that Satan once appeared to St. Martin in the guise of the Savior himself. St. Martin was ready to fall at his feet and worship this resplendent being of glory and light. Then, suddenly, he looked up into the palms of his hands and asked, “Where are the nail prints?” Whereupon the apparition vanished.^[3]

Satan’s servants offer the world a cross-less Christ. The reason is that Satan hates the cross. And the reason he hates the cross is because he knows what human beings don’t like to admit, namely what made the cross *necessary*. We were without strength, ungodly, sinners. That’s why Jesus died. Satan doesn’t mind if you believe in a Jesus that merely inspires you. But the true Jesus didn’t come to inspire you. He came to *save* you.

B. Here’s what made the cross reality. Let’s look again at verses 6-8, this time paying attention to what the Lord did. God did not wait for us to start helping ourselves. Notice God’s twofold activity.

1. *God saw our need.* Verse 6 states, “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.” At just the right time, in due time, God saw our need. God saw our predicament. God saw our helplessness. God saw that we were without strength, ungodly, and sinners. He saw our need. Then what happened?

2. *God took action to meet our need.* That’s what love is. Love is action, not mere feeling. It’s selfless action that focuses on the need of the other person.

This kind of love is such a rare thing in our world. We live in a “What can I get out of you?” world. That’s true of the teen who violates the sexual purity of another teen. That’s true of the politician who uses his constituents to get what he wants. That’s true of the man in his mid-life years who has an affair and violates his covenant with his wife. That’s true of churches that measure success in terms of bodies and bucks. That’s true of people who choose a church with only one question in mind, “What will this church do *for me*?”

Real love is just the opposite. If you want to see real love, here it is. “For when we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly.” God took action to meet our need.

How unusual is this kind of love? Consider verse 7, “Very rarely [“scarcely” in the KJV] will anyone die for a righteous man.” To die for another is the greatest display of love. Jesus said in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” You don’t see such love very often.

Paul continues, “Though for a good man someone might possibly dare [that is, “have the courage”] to die.” There is a definite article before the word “good.” It could be translated, “the good.” In other words, once in awhile, a person might give his life for *the* good person or *the* good cause. So you might find a person who is willing to give his life for a friend or for a good cause. But...

The next word is key. Verse 8 begins, “But God.” There’s a strong contrast between what people might do and what God did. Man’s most noble acts of love pale in comparison with God’s love. “But God demonstrates [KJV “commendeth”] his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God took action to meet our need.

Notice something very important. The verb “demonstrates” is present tense. Though the cross is a past event, it remains a present proof of God’s love. A literal reading of verse 8 would be, “God keeps on showing His love toward us.” Christ’s death is continuing evidence of the fact that God loves us.

When some people think about the cross, they have a mistaken notion. They have the notion that long ago, after Adam sinned, God the Father and God the Son had a discussion in heaven. God the Father, because of His holy wrath, wanted to obliterate mankind. God the Son stepped forward and said, “No, don’t do that. I love those people. I’ll die for them.” Such folks think that Christ somehow changed God the Father’s vengeful mind. Nothing could be further from the truth.

According to verse 8, who took action to meet our need? “God commendeth His love towards us.” Our salvation is rooted in the love of God. Jesus Christ didn’t come to change God the Father’s attitude towards us. He came to show us the Father’s love.^[4]

J. Vernon McGee offers this insight, “God does not save you by His love. You see, God is more than love; He is holy and He is righteous. God cannot open the back door of heaven and slip sinners in under the cover of darkness... If He does that, He’s no better than a crooked judge who lets a criminal off. God has to do something for the guilt of sinners. There must be judgment.”^[5] And there was.

Verse 6 says, “Christ died for the ungodly.” Verse 8 reemphasizes—“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Dear friend, if you had been standing at the cross that day, you couldn’t have seen it with the naked eye, but it was happening. A substitution was taking place.

“God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).”

“The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isa 53:6).”

“Christ died for our sins (1 Cor 15:3).”

“For the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matt 20:28).”

It's true. Christ died *for us*. A holy God cannot overlook sin. The penalty for sin must be paid. It must be paid. Either you will accept Christ's payment in your stead, or you will pay sin's penalty yourself.

Do you believe that? According to God's Word, it's true. At the cross God demonstrated His justice and His love. Since God is just, He cannot wink at sin, but must punish it. And since He is love, He desires to pardon sinners. And that's what He did. At the cross He punished His own Son for the crimes we have committed. Christ died for the ungodly. Christ died for *us*.

The year was 1942. John was a Lieutenant in the United States army, stationed in the small country of Tunisia in northern Africa. He had been in Africa for only a couple of weeks. Early one morning, he and another soldier went searching for a Nazi machine gun nest hidden in a wooded area. As they were advancing over an open field, gunfire erupted and both men were shot. John was bleeding badly, but when the medics came, he told them, "Take care of my partner first. He's in worse shape than I am." He never saw His partner alive again. John himself spent the better part of the next year in hospitals recovering from that wound, and the next 50-some years dealing with its painful complications. John Branon, like so many others who have served their country, was willing to give his life for his comrade and for his country.

I am humbled when I think of such selflessness. Yet I am overwhelmed when I think of what Jesus Christ did. He did not die for a comrade. He did not die for a friend. He died for His enemy. He died for sinners. He died for us. That's love.

When you go up in the watchtower and look at the cross from God's perspective here's the first thing you see, says Paul, the demonstration, the *greatest* demonstration ever of God's love.

II. At the cross you see the basis for our security (9-11).

Indeed, the cross *is* the basis for our security. Paul explains in verses 9-11, “Since we have now been justified by his blood [that is, by what happened at the cross], how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.”

In verse 9, Paul is using an argument from the greater to the lesser. Since *this*, how much more *that*. The KJV begins with the words, “Much more then.” If God did this (as explained in verses 6-8), how much more will He do that (verses 9-11). It's a logical necessity.^[6] If He did the hard thing (namely, justified ungodly sinners), we can be sure He can likewise do what is comparatively easy (that is, save those He justified from future wrath).

If you are struggling with insecurity, check your view of the cross. A proper view of the cross should affect us in three very practical ways.

A. The cross should affect the way we view God (9). Verse 9 [KJV]—“Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” We are now justified. The verb is passive. The implied subject is God. God justified us. How? By our merit? No. By His blood. Since that's true, since God declared us to be right with Himself on the basis of His Son's atoning sacrifice, surely He will spare us from the wrath we deserve, again because of Christ.^[7]

Again, we deserve wrath. Romans 1:18 states, “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” But does that wrath affect the believer? No. Paul explains why in 1 Thessalonians 5:9, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.” There is our hope, in the words of 1 Thessalonians 1:10, “Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.”

Simply put, the same love that prompted our salvation is apparent in our security. Because God loved us, He saved us. Because He loves us, He keeps us secure.

I find J. Vernon McGee's comment helpful at this point, “God does love us. Regardless of who you are or what you have done... You can't keep God from loving you. Now you can get to the place that you do not experience the love of God. For instance, you can't keep the sun from shining, but you can get out of the sunshine. You can put up an umbrella of sin, an umbrella of indifference...which will keep His love from shining on you.”^[8] But He still loves you.

So knowing the truth about the cross affects the way we view God. Furthermore...

B. The cross should affect the way we view ourselves (10). “For if, when we were God's enemies, we were

reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" Notice the verb tenses in this verse and you'll discover three things concerning the identity of the Christian.

1. *We were God's enemies.*
2. *We have been reconciled.*
3. *We will be saved.*

There's what we *were*—God's enemies. There's what we *will be*—saved. In the middle is what made the difference—we have been reconciled.

The key word is *reconciled*. In its most basic sense the term means "to change, to make other than it is." When a divorced couple reconciles, they change their status. Instead of being apart, they come together again. When a father and his prodigal reconcile, their relationship changes and it becomes other than it was. The wall comes down and they come together.

The Bible doesn't speak of Christ reconciling God to men, for God didn't change. It was God who reconciled us to Himself. And when? When we were His *enemies*. Don't water down that term. It's not that we were friends who'd had a tiff. We were in the enemy camp when God came seeking us.

There's a popular way of thinking today that says, "I can come to God my own way." But wait. This isn't our universe. It's God's. He made it. He makes the rules, too. We don't come to Him on our terms, but on His. And He said we must be "reconciled" to Him through His Son.

The Bible makes it clear that Christ died as a substitute. He did not die merely to give us an example to follow. He died *for us*, in our place. He died for us when we were God's "enemies." There is no such thing as a naturally godly person. There are people who have been reconciled, and there are those who haven't.^[9]

*Alas and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sovereign die,
Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?
Was it for crimes that I have done He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity, grace unknown, and love beyond degree.*

Have you been reconciled to God? Do you view yourself that way? That's the key to our security. We were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, and we are saved by His life, that is, His present life in heaven. Even now, Jesus is interceding for us. His life keeps us secure.

C. The cross should affect the way we view life (11). "Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Quite simply, because of the cross we have two possessions.

1. *We have reconciliation.* The verse concludes, "We have now received reconciliation." We have it. That means, my friend, that you can *know* if you are right with God. You can know it today. You need not live in fear and uncertainty. Reconciliation, again, is either something you have received or you haven't received.

What's more, if we possess reconciliation, there's something else that we have.

2. *We have reason to rejoice.* Paul says, "Not only is this so [KJV "And not only so"—in other words, to top that!], but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The KJV says, "We also joy in God."

There are a lot of people who claim to know Christ yet lack joy. Such individuals don't attract others to Christ. Quite frankly, they repel the lost from Christ. This ought not be. God's Word says there's a connection between reconciliation and joy.

Don't miss it. If we have reconciliation (and we do if we know Christ), we have reason to rejoice! Once we get a handle on the love of God, it will produce joy in our lives. Life is not a drag when you know you are loved by the Creator! I like the way the Phillips version paraphrases verse 11, "We may hold our heads high in the light of God's love."

I challenge you to do this. Ponder the love of God. When I get a handle on who God is, and how God loves me, it affects the way I view myself (see Rom 8:37-39). As Paul says, "We rejoice in God!" George Beverly Shea put it this way:

*There's the wonder of sunset at evening, the wonder as sunrise I see;
But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul is the wonder that God loves me.
O the wonder of it all! The wonder of it all! Just to think that God loves me.
O the wonder of it all! The wonder of it all! Just to think that God loves me.*

This morning, indeed for the past five Sunday mornings, we've gone up into the "lookout" tower and surveyed the cross. We've seen the cross as the demonstration of God's love and the basis for our security. Before we leave the tower, let's take a moment and bring together these five key words.

E. M. Griffin writes about three kinds of London maps: The street map, the map depicting thoroughways, and the

underground map of the subway. "Each map is accurate and correct," he writes, "but each map does not give the complete picture. To see the whole, the three maps must be printed one on top of each other. However, that is often confusing, so I use only one 'layer' at a time.

"It is the same with the words used to describe the death of Jesus Christ. Each word, like redemption, reconciliation, or justification, is accurate and correct, but each word does not give the complete picture. To see the whole we need to place one 'layer' one top of the other, but that is sometimes confusing--we cannot see the trees for the whole! So we separate out each splendid concept and discover that the whole is more than the sum of its parts."^[10]

We've gone up in the tower five times now. Here's what we've seen. At the cross a *substitution* took place. Christ died in the place of and for His undeserving people. *Justification* is the result of this substitution, for God now declares sinners to be righteous on the basis of His Son's death and resurrection.

Furthermore, at the cross Christ secured our redemption and propitiation which are the basis for our reconciliation. *Redemption* means that Christ paid the price to set us free from the sin that alienated us from God. *Propitiation* means that Christ turned away the wrath of God that sinners deserve by bearing that wrath Himself. The result is *reconciliation*, for since Christ has set us free from sin and removed the deserved wrath, nothing now stands between us and God. We are reconciled to Him!

It's time to make it personal.

Make It Personal: What should we do with the cross?

We have two lifelong assignments.

1. *We need to think about the cross more often.* Oh, beloved, think of His love and ponder it again and again! Meditate on the cross. And go a step further. Choose to love others like God loved you. In your friendships. In your marriage. In your church relationships. We need to get our eyes off of ourselves, see the needs of others, and take action to meet those needs. Yes, think about the cross more often.

2. *We need to talk about the cross more often.* The message of God's love is not a message to be hoarded. It's to be heard. We must share it.

^[1] This devotional is based on an earlier message given at WBC on 3/28/04, "Reconciliation: He Removed the Hostility of Sin."

^[2] Lloyd-Jones, p. 124.

^[3] Source Unknown.

^[4] Barclay, 77

^[5] J. Vernon, McGee, p. 92.

^[6] Observation by Lloyd-Jones.

^[7] Don't miss the fact that justification is our present condition. And if God has justified us, He won't abandon us to suffer His wrath.

^[8] J. Vernon McGee, p. 92.

^[9] Lloyd-Jones, p. 120.

^[10] John Ross, referring to E. M. Griffin in *Making Friends*.