

While we were still sinners * Romans 5:6-11

Good Friday * April 15, 2022 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

The account of Jesus' passion that we heard this morning begs two questions. Do you know what they are? Who does that? And why?

You know the answer to the first one – Jesus does that. Jesus DID that. But the second question remains: why? Why would Jesus lay down His life and die on a Cross?

Well, as it turns out, Paul tells us that in the fifth chapter of Romans. When we were going through faithBasics, I skipped over it because it lays out so clearly why Jesus did what He did, so let's look now together at Romans 5 and answer that question: why Jesus did do what He did that Good Friday more than two thousand years ago? Turn with me in your Bibles to Romans 5, starting in verse 6.

At Romans 5, verse 6, Paul writes:

6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

This one verse captures two of the most foundational truths in all of the Bible. 1. Without God, we were ungodly, sinful people. Remember Romans 3? Verse 10 – 'there is no one righteous, not even one.' Verse 12 – 'there is no one who does good, not even one.' Verse 23 – 'All have sinned and fallen short of God's glorious ideal.' Before we knew God, we were all slaves to sin. We were the 'ungodly' Paul is talking about here.

But that's not even the worst part – not only were we slaves to sin, we couldn't do anything about it! Our sin nature kept us from seeking after God, even though we needed Him more than anything else in the world. Again, Romans 3:11: 'no one seeks after God, not even one.' Romans 8:8 – 'those who are controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.' We were all controlled by the sinful nature, therefore, we were all literally powerless to save ourselves.

BUT, second foundational truth in this verse – at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

When the time was right, Jesus died to help those who couldn't help themselves. Anyone who says 'God helps those who help themselves' – point them to this verse and say 'Actually, that couldn't be farther from the truth. In His mercy God helps those who CAN'T help themselves.' Jesus actually died to help helpless people.

Now, that's a pretty far-out idea – the idea that someone would die for another - and so Paul takes a moment to think about it.

7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

I think that what Paul is getting at here is that we have a hierarchy of who we'd be willing to die for. A righteous man, a guy who does right by the law, who does good because he's supposed to, maybe. A good man, who does good things because he's good natured, probably. A Mother Theresa, yeah, more than like you'd be willing to die for someone her.

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul puts his finger here on the most incredible truth – I think – in all of the Bible. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Sure, someone might be willing to die for a good man, maybe, but for a sinner? No way! Somebody might be willing to die for a righteous man, but for a man who was actively opposed to him? Not in a million years.

And yet that's exactly what Jesus did. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. When we wanted nothing to do with Him, when we were so taken by our own sinful nature and selfish desires, Jesus laid down His life to save us. That is an incredible truth.

I mean think about. This a pretty serious question but think about it -

Would you be willing to die for one of your children? Of course. I'd be willing to lay down my life for Ben or Anna if it came to it.

What about a spouse or a parent? Yeah, of course.

What about a co-worker or a neighbour? Would you be willing to die for them? Well, maybe. I guess it depends on the situation, how well you know them.

What about a stranger? Maybe. Maybe not.

What about an enemy? Would you be willing to die for someone who wanted nothing to do with you and made that clear at every opportunity? Probably not right?

And yet that's what Jesus did on Good Friday. While we were still sinners, still opposed to Him, still estranged to Him, Christ died for us.

And why did He do this? Why did He decide to take the ultimate step of laying down His life to forgive the very people who took His life? How does the verse start? 'God demonstrates His love for us in this.' Jesus' death on the Cross shows us just how deeply God loves us. Jesus' willingness to die in our place shows us just how much He loves us.

That's why Jesus did what He did on Good Friday. Jesus did what He did because He loves us enough to die for us, even when we wanted nothing to do with Him. Jesus died to show us the limitlessness of His commitment to us.

That's amazing. That's incredible. That means that God didn't wait for us to get right with Him. We didn't. We couldn't. We were actively opposed to Him, laughing at His sovereignty, and yet He chose to die in our place, to win us back, all because of His love for us. It's amazing.

You know the song? Jesus loves me this I know/for the Bible tells me so? This is one of the places the Bible says it. Jesus loves you SO deeply that He was willing to die for you. Not you plural; you singular.

And we know that because of what Jesus went through on Good Friday. We know that because of the Cross. Jesus didn't just SAY He's committed to you; He lived it out.

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Now that on its own is pretty incredible, but Paul wants us to remember that there's more. Jesus' love for us, Jesus' commitment to us didn't end on Good Friday. It's still going. And what Jesus did then has implications for how we live now.

Look at verse 9 -

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

This is a classic rabbinic formula – 'if this is true, then how much more with THIS be true' – like 'if you like Turkey Point, you're going to LOVE Miami Beach!'

If we have been justified by His blood – that is, if Jesus' death on the Cross made us right with God – how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him. If Jesus died to save us, how much more will He LIVE to deliver us? There is no possibility that we will not be saved in the end. We will not stand before the judgment seat of God and find ourselves barred from entry to eternal life. Jesus died on the Cross to deliver us on Good Friday and lives even now to deliver us in the end. And Paul continues -

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!

Right? If Jesus was willing to die for us when we were His enemies, how much more do you think He is going to be willing to do now that we are His friends? He is not going to turn His back on us and leave us to our own devices; He is going to help us to grow in grace and holiness, to stand in the face of trials, to give us wisdom when we need it most.

Ernst Kasemann writes:

“The Christ who *died* for us also *lives* for us, and destroys the threats of the future as he destroyed the evil power of the past. [Jesus is the personification of the reality that God is ‘for us.’]”ⁱ

God demonstrates His love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Imagine then, just what He will do for us now we are His children. He will deliver from sin. He will provide for our needs. He will help us in ministry and He will grant us eternal life.

Jesus did what He did on Good Friday to show us how deep His love runs. Embrace that love and build your life upon it.

ⁱ For clarity in preaching, I have paraphrased Kasemann’s second sentence. His original reads: “The Christ who died for us also lives for us, and destroys the threats of the future as he destroyed the evil power of the past. He is in person the irreversible ‘for us’ of God” (in Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Letter to the Romans*, p. 75. Bruner’s emphasis).