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GOD'S AMAZING LOVE

Romans 5:6-8

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Romans Lesson 27

God's Amazing Love
Romans 5:6-8

In 1861, a wild gambler and drinker named Harry Moorhouse rushed into a revival meeting in Manchester, England, looking for a fight. But instead he got saved. Six years later, the famous evangelist, D. L. Moody, was preaching in Dublin when Moorhouse came up and told Moody he would like to come to America and preach the gospel. Moody guessed Moorhouse to be about 17 (although he was older). He didn't know if Moorhouse could preach, so he brushed him off.

But after Moody got back to Chicago, he got a letter from Moorhouse saying that he had landed in New York and he would come and preach. Moody wrote a cold reply, saying that if he came west to call on him. A few days later, Moody got a letter saying that Moorhouse would be in Chicago the next Thursday. Moody didn't know what to do with him, so he told his deacons, "There is a man coming from England who wants to preach. I'm going to be gone Thursday and Friday. If you let him preach those days, I'll be back Saturday and take him off your hands."

On Saturday Moody returned and asked his wife how the young Englishman had gotten along. Did the people like him? She said they liked him very much. "Did you like him?" "Yes," she said, "very much. He preached two sermons from John 3:16. I think you'll like him, but he preaches a little different than you do."

"How is that?" Moody asked.

"Well, he tells sinners that God loves them," she replied.

"Well," Moody said, "he's wrong."

Moody went to hear him that night, determined that he would not like him. But that first night as Moorhouse preached again from John 3:16 on God's great love for sinners, Moody's heart began to thaw out and he could not hold back the tears. For seven nights, Moorhouse preached to a crowded church on John 3:16.

The final night Moorhouse concluded his sermon by saying, "My friends, for a whole week I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you, but I cannot do it with this poor stammering tongue. If I could borrow Jacob's ladder, and climb up into Heaven, and ask Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, if he could tell me how much love the Father has for the world, all he could say would be, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.'"

Those sermons changed D. L. Moody's life. He said, "I have never forgotten those nights. I have preached a different gospel since, and I have had more power with God and man since then." (I collated this story from A. P. Fitt, *The Life of D. L. Moody* [Moody Press], pp. 53-56, and Roger Steer, *George Muller: Delighted in God* [Harold Shaw], pp. 260-262.)

Romans 5:8 is the apostle Paul's version of John 3:16: "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Paul wants us to know and experience even more deeply the truth of verse 5, that "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

In verses 6-8, Paul is explaining further ("for") this life-changing truth of God's great love for us as sinners. In doing so, he is showing why our hope of heaven will not disappoint us (5:5). This, as we saw in our last study, is a continuation of the blessings of being justified by faith (5:1), which include: peace with God (5:1); access into God's grace (5:2); hope of the glory of God (5:2); and, joy in our trials, knowing that God is using them to develop perseverance, proven character and hope (5:3-4). The thing that anchors our hope is this abundant outpouring of God's love within our hearts through the Holy Spirit. So now Paul shows us why God's love is a sure thing and thus, our hope of heaven is sure:

Our hope of heaven is secure because it is based on God's love that sent Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners.

In other words, God's amazing love is not based on us getting our act together to deserve it. It is not based on our track record of performance to guarantee its continued flow. Rather, God's love is

based on the fact that God is love (1 John 4:7). He is gracious (Exod. 34:6). He extends His love and grace to sinners apart from and in spite of anything in them. This means:

1. Our hope of heaven is secure because it is not based on anything good in us.

Paul emphasizes this in our text with a series of synonyms: we were helpless (5:6); ungodly (5:6); sinners (5:8); and, enemies (5:10). Before we look at these terms, note:

- A. To appreciate God's great love, we must feel our own great need for the Savior.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones observed (*God's Way of Reconciliation* [Baker], Ephesians 2, p. 201), "In order to measure the love of God you have first to go down before you can go up. You do not start on the level and go up. We have to be brought up from a dungeon, from a horrible pit; and unless you know something of the measure of that depth you will only be measuring half the love of God."

This is illustrated in the story in Luke 7:36-50, where Jesus went to dine at the house of Simon the Pharisee. Picture the scene: You have this very religious man, who took great pride in his religious observance. He never ate unclean food. He tithed meticulously. He kept the commandments of Moses. He kept his distance from notorious sinners. He wanted to find out if this upstart, un-educated rabbi from Galilee was legitimate or not.

As they reclined at dinner, a woman who was known to be a prostitute slipped in with an alabaster vial of perfume. Standing at Jesus' feet weeping, she wetted His feet with her tears, wiped them with her hair, and kissed and anointed them with the perfume. And Jesus seemed to be pleased with her actions! Simon was aghast! He was thinking (Luke 7:39), "If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner."

Jesus knew what he was thinking, so He told him a story. A lender had two debtors. One owed him 500 denarii; the other owed him 50. When they were unable to repay, he forgave them both. Then Jesus asked (7:42), "So which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more."

Jesus said, "Correct." Then He drew the lesson. The sinful woman, who had been forgiven much, loved much. But the one who is forgiven little loves little. His point was not that Simon had little to be forgiven of. In fact, Simon had not even shown Jesus common hospitality. He was rude and arrogant. Rather, the point was that Simon did not realize how much he needed God's forgiveness, and so he did not love Jesus as much as this woman, who knew her great need for the Savior.

If, like me, you grew up in a Christian home and never got into much trouble growing up, you're more prone to be like Simon than like the prostitute. If you want to know and experience the great love of God in Christ, you have to see more of the awful depths of sin that lurk in your own heart. Again, to cite Lloyd-Jones (*Romans: Assurance* [Zondervan], p. 114), "It is to the extent to which we realize our inability and incapacity that we realize the love of God." Paul shows us our inability in these verses:

- B. We greatly need the Savior because we were helpless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies of God.
 - (1) We were helpless.

"Helpless" in this context means, "incapable of working out any righteousness for ourselves" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, by William Sanday & Arthur Headlam [T. & T. Clark] 5th ed., p. 127). F. Godet (*Commentary on Romans* [Kregel], p. 191) says that it means "total incapacity for good, the want of all moral life such as is healthy and fruitful in good works." Lloyd-Jones (*ibid.*, p. 112) says that it means "total inability in a spiritual sense." But so that you see that these men are not making this up, let's see what the Bible says about our helpless spiritual condition outside of Christ:

We were spiritually dead, living in disobedience to God. "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked" (Eph. 2:1-2). We needed God to raise us from the dead.

We were not able to save ourselves. Jesus told the religious Nicodemus (John 3:3), "Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." As a Pharisee, Nicodemus was about as religious as you can get. But all that religion could not get him into the kingdom of God. He needed the new birth. And just as we could

not produce our natural birth by our own efforts or will power, so it is spiritually. It must be an act of God. You can't save yourself.

We were not able to see the light of the gospel to be saved. Paul said (2 Cor. 4:4) that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

We were not able to understand spiritual truth. Paul explains (1 Cor. 2:14), "But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised." God has to open our eyes to understand the gospel.

We were not able to hear God's truth. In John 8:43, Jesus asked the Jews who were challenging Him, "Why do you not understand what I am saying?" He answered His own question, "It is because you cannot hear My word." They lacked the spiritual ears to hear (see, also, John 14:17).

We were not seeking God. We saw this in Paul's indictment of the human race (Rom. 3:11), "There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God."

We were not able to submit to God's law or to please Him. In Romans 8:7-8, Paul states, "the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

So when Paul says that "we were still helpless," he means that we were totally unable and unwilling to do anything to bring about reconciliation with God. But he doesn't stop there!

(2) We were ungodly.

"Christ died for the ungodly" (5:6). This word takes us back to his indictment of the human race (1:18), "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness." To be ungodly is to be unlike God, who is holy and apart from all sin. It means that our ways are not God's ways and our thoughts are not His thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9). There is a humanly uncrossable chasm between us and God.

(3) We were sinners.

Paul says (5:8): "while we were yet sinners" As we saw in Romans 3:23, "for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." The essence of sin is to fall short of God's glory. We did not live for His glory. We had no concern for His glory. Rather, we lived for ourselves and our own glory.

(4) We were God's enemies.

I'm jumping ahead to verse 10, where Paul describes our past as being God's enemies. We were hostile toward Him (8:7), alienated from Him and opposed to His lordship over our lives.

Maybe you're thinking, "This is awfully depressing. It tears down my self-esteem. It doesn't help me to feel good about myself." But if you do not see the depths of sin from which God rescued you, you won't appreciate His great love. Christ didn't come to help you polish your self-esteem or to feel good about yourself. He came to die for your sins in order to reconcile you to God. If you don't see yourself as a helpless, ungodly sinner at enmity against God, then you won't see your need for the Savior. And, you'll never have assurance about your hope of heaven, because you'll base that hope on your own goodness or merit. Our hope of heaven can only be secure if it is not based on anything good in us.

2. Our hope of heaven is secure because it is based on God's gracious love for us while we were yet sinners.

"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). *Demonstrates* means to show, prove, establish, or render conspicuous. Note briefly:

A. God's gracious love took the initiative to save us from our helpless, ungodly condition.

These verses show that salvation is totally from God and His great love. There was nothing in us that was lovable or that motivated God to send the Savior. As God pictures Israel (Ezek. 16:3-6, 9-10), we were like an unwanted newborn infant, thrown into a field, squirming in our blood, a piece of garbage about to die. He took us, bathed us with water, anointed us with oil, and wrapped us in fine garments. Salvation stems from His great love.

B. God's gracious love for us is far higher than any example of human love.

This is Paul's point in verse 7: "For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die." Some commentators argue that Paul is drawing a distinction between the righteous man, who keeps the law but is not very kind; and the good man, who is both righteous and kind. But I don't see that as his point. The two terms are never distinguished like that in Scripture. Rather, Paul makes an initial statement and then qualifies it by granting that in some cases, a person may die for a good person. But who would offer to take the place of a scoundrel who deserves to die? Answer: Jesus would! In fact, He died for only one type of person: ungodly sinners! None of us deserved what Jesus in love did for us.

C. God's gracious love for us sent none other than Christ.

Who is the One whom the Father sent to die for our sins? It was His beloved Son, in whom He was well-pleased (Matt. 3:17). He was the eternal Word, who was with God and who was God, who created all things (John 1:1-3). He is the One who "is the radiance of [God's] glory and the exact representation of His nature, [who] upholds all things by the word of His power" (Heb. 1:3). He is the One whom the angels of God worship, whose throne is forever, who laid the foundation of the earth, and made the heavens, whose years will never come to an end (Heb. 1:6-12).

Paul says that *God* demonstrates His own love for us in that *Christ* died for us. But doesn't that demonstrate *Christ's* love for us? Yes, because Jesus and the Father are one (John 10:30). Leon Morris observes (*The Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans/Apollos], p. 224), "Unless there is a sense in which the Father and Christ are one, it is not the love of God that the cross shows. But because Christ is one with God, Paul can speak of the cross as a demonstration of the love of God." On the cross, Christ didn't die to persuade the angry God of the Old Testament to love us, as some mistakenly have pictured it. The Father and the Son were one in their love that devised the plan of salvation for guilty sinners. The fact that it required the death of the eternal Son of God should cause us to bow in love and wonder.

D. God's gracious love sent Christ at the right time.

Leon Morris explains this phrase (p. 222): "Two ways of looking at the time of Christ's death are combined here: he died at a time when we were still sinners, and at a time that fitted God's purpose. This second way emphasizes that the atonement was no afterthought. This was the way God always intended to deal with sin; he did it when he chose." So in the grand scheme of the ages, Christ's death was right on schedule. As Paul explains (Gal. 4:4), "But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law"

But on the personal level, He died for us at the right time in that we were perishing. We had no hope. We would have been doomed if God had not sent the Savior. You must come to the end of trusting in yourself and your good works so that you see your hopeless, helpless condition. As Spurgeon put it (*C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography* [Banner of Truth], 1:54), you've got to stand before God, convicted and condemned, with the rope around your neck, so that you will weep for joy when God at the right time sends Christ into your life as your Savior.

E. God's gracious love sent Christ *to die* for us.

The word *die* is prominent in these verses: it occurs once in verse 6, twice in verse 7, and once again in verse 8. Since the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), Christ had to die to pay the penalty for our sins. He was our substitute, bearing the punishment that we deserved. He died as "the Just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). While Jesus is our great example of how to live, His example did not save us. While He is our great teacher, His teaching did not save us. His death as our substitute bore the awful penalty of God's justice. Jesus alone can save us and He does it through His death. "Christ died for the ungodly." "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The bottom line is:

3. If we were helpless, ungodly sinners in need of Christ's death to save us, then salvation cannot in any sense be due to human merit, works, or righteousness.

These verses do away with all works-based salvation. We were helpless, ungodly sinners, enemies with God. Christ did not come to help us save ourselves. He did not come to die because He saw a spark of potential in us. He didn't come to die for us because we

had some inherent worth in His sight. As Charles Hodge put it (*Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Eerdmans], pp. 136-137), “Our salvation depends … not on our loveliness, but on the constancy of the love of God.”

This is tremendously good news! It means that our hope of heaven is secure because it doesn’t have anything to do with us. In fact, it’s *in spite of us!* It has everything to do with God’s gracious love for us “*while we were yet sinners.*” If you’re not saved, it’s because you have not received the free gift that God offers. Maybe you’re still trying to earn your way to heaven. But if heaven is based on your works, you’ll never be sure of it, because you can never do enough. Trust instead in God’s loving gift of eternal life through Jesus, who died for us when we were yet sinners.

Conclusion

Years ago, the Swiss theologian Karl Barth visited the United States. At a question and answer session, someone asked him, “Dr. Barth, what is the greatest thought that has ever gone through your mind?” The questioner probably expected some deep, incomprehensible answer, as if someone had asked Einstein to explain his theory of relativity. Barth thought about the question for a while and then replied, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so” (from James Boice, *Romans: The Reign of God’s Grace* [Baker], p. 539).

While Barth was off on some of his theology, he was right on that answer! The apostle Paul wants us not only to know intellectually, but also to feel experientially the great love of God as seen in the fact that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Application Questions

1. Why does the popular teaching on self-esteem and self-love militate against our experience of God's great love?
2. Some argue that while we *were* sinners before conversion, now we should not view ourselves as sinners, but only as saints. What Scriptures would you use to refute this?
3. Is it right to lead off an evangelistic presentation by telling lost people that God loves them? Is there any biblical basis for this? What biblical guidelines apply here?
4. How does any form of works salvation undermine a person's experience of God's amazing love in Christ?

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