

+ Romans 5:6-11 + Why Are We Here? + Back to Church Sunday + 8 November 2009 +

This morning people are making their way to church. Even more are staying home—more than 80% of Americans according to some researchers. I'm very thankful that you are here today, but why are we here? Perhaps you were invited by a friend or a loved one. Perhaps you wanted to find out more about our congregation. Perhaps you came because this is where you hear the Word of God and this is your church, but why are we really here?

There are plenty of arguments and excuses out there for us not to be here in church at all. It's easy to let life get in the way. Even if you haven't acted on them, I'm sure you and I have come up with excuses to not show up for church. "It's been a long week and I'm tired." "I'm too busy and I have to get (fill in the blank) done." "The weather's nice and around here you have to use it." "Do I really need it today? I'm doing pretty well, besides I really don't need it until I'm older, right?" Pretty soon you have yourself convinced that everything has a higher priority than church that morning.

Those excuses and temptations, though, seem awfully hollow when guilt keeps lingering and doesn't go away. They seem awfully shallow when you're faced with a crisis—a loved one is unexpectedly ill or your financial situation worsens or you get an all-too-close glimpse of death. You realize how poor those excuses are when you look back at your life and wonder if there's any purpose or meaning to it at all or if this life is all there is. So where's the answer then? In the pleasures of this life? In its busyness? No.

You and I might wonder if we even need church, but then we read Paul's words in Romans 5. They hit us between the eyes like a 2x4. We really don't like to hear the way Paul describes you and me. Just listen. "**When we were still powerless...ungodly... While we were still sinners... When we were God's enemies...**" Paul doesn't hold back as he describes who we are by nature before God. I mean, who of us wants to be described as "**powerless**", "**ungodly**", "**sinners**", "**enemies**"? It makes you look at yourself and who you are, what you've done and said and thought, and makes you uncomfortable, because deep down you know he's right.

None of us wants to hear that we are "**powerless**" before God. By nature every one of us wants to have a little power to come to God, but in reality, none of us has the strength to seek him, to serve him, to save ourselves. To the Ephesians, Paul explains, "**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...**" Before God, you and I are dead by nature.

None of us wants to hear that we are "**ungodly**" "**enemies**". You hear that and you might think, "I'm a good person, right? I don't mess around. I haven't hurt anybody. I'm nice to my neighbors and my co-workers find me rather friendly. I believe in God, so how am I ungodly?" The fact is, by nature, you want nothing to do with God and his promised Savior. Later in Romans Paul explains, "**The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.**" If anything, your sinful nature wants to claim a little of the glory for saving yourself. All that does, though, is put a greater burden of guilt on your shoulders before the holy God.

When we put Paul's harsh words together, it makes us take a close look at ourselves, we shudder as we stare into the perfectly clear mirror of God's holy Law. We see how often we have failed to have perfect thoughts, speak perfect words, or carry out perfect actions. We realize how wicked we really are by nature and how much we deserve God's holy wrath. We come to realize that because of our willing rebellion and sin, the holy God hates us, as David sings in Psalm 5, "**You hate all who do wrong.**" In essence, Paul's harsh words make us peer over the edge into the gaping maw of God's eternal condemnation in hell, which we earn with every sin.

If the sermon ended there, you and I would be left with nothing, but God's wrath. We would have no reason for hope. We would be crushed with guilt. We would probably lose sleep with terrifying thoughts of judgment, but it doesn't end there! There's more to the story!

Now when Paul wants to make a point in his letters, he emphasizes and emphasizes and emphasizes. See if you get his point in our text. Paul writes, "**You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... While we were still sinners, Christ died for us... When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son...**" Did you hear it? Did you hear how strongly Paul speaks about the rest of the story, about Christ?

"**At just the right time...**", Jesus came into this world—on his timetable, not ours, in the way he wanted, not our way. He came not with a grand and glorious entrance into the world, but left his throne in heaven for the cramped space of a mother's womb and a smelly, filthy manger in a Bethlehem stable. He came not as an adult taking a physical throne in Jerusalem to be the great Messiah-King of Israel, but grew up from infancy to childhood to adolescence to adulthood and only showed brief glimpses of his glory to support the authority of his teaching. Even when he entered Jerusalem the Sunday before his death, it was not on a mighty steed, but on an unbroken donkey colt. Jesus didn't die a glorious death on the battlefield or a comfortable death at home in his bed. No, he died a humiliating death by crucifixion, which was reserved for common criminals and political rebels. His tomb was

borrowed, but only three days later he left it vacant. Even his glory after he rose from the dead was not for all to see, but for his small band of followers, who would proclaim it to the world.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God and your Savior, was willing to do all that for you. Isn't that just as shocking as Paul's harsh words? He explains, **"Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die."** Yes, there are times when someone sacrifices their life for the good of others, like a soldier diving on a live grenade to save his squad, but we shouldn't expect that to be the norm. Human love usually only goes so far, often not extending to the point of giving up your life for your neighbor, let alone for someone who rejected you, spit in your face, and dragged your reputation through a field full of manure.

Yet isn't that what Christ did? **"When we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly... While we were still sinners, Christ died for us..."**? Why? There was no reason in the world to save us, but Paul explains, **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Do you want to know if God loves you? Look at what he was willing to give up for you. See that God loves the sinner because of the Savior. See God's one-way, self-sacrificing, focused-on-you love in Christ.

Do you start to see why all this matters, why it matters that you and I are here in church? You don't see that kind of love out in the world, but there's even more! In fact, Paul urges us to rejoice because of what we hear here! **"Since we have now been justified by his blood, 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."**

Because of God's love for you demonstrated in the sacrifice of his Son for your sins and mine, you are now **"justified by his blood"**. That means in the courtroom of the holy God, you, the defendant, who is clearly guilty, have been justified or declared "not guilty". Your defense lawyer, Jesus Christ, did something unheard of in our world. He made himself the defendant. "I'll take the punishment to set them free!" So he took the full brunt of God's holy wrath on the cross to make you innocent in God's sight, not to be a slave to sin, but to become a beloved child of God through faith in him.

Because of God's love for you demonstrated in the sacrifice of his Son for your sins and mine, you are now **"saved from God's wrath"**. Jesus rescued you from the fires of hell, so you no longer have to fear God's eternal judgment. You have eternity in heaven, not because you earned or deserved it in any way, but through the precious and innocent blood of Christ for you.

That blood of Christ has also **"reconciled you to God"**! When our first parents, Adam and Eve, first disobeyed God, they became corrupt with sin and passed that on to every generation down to the newest infant. They ruined humanity's perfect friendship with the holy God, but God promised way back then when he said to Satan, **"I will put enmity (hostility) between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."** Your Savior fulfilled that promise so now you are reconciled with God. Your relationship is restored through his blood. **Justified, saved, reconciled.** For all that, **"we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ"**!

So why are we here? **"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Through his blood, we are justified, saved from God's wrath, and reconciled with our holy and gracious God, but now that we know that, do we still need church? Jesus promises in Matthew 18, **"Wherever two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."**

Friends, we still need church, because we still need Christ each and every day. Christ reveals himself here in his Holy Word, in Holy Baptism, in his Holy Supper. Here Christ takes the sins and burdens of the past week off your shoulders to absolve and cleanse you with the forgiveness of sins. Here Christ strengthens your faith to get you through the day, the week, through life. Here Christ helps you grow in the grace and knowledge of him through his Word. Here Christ provides encouragement and support from fellow brothers and sisters in Christ struggling against their sinful excuses just like you and receiving the blessings of God's grace just like you. Here Christ provides reconciliation and joy and purpose and hope and life. Here you find Christ. **"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** That's why we're here. Amen.