

Romans 5:8-11

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 February 2016

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] I'm going to start by 5 years late to 11, looking at the reconciliation of God. Friendships are getting harder. I don't mean that personally, but I mean that generally.

! Relationship commitments today are based not on mutual belonging, but on mutual benefit. They are not based on covenant, but on economics. They are not based on a sense of fidelity, but on a utilitarian and economic view of the other person.

We want more and more from our friendships, but are willing to give less and less. And so friendship is now not so much about commitment and community, but about usefulness and advantage.

So my friendship and my commitment to you can be broken when the friendship is no longer to my advantage. That translates, doesn't it, to the area of romance.

[1 : 14] Sociologists call it commitment avoidance. And actually it's reached church life. Jonathan Sachs, who is the former chief rabbi, says that belonging to a religious community these days is not so much about pursuing salvation.

It has become a branch of the leisure industry. And we've transformed tourists from pilgrims. Which I suppose makes me a tour guide, doesn't it?

And the reason I tell you that, the reason I start with this kind of thought of friendship is I think it affects how we think about God. If I was to take a poll this evening of all the people in this room, of all the people in our congregation, do you believe in a loving God?

I think that all of the answers would be yes. But if I was to ask you whether you are confident that God really loved you, in such a way that you were able to trust Him completely and give yourself to Him, give yourself to Him with unqualified access to every area of your life, I suspect we might find that there's a different answer.

And the problem is we are so used to being treated economically and treating others as useful and treating God in that way that it's next impossible to imagine that God could treat us in a different way.

[2 : 40] And we bring to our relationship with God an awful suspicion and mistrust that He's not really interested in our best. And actually it's much easier to hide from Him.

Because if we open ourselves up totally to God, we might find that He's out to get us. We might find that God is actually out to spoil our fun or to interfere with our life goals or to make us less than we can be.

And that is why it's so important to get hold of Romans chapter 5. Which comes from the pen of the Apostle Paul. If you look at verse 8, the theme and the flavour of the whole passage of Romans 5 is God's love for us.

But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Literally it means God proves His own love.

Though God's love is different from our love. In fact the truth is this, isn't it? That God's love is unlike any love that we've ever experienced. Or any love that we give to one another.

[3 : 49] Put most simply, it is so good it is beyond our human comparison. And this word where it says He proved His love is not a mathematical proof, it's not an abstract proof.

The idea behind this is this, that if we begin to get a grasp or a glimpse of God's love, it will overwhelm us. It will flood our hearts.

And it will fire them with joy. So the Apostle tells us three things about the love of God and each one connects to the death of Jesus and that each one is able to change our lives forever tonight.

The first is very simple, it's that God's love does not depend upon us. Look at verse 6. God's love is the opposite of a self-serving, economic and utilitarian love.

So it says in verse 6, while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Jesus did not come from heaven to earth because we asked Him to.

[4 : 52] God was not moved to send Jesus because of our great love for Him. Nor because of any great advantage that God would get out of it. Nor in response to any value or potential or dignity that God saw in us.

He loves us and He sent His Son even when we did not trust Him. Even when we did not love Him. Even when we could not care less about Him. In fact, He loved us when there was discord, when there was hostility between us and when the hostility and the alienation was caused by us.

So as Edith read the text, did he notice how we are described. Look at verses 6 to 10. In verse 6, what are we? We are weak. The end of verse 6, what are we?

We are ungodly. In verse 8, what are we? We are sinners. In verse 10, what are we? Enemies. Weak, ungodly, sinners, enemies, enemies. And the apostle, as he writes them, he throws them out kind of cheerfully, doesn't he? Because his reason isn't to make us thoroughly abject and miserable, though we've got very good reason to do so.

[6 : 12] He puts these words before us because he wants you to see how brilliant God's love is. And he needs us to face the facts about us.

The word for weak is the word sick, you see. God has never stopped loving us. And yet we hide from him and treat him with mistrust as though his motives are not as good as our motives.

If you were a friend and you treated them like that, it would be sick. And that is why the apostle describes us as ungodly. We are unlike God.

Our love is often calculating. Our love ensures we get the advantage. But God's love is not caused by anything in us, nor by anything he gains from us. And yet day by day, hour by hour, week by week, he showers his gifts upon us.

And as you find, as you go about daily life and you see the amazing things in this world, maybe even in this city, and the things you see and the ability to see them, they are gifts from God.

[7 : 22] Have you stopped to thank him? We enjoy the blessings of God constantly, but instead of thanking him, we get instantly angry if anything comes in the way of enjoying them.

Well, ungodly. And here is the point. It is for the ungodly that Christ died. And when it comes to the word sinner in verse 8, it's been my experience that the only people who are offended by being called sinners are those who think that they are better than others.

The idea of sin takes our daily behaviour and the way we work and puts that into the context of our relationship with God. And in the Bible, sin is not confined to murder or to terrorism or torture.

Sin is just a basic attitude of putting myself at the centre. Of making me the reference point. And one of the cleverest ways that it shows itself is when we make real decisions.

I become the expert in what it's going to be for my advantage. If it helps my friends as a by-product, well, that's well and good. But what God thinks about this and what God says is right and what God says is wrong, we'll very rarely get a look in.

[8 : 40] We treat God economically. We refer to him when it's useful for us to do so. We ignore his love.

But when we're in trouble, we very quickly ask for his help. And that is why the apostle calls, ends by calling us enemies. Fundamentally, we resent God being God. We have a deep-seated resentment and resistance to living life on his terms.

And although he made us and although he has not stopped loving us for a second, we feel that we need to decide what is right and wrong. Because after all, we are in a much better position than he is, aren't we?

And it is very fortunate for God when we agree with him on so much. But when we disagree with God, well, he's conveniently forgotten. And then we play God for a while.

Now why does the apostle labor all this? It's to show the wonder of God's love. That God's love is not based on our goodness. That God's love is not based on our fulfilment.

[9 : 52] Do you know you can measure someone's love by who they love? And the measure and wonder of God's love is that his love is entirely unlike ours. There is nothing self-serving.

God's love reaches out and embraces us while we were still sinners. While we were treating him as an enemy, he does not stop loving us.

Despite our ignoring him and despite our mistrusting him and despite our disobeying him, God's love does not depend on us. That's the first point. Second point is God's love costs him daily.

And you see, you can measure, can't you, anyone's love, not only by who they love, but what it costs them. And four times in the passage our minds are drawn to this. Let me underline that for you. Look at verse 6, we read Christ died for the ungodly.

In verse 8, Christ died for us. In verse 9, we have now been justified by his blood. And verse 10, we have been reconciled to God by the death of his son.

[11:00] We saw in the Jerusalem with the Pilgrim's progress, where was it that Pilgrim, where was it that Christian was delivered? What was he looking at when he was delivered? Noah.

The place of deliverance. And what was he looking at, Rebecca? Do you remember what he was looking at? That's right, trust me, the cross is the place of deliverance. And our salvation rests on the cross of Jesus Christ.

God sent Jesus from heaven, he was born as a human, he lived a sinless and perfect life, he went about doing good, and at the end he was crucified and executed on a Roman cross. Why? Well the answer in Roman's age is for us.

He died that we might be forgiven. He died on our behalf. He died at our place. The cross of Jesus Christ is the mighty cosmic exchange. It was planned by God as the innocent Jesus dies.

God takes our sin and our hostility to him and gives it to Jesus Christ and Jesus himself bears our sin in our place, on our behalf, in his body and he dies.

[12:12] All those things that we have done to reject the love of God Jesus takes, our weakness, our ungodliness, our sinfulness, our enmity, he takes and he receives the due punishment.

The sin is ours, the ungodliness is ours, the pain is his. And that is what verse 8 means. It is remarkable, it's almost good to be true, that the hostility that you and I are responsible for, that deserves God's right anger, God puts away in the death of his son.

There is nothing to commend us to God. There is nothing to commend us to God. We were without spiritual ability, we were unlike God in disobedience, we were sinners against the majesty of God.

And here is the amazing part, it was why we were like that, God so loved us, and gave Jesus to die for us. Every now and again you'll read in the newspaper a remarkable story of someone dying who dies trying to rescue someone, a child or another person, and we honour that, that is heroism.

But here is the wonder of God's love, he gives the life of his son to die while we are still enemies. I have three children, I cannot imagine anything in the world that I would give their lives for, but God's love is such that he gives the life of his son for us while we are turned away from him.

[13:47] I read this week of a man captured in the second world war, he was imprisoned in a second world war prisoner of war camp, and many people died in that prisoner of war camp.

Each day they were fed with a small scoop of rice, and every other day they were given another scoop of rice and a bit of gravy, and some of the men would save the scoop of rice from one day and wait for the second day when you could add it to the other rice and the gravy and make something more of a meal.

Nobody took anyone else's food because it was their lifeline. One night after the lights out this man who was quoted in this article was lying there and he noticed the man lying opposite sat up.

He looked around in the dark to see that nobody was looking, and he'd been collecting his rice, and his neighbour had been collecting his rice as well. He picked up his neighbour's bowl and his bowl, and instead of taking and stealing his neighbour's rice, he took his rice and he put it in his neighbour's bowl.

When they woke up the following morning, the fellow who had given his rice away had died. He knew he was dying, and he gave his food away so that his friend might live.

[15:08] It's a wonderful and moving story. The question is this, is God's love like God? And the answer is no. Because that man gave his life for a friend.

But God's love is so marvellous and so wonderful that he gives the life of his son for us, that while we were still enemies, while we were still opposed to him, while we couldn't care less, he gave the life of his precious son to die in your place.

That brings us to the third point, and it's an obvious point, it's that God wants us as his friends. If you look down in verses 10 to 11, three times we are told that the reason God has done this is because he wants us to be reconciled to him.

You see, the heart of the Christian faith is not a bunch of rules. The heart of the Christian faith is not about how we behave. The heart of the Christian faith is not essentially about how we behave.

The heart of the Christian faith is a relationship where we come back into friendship with God. And do you notice that it's entirely unknown in the world religions?

[16:30] The idea that God should be interested in the daily friendship of each one of us is unknown and it's alien in pagan religions. The fact that he is willing to die to make the friendship possible has always been a scandal.

But the wonderful thing is in the death of Jesus, God doesn't just forgive us, but he opens the door, doesn't he, to the beginning of a friendship. A friendship that will last all of our life and beyond into the world to come.

And the death of Jesus has created a whole new situation for us. That each one of us has treated God economically, each one of us has trusted him less than a person, certainly less than a friend. But God is not just loving us. He continued to love us when we played at being God. He gave his son for us because he desires friendship with us.

That is why the cross of Jesus Christ is just so important for us as Christians. So imagine a woman after a number of years of marriage, her husband leaves her for a younger woman.

[17:40] He leaves her with a mortgage and the children. After a few months of living with a younger woman, he comes back to his wife, he knocks on the door and he says, will you take me back? What does she do?

She could say to him, get lost, couldn't she? She would be completely just in doing so. It would be just, but the relationship would be at an end.

But what if she still loves him? What does she have to do if that relationship is going to continue? Well, the answer is not to deny it.

It's not to pretend it isn't there. It's not to be indifferent to what has happened. That is not love. If there is going to be restoration, then the pain and the anger and the hurt cannot be denied.

They have to be digested. And this is something that the genuine power of love is able to do.

Despite the serious anger and the deep hurt, love is able to digest them and absorb them and open the possibility of reconciliation if there is going to be a relationship.

[18:55] She has to bear the anger and the pain. And the pain has to digest it and absorb it in herself. And that is what happened at the cross. That on the cross it is God who plumbs the inner resources of his heart and quenches his own anger.

His own righteous anger. It is on the cross that God in Christ accepts and bears and absorbs the pain that we cause.

And he opens a way for you to be reconciled. You see, for God and us to become friends and be reconciled.

Well, if that's going to happen, isn't it? If you're going to become a friend of God and be reconciled, two things need to be dealt with. One, our disregard and our disrespect for God and his righteous anger.

And in the cross of Jesus Christ, God has dealt with his righteous anger. He has loved us through that right anger and acted to bear the pain of our hostility.

[20:05] But it takes two, doesn't it, to be reconciled. And it doesn't just happen automatically. True reconciliation with God, like true reconciliation with one another, isn't burying the hatchet and pretending everything is okay.

There is no reconciliation until the truth is told. And until we all acknowledge the wrong that has been done, well, we cannot be reconciled.

God has done all to reconcile himself to us. All that remains is for us to be reconciled to him. And that means doing two things, doesn't it? It means turning around and recognising that we've treated God like an enemy.

And asking him to forgive us and to turn us into a friend. And secondly, it means trusting him and acknowledging that Jesus died for sinners and putting your trust in his love.

And to be reconciled means taking and making a movement on your part. To recognise your weakness and then godliness. And to see in Jesus Christ and his death the magnificent love of God for you.

[21:23] And to turn away from your hostility and return to friendship with God. His love is real. His forgiveness is available. He loved us before we knew it.

He gave his son to die for us and he loves sinners still today. And so he invites you and I tonight to turn to him and to trust him.

