

## **Christ's Death Trumps Our Death**

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Romans 5:6-11

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### The Human Crisis According to the Bible

To put our scripture reading in context this morning, Paul has just completed the prosecution section of Romans. Paul plays the role of the great prosecuting attorney as he describes us to ourselves.

He lays out the Old Testament and New Testament anthropology of who we are, and how through our own choices we have irreparably damaged our relationship with God, with each other, with the earth, and with ourselves.

Paul sees our humanity in terms of these four great relationships. We're understood in terms of our relationship with our neighbor, in terms of our relationship with ourselves, in terms of our relationship with the earth, and the most fundamental of all relationships, our relationship with our Creator, the one who made us. And according to the biblical anthropology, you cannot know who you are without seeing yourself in the context of these relationships. So Paul, in this first section of Romans sketches the nature of our human crisis.

When any one of these relationships breaks down or is blurred or gets distorted, it will inevitably affect the relationship you have with all the others.

Paul doesn't have to tell you that when things aren't right with your family, with your parents, or your friends, when those relationships are confused or blurred or harmed in any way, you're in crisis.

Child abuse *is* the human crisis. Bullying of wives and husbands is the crisis. Gossip and things that we do to our friends, *that is* the human crisis writ small.

In other words, from Paul's point of view when these relationships are broken, we are in crisis, and it will inevitably affect everything else in our lives.

The same thing with the earth. I'm meant to live in a harmonic, stewardship relationship with the earth, but when this gets distorted it inevitably affects myself and the way I see others.

For instance, if I love things more than people, I'll use people. It's an ancient axiom and it's true. If I take something from the earth, even if I take my own talents or body and worship it, an "exchange" occurs that causes crisis in my life.

Paul says in 1:22-23, "*Claiming to be wise, we became fools; <sup>23</sup>and we exchanged the glory of the immortal God for idols.*"

If I worship money or things or people, a break has occurred in my most fundamental of all relationships. And when I choose to worship something else, to get the meaning for my life from something else, that idolatry or that confusion causes a breakdown in my understanding of myself and a harmful, destructive relationship to my neighbor, and also a confused relationship to the earth around me.

That's the human crisis as Paul portrays it.

### The Crisis is Dynamic

That would be bad enough, but Paul also makes the observation that the crisis is not static; it's dynamic. It's building at all the time. Pascal, the great mathematician of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, put it this way, "Nothing stays put for us." All of life is that way. The crisis is not static. It's dynamic. Good or bad, this is the nature of life. Our technology doesn't stay put for us, so we always have to work harder to keep on the cutting edge. Relationships don't stay put; they change with each passing day.

And our sins don't stay put. If only our sins stayed put, we could make them right. By the time I get around to dealing with the sins that I committed yesterday, they have become worse. They are built up. I suffer their consequences.

If I told a half truth yesterday about someone at the office, today it has become a full blown rumor. The extra scoop of ice cream I ate, that tasted so delicious yesterday is literally growing on my waste today. And, if you're an anxious person and you've been having that one or two drinks at night to bring your anxiety down just a notch so you feel relaxed, if you don't watch out that becomes three or four drinks and you find that you can't get up for work tomorrow. It's cumulative.

And that's what Paul talks about when he describes the cumulative nature of the human crisis. It doesn't stay put.

## The Law Doesn't Resolve the Crisis

Even God's law doesn't help us resolve our crisis. As good as the law is for showing us God's will, it only makes us aware of the severity of our crisis.

It's kind of like a mirror that shows you how dirty your face is, but it has no power to clean your face. Before we looked in the mirror, we didn't know our face was dirty, but once we looked in it, we saw what we really were. That's why Paul says, "But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied" (5:20).

That's why the legalist is no help. He is a reality check, and we appreciate that. Thank God for those people who give us a reality check to our waywardness. But they can't get us out of our crisis.

It's like that old Red Skelton joke. If you don't know the law of gravity and perhaps you're falling from the Empire State Building, you might say as you went by the 80<sup>th</sup> Floor, "So far so good!" But, if you know the law of gravity, and you know physics, you know that you're in for a terrible shock in just a few moments. It's not so good.

In other words, the law serves to increase the crisis. Paul doesn't make fun of the law. He doesn't make fun of his fellow Jews in their reverence of the Torah, but he says it doesn't help with this sort of problem. It only makes matters worse because it measures our crisis. The law is of benefit, but it won't help our crisis.

## The Solution to the Crisis is Summarized in Ch. 5

So what's the solution? The problem is a cumulating problem. It affects all of us, and it doesn't seem like we have the means by our own strength and resources to overcome. So what can we do? What is our hope?

You find Paul's answer in Chapter 5 as he re-gathers everything he's talked about so far. In one chapter, Paul is going to give you God's solution to the human crisis.

That's why Karl Barth, the great theologian of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century calls this the most important chapter in all the Bible; not John 3, Romans 5.

## God Offers a Man for the Crisis

He begins, "*For while we were still weak—while we're in the middle of our crisis—at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.*" Paul doesn't offer a theory or

a doctrine for our crisis, but a man for the crisis. Paul describes a radical downward intervention of God that provides total help for our total need.

And notice, the lawgiver himself does what it takes to provide the solution himself.

### Illustration from Sports

You know, if you want to be a world class ice skater and you watch an amazing performance by one of your favorite skaters on TV, and you see how fantastic she is, it's really little help to you except to show you how high the bar has been set for you.

But if she calls you on the phone after her routine and says that she's going to come out to your town and spend a year coaching you, that's real help.

God doesn't offer a theory for the crisis, he doesn't offer a doctrine for the crisis, he offers a man for the crisis.

And in Romans 5, Paul uses the language he's been developing throughout this whole first section of Romans to speak of what Christ's help does for us.

### Christ's Sacrifice Atones for our Sin

He uses the sacrificial language of the temple, that's what it means when he talks about Christ's blood justifying us. Just as on the day of atonement, on Yom Kippur, when the priest would sprinkle blood on the cover of the ark of the covenant, it would symbolize that instead of your life being taken for your own sins, an animal's blood would be spilled in its place.

Kippur is the word for covering, and it's the Hebrew word for atonement because the Hebrew idea was that the blood sprinkled on that mercy seat would be a substitution for your blood, so that the price of your sin would be met.

But in this passage, it is *Christ's* blood that is spilled for us. Christ has become our Kippur. In other words, Jesus Christ comes alongside me and takes my life upon his life, that marvelous Yom Kippur, (Yom is the word for day) where God becomes his own Yom Kippur; God becomes the sacrifice for us. He does what we cannot do for ourselves. He identifies with us in this tragedy, he absorbs this tragedy, and he takes it on his own back.

God defines his love for us in this, that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Not for the righteous, but for the ungodly and for sinners.

### Christ's Sacrifice Makes us Righteous

And notice Paul also uses the language of the courtroom. Christ's sacrifice on our behalf justifies us. This is the word *dikios* in the Greek which is the word for justice in the Bible, and also the word for righteousness. Christ becomes our righteousness. He becomes our justification.

After all, we live in a just world, we do not live in an unjust world; justice is at the core of the universe, so we'll be saved in the sense that justice will be done and the justice of God will be preserved.

So Paul uses the language of the courtroom and language of the Jewish temple to speak of our salvation.

*"Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God" (5:9).*

Christ's work on our behalf makes us safe from God's wrath. It saves us. Remember Paul's great manifesto in Paul's opening argument, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16).*

### Christ's Sacrifice Reconciles Us

But now he's going to introduce one more word to his salvation vocabulary to help us understand how Christ solves our crisis. It's the word, *catalidzo* or reconciliation. Verse 10 says, *"For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life."*

The Greek word here for "reconciled" is a word that you know in modern chemistry and in modern English. In fact, most modern scientific language comes from Greek. And the scientific word that Paul uses here is the word catalyst, *catalidzo*, in Greek.

And a catalyst is something that keeps its own identity but when it's in the midst of other things, it changes the identity of those other elements. The catalyst changes things, but *it* stays the same. And Jesus Christ is the great catalyst, and that's the word Paul uses to describe what Christ's work does for us.

In other words, Christ comes into the midst of his enemies and he changes us. Jesus Christ changes you and he changes me. His reconciliation SAVES us in the sense that he restores our broken relationships.

Paul will bring this up all through 2 Corinthians when he says, “*Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come*” because of the reconciliation we have in Christ – a new beginning, a brand new reality is occurring, and it changes our relationships because now those relationships are mediated by his grace.

### Conclusion

What God has done is this. He has spoken for himself and he has broken through and shown us his Son,

- who has a continuity with the earth, like we do; Jesus Christ became flesh, a real person,
- who comes along side of us in the midst of our crisis,
- who comes in between us and our crisis with our neighbor, the earth, God, and ourselves,
- and he resolves our crisis through his own death.

He is himself alive, so he’s able to outdistance a cumulating crisis, and is himself a person, God’s own speech, so he solves the most fundamental of all our crises, our relationship with God.

Paul as the great prosecuting attorney steps across the courtroom and shows us how Christ is our defense. He’s our salvation, and he’s the solution to our crisis.

Paul finishes this great chapter this way in verse 20, “*where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*”

The accumulation of our brokenness is no match for the grace of God. God’s grace trumps our sin. Christ’s death trumps our death.

The equation is not equal. This is not Greek dualism, bad on the one side and the good on other, both with the same power; the equation is skewed in favor of grace, and that’s our hope. This is not yin and yang, folks. Grace is more powerful than sin. Sin is powerful, we’re all in the human crisis together. But grace is more powerful still.

Look at what this does to our ethics. I know two things about everybody I meet. First that they are in crisis, just like I am. So why should I be surprised when someone lets me down, whether it's my spouse or my children or anybody in my life. I know there's a crisis out there and it's endemic to all of us; everybody is involved in it.

But I also know something else. I know that every single person I meet is already loved by God. They don't have to earn my respect so I can love them. There's a mediated respect that I have for them already because Christ has died for them too. I know that they are already loved, and that God's grace is adequate for their crisis too.

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this great text. Thank you for this amazing breakthrough for the apostle Paul. May we experience it. If there's someone in this room that doesn't know about this grace, may we experience, and realize that it's stronger than any sins we think we've committed or have committed. Lord, thank you for that wonderful freedom when we receive it. In Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen.