

“Love in the Dark”

Romans 5:6-11

Good Friday March 30, 2018

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⁶For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Can you see in the dark? How about now in this room? How solid is your vision? In 2013 there was a study conducted at the University of Rochester that sought to study the ability of humans to see in the dark--the total darkness.

There is a group of people who claimed to be able to see their hands wave before their face even in complete and total darkness, so these scientists devised some very clever experiments to test whether they could. The answers proved enlightening. Some people COULD actually see their hands moving in the total darkness. It was a fascinating study.

But no one claimed that they could see better in the darkness than they could in the light. However, that is exactly what the Apostle Paul claims here. What might we see better in the dark? Allow me to suggest Paul shows us here in the darkness we see magnified the love of God. The darker it seems to be, the more brightly his love shines forth. Here's how.

Notice in v. 6, Paul says this all happened “at the right time.” When is that? Could it be like Paul says in Gal 4:4, the precise moment in history? Perhaps. But it seems like Paul is telling us exactly what the right time is in these verses themselves. The right time is when we *were weak and ungodly, v. 6, sinners, v. 8, his enemies, v. 10.* Our time of weakness, sin, living ungodly lives, as enemies of God—that was the right time—at our worst, when we had no other help coming, when we were in our darkest hour, that was the right time for Jesus to die. At your worst is the right time for Jesus to step into your life. Now this is interesting because sometimes we would like to draw some sort of dotted line to some commendable quality we may have as a reason why he would die. Or, some possibility of what we might become, that would make us a good risk for Jesus.

But no. When we were at our worst, when we *v. 8, were still sinners,* THAT was the right time for God to demonstrate his love in Jesus dying for us. The darkest you. The most sin trapped me. The love of Christ is proven in his stoop, his reach in to love us at our worst.

Think about how different that is so often from our human love. Who do I love? Do you? Most often, it is people who make me feel comfortable, or relatively easy. A person for whom I have some responsibility in family or existing relationship, an obligation. Or a person who could love me back. Kids, you are drawn to care about those who might care about you, right? Or be nice to you. This is Paul's point in vs 7-8. *For a righteous person one would hardly DIE, maybe for a good person. But God loved us when we were his enemies!* When we were in the grip of evil and sin, when we were on the side of everything he stands *against,* that's when Christ died *for* us.

Do you have an enemy? Someone you harmed or hurt deeply. A person that it feels like an impenetrable wall stands between you and THERE IS NOTHING TO BE DONE. What Paul is saying is that when YOU were that person, that enemy, Jesus loved you at the cost of his life. At your WORST, Jesus loves. The deepest, darkest, Jesus loves. In those moments when it feels like life no longer works, Jesus loves. When even Christian faith no longer works, Jesus loves! In those places that feel like they can never be fixed, Jesus loves. When we see the reality of our darkness—sometimes feeling like total darkness of our souls or our circumstances, his incredible love burst forth as brilliant. When we feel trapped in the darkness of our weakness and sin and feel we can't hang on any more, in that moment we understand more clearly that Jesus has an unrelenting grip on us. He will not let us go because he came for us in our darkest hour and our darkest place.

This is not merely about our darkness, but what's more, we see that love in the dark when we hear Paul tell us of the darkness that fell on Jesus. *V. 8, the darkness of death* fell on Jesus. But why again? *V. 9, that we might now be justified*

by his blood, and saved from the wrath of God. When Paul uses the word justified he is pointing to judgment. To be justified is to be declared acquitted, counted not guilty in the tribunal of God. Why? Because Jesus was counted guilty. He was judged/CONDEMNED in our place. We will be **saved** from the wrath of God, v. 9, on the day of judgment at the end of days because Jesus **bore** the wrath of God for our ungodliness and sin and enmity on the cross. His wrath has already been poured out on Jesus. As Paul says elsewhere, WE were crucified with Christ. So what that means for us friends is that there is now no condemnation for us...because Jesus already was condemned for us. His love drove him to alienation, so that we may be received by God. Betrayal, that his faithful care shown to us. To mockery, that we might be celebrated before the throne of heaven.

Sometimes we sing, "It was our sin that held him there, until it was accomplished." But Paul's words here say It was HIS LOVE that held him there!" His love for you, his thirst for your wholeness, his heart for fellowship with you held him on that cross so that he would cry, "It is finished!" Because he loves you and me, he endured the darkest, most horrific place in all reality—alienation from God himself.

On the one hand the cross was an instrument of Roman torture. Another perspective is that it was an instrument of judgment, God's judgment on OUR sin. And yet one more, the cross was God's own device of love, whereby he loved us unto his own death that we might come home safely to him.

So, friends, as the story continues which we will read in a few minutes, as Jesus died upon the cross, darkness descended on the land for three hours, even here tonight the lights go down and we sit in the darkness.

But in that darkness, you can see. In fact, in this darkness we can see even better, a love that came for us. His wrath is gone; what is left is His delight in you; his welcome of you as his dearly loved child, his grip of passion for you that will never let you go. Can you see it?