

Amazing Love

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[0 : 00] in verse 8, although we look at verses 8 to 11, that we may take verse 8 as our starting point. But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I want to begin our meditation this afternoon quoting a poem which, according to tradition, was found in the cell of a prisoner, or it may have been, according to tradition, someone suffering in a mental hospital.

And written in the wall of the room were these words. Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made, were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade?

To write the love of God above would rain the ocean dry, nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.

These words have become known because they've been handed on to different generations by a German-American who discovered them in 1917.

[1 : 23] His name was Frederick Lehman. He had been born in Germany, but as a child he emigrated with his family to the United States. And he became a businessman in California.

But about 1917, his business went badly wrong, and he had to give up. He seemed to have gone bankrupt, and he had to work in an orange and lemon packaging plant in Pasadena in California.

And during that time, when he was meditating upon the adversities that had struck his business life, he was very impressed by a sermon he heard in church, On the Love of God.

And as he meditated upon that, he began to write a poem. And as he wrote his poem, he was reminded of a bookmark that someone had given him some years previously.

And he looked at that bookmark, and on the bookmark were written the words which I've just quoted, Could we with ink the ocean fill, and were the skies of parchment made?

[2 : 46] That was a great discovery for him, and it blessed him and helped him to write the poem, which in America at least has become quite a well-known hymn.

Our text reminds us that God is love. John, in his first epistle, tells us that quite clearly.

And perhaps the best-known verse in the Bible is that God so loves the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

God is love. Love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the Holy Trinity. And it is God's love that gathers up all his attributes, his goodness, his holiness, his righteousness, his mercy, and others.

In Psalm 136, we have a refrain that goes right through the 26 verses of that psalm. And that refrain is this, his love endures forever, his love will fail us never.

[4 : 03] At the close of the service, we will listen to that, to a part of that psalm being sung. And it reminds us, as does John chapter 3, verse 16, and indeed the whole of the scripture, that God loves us.

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, says the children's hymn. And this passage in Romans chapter 5, verses 1 to 11, give us perhaps the fullest explanation of God's love that we have in scripture.

Here, the apostle expounds the meaning of the love of God. And he reminds us that this love is absolutely fundamental as the divine rationale behind both creation and salvation, which gives the people of God hope that God has the whole world in his hand.

He is a God who loves us and who loves the world. So I think that these verses tell us four things about the love of God.

First of all, they tell us that God's love is verifiable. Paul tells us, as John does, that God loves us.

[5 : 30] And Paul is here proving that what he says is true. And the proof is that Christ died for us, he tells us in verse 8. Now, Paul was writing these words some 30 years after the crucifixion.

And that was still a contemporary event to many of his readers and hearers. It certainly was to him. And if anyone, if we can compare that with what those of us who are 40 years or older, we're doing or thinking, if we can remember what we're doing in 1990.

And I'm sure that if in 1990, something very important happened, we would remember it very clearly. Might give an illustration if you are a fan of Manchester United.

Manchester United won the FA Cup against Crystal Palace in 1990 after replay. Now, any fan of Man United who was present at that event would never forget it.

They would remember it even 30 years later. And I think that's why we can claim that the crucifixion constitutes proof of God's love.

[6 : 56] because Paul is here speaking of something, of an event which he and others who were alive at that time could remember because there was the crucifixion, there was the resurrection, these were momentous events.

And these were events which they would never forget. And it is proof also to us because distance and time does not alter facts. Evidence is evidence.

However old it may be, even today in our court, sometimes we hear about people being brought to trial for misdeeds that they performed 30 years ago and the evidence has been found and they have to give an account.

And so I think that we can affirm that the evidence confirming the death of Jesus cannot reasonably be doubted, especially when we take into account the impact that his death has had in the course of the world history.

And when the Gospels are examined on the same terms as other ancient historical documents, the grounds for accepting the reliability are very compelling.

[8 : 10] And so this is the first point I think that Paul is making here, that God's love is verifiable in the death of Jesus on the cross when he died for our sins.

The reality of God's love has been demonstrated in history. And so John chapter 3 verse 16 is not a fiction, it's not a myth, it is a fact.

It is a hard fact. God's love is verifiable. It has been validated by history. That's the first point. that I think we learn from this chapter.

The second point is that God's love is incomparable. Paul, having established in verse 6 that God's love is factual, goes on in verses 7 and 8 to emphasize that it's also unique by contrasting Christ's readiness to die for us with the reluctance of human beings to die for others in more favorable circumstances.

He speaks of the reluctance of people to die for either a righteous man or for a good man. Now, the term a righteous man here is not used in the sense that it is often used by Paul in Romans of someone who is righteous in God's sight.

[9 : 37] Rather, it is used of someone who is coldly correct. a person acknowledged by others as someone who keeps to the letter of the law and at the same time keeps his nose clean.

Mark Twain used to speak of a good man in the worst sense of the term and perhaps that's the idea that is behind Paul's reference here to a righteous man.

This person is correct but not very likeable. He also refers to dying for a good man. A good man is more than correct.

He's a likeable man. He's willing to go the second mile. He's willing to help. Now, the point Paul is making is that people find it very difficult to die for a righteous man in the sense in which he understands that term here and that happens, he said, very rarely.

But for a good man, he says, someone might possibly dare to die but it is by no means certain. And so, on the other hand, he contrasts this with Christ who was willing to die for us while we were sinners, while we were moral failures.

[10 : 58] He died for us not because we had earned his respect and approval but rather on the contrary he died for us because we were still sinners.

And Paul explains the term sinners further in verses six, two terms in verse six and another in verse 10 which describe our condition.

First of all, he says we were without strength, we were powerless, we were helpless, powerless to please God.

we fall short of God's standards. And however much we may try, we simply don't have the resources, we don't have the moral energy, we are powerless to satisfy God's standards.

And then the other word that, the second word that Paul uses is the term ungodly. He said that Christ died for the ungodly. Now the people to whom Paul was writing in Rome would understand that word as meaning someone who was totally irreligious because in the classical ancient world that term was reserved exclusively for people who had no religion at all or morals.

[12 : 22] They referred to as someone who deliberately rejects religious faith or morality. And so Paul is saying that Christ died for us not only when we were powerless but also when we were in rebellion against him when we had given up on following him.

And further he uses a third term in verse 10 the term enemies. He died for us while we were his enemies. We were rebels. against him.

And so these are the people that Christ died for. People who were sinners, who were powerless, ungodly, and enemies. And there's a sharp contrast here between our love which we think should be earned and God's love which is for the undeserving, the unloving, and the unlovable.

And so Paul is emphasizing the love of God. He speaks in verse 8 of his love. And in the Greek original, that phrase is emphatic.

It's God's own love. It originates entirely in himself. It is unprompted by anything in us except our misery and our need.

[13 : 51] So God shows us how much he loves us. God's love, God's love, God's love is incomparable. It is without parallel. God's love is extraordinary.

But God's love is incomparable not only because we, its recipients, are so unworthy. It is incomparable also because of how costly it was for God to demonstrate his love to us.

for God to love the world so much that he sent his only begotten son into the world was not something easy. It was in fact intensely difficult.

In verse 9, Paul speaks of God's wrath or God's anger. The fact is that our sin deeply offended God. We affronted God.

Our sin deeply hurt God. And God must have been aghast at what the fallen humanity had done. We see this angst, if you like, of God being brought out in the poetry of the prophets like Jeremiah who graphically captures this divine angst precipitated by the rebellion of the human race against God.

[15 : 13] How can I pardon you, says God through Jeremiah to the people of Israel? God's anguish at having hoped and been betrayed is expressed by the prophet when he betrays the Lord as a grieving father.

Let me just quote from Jeremiah chapter 3 verses 19 and 20. I said, how would I set you among my sons and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations?

And I thought you would call me my father, and you would not turn from following me. Surely as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord.

And again, Jeremiah also speaks of the people in rebellion against God. That's true of not only of his generation, but of our generation also.

And he represents the Lord not only as a grieving father, but as a heartbroken mother. In chapter 31 and verse 20, we have these words, is Ephraim my dear son?

[16 : 36] Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still. Therefore my heart yearns for him. I will surely have mercy on him, declares the Lord.

And so the Lord's heart yearned and still yearns for our fallen humanity. And it reminds us that God's love was costly and is costly to him because he sent his only son into the world to be humiliated, to be humbled, and to bear our sins in his own body in the cross, to become a sacrifice, to absorb God's judgment in himself and to absorb it all and to exhaust it.

that was unbelievably painful for Jesus. We just simply cannot begin to enter into the agony that that must have caused for him.

And so the love of God is incomparable, it is unique. It is unique in that it is directed towards sinners. It is unique in that it was so costly, it was something that money could not buy.

Jesus reminds us that when the Queen of Sheba came to see Solomon that she was left breathless, she was amazed, she just couldn't take in the wisdom of Solomon.

[18 : 19] And Jesus tells us that he is a greater than Solomon and that he is here. and she was breathless before the wisdom of Solomon. And Jesus is saying that in the same way, in a similar way, we ought to be breathless with wonder and amazement as we look at God's love as it is demonstrated in the gift of his son.

And if we've lost a sense of sheer amazement at what Christ did for us at Calvary, death of Jesus, to the spiritual reality of the death of Jesus.

Ask him to speak to us, to proclaim to us through what Jesus did for us at such enormous cost. We're reading about that.

Let us ask God to so impress this reading upon us that we may be like the Queen of Sheba, that we may be swept of our feet, that we may be amazed at God's love and God's grace, that we may revel in the gospel and allow it to excite us so that we may be lost in love and wonder and praise.

And so that's the second point I think that Paul is making here, that God's love is not only verifiable in history, but is incomparable in what God has done in sending his only begotten son into the world.

[19 : 57] The third point that Paul makes here is that God's love is sensational. Now, I'm not using the word sensational in the popular sense, I'm using it rather in its literal sense.

The word sensation refers to a state of consciousness produced by an external object. Sensation speaks about experience, human experience.

And what Paul is saying here is that God has poured his love into the hearts of his people, that God's love was not only demonstrated at Calvary and verified there, that God's love is not simply incomparable in the whole universe, but God's love can be experienced by the Holy Spirit, pouring his love into our hearts.

Jesus said to his disciples, if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

And so God's love can be experienced, but in the grace of the gospel, gospel, as the Holy Spirit pours out his love into our hearts.

[21 : 16] Now God has promised to give his spirit to those who ask him, and as we read and meditate upon these verses in Romans chapter five today, will you ask the Holy Spirit to pour out God's love into your heart, to inundate your heart with his love?

God's love is there. The Holy Spirit has been given to the people of God. And so that is a promise which we need to plead, and we need to claim by faith.

So God's love is sensational in that sense. It's experiential. It's something that we can experience. It's not simply a fact of history 2,000 years ago. It is an experience in the here and now, brought to us by the Holy Spirit.

The fourth point that Paul makes here is that God's love is infallible. He has emphasized that it's verifiable, that it's incomparable, and it's sensational, but it's also infallible.

Now, infallible means something that never fails, something that is foolproof, and we see this by Paul using that phrase, how much more, twice in verses 9 and 10.

[22 : 44] He says that if God has put us right with himself through the blood of the death of Jesus, how much more will we, those who trust in him, be saved on the day when God's wrath is poured out on the earth?

In other words, what Paul is saying here is that if we have been justified by faith in Jesus, how much more certain is it that we will be saved on that day, that awesome day of judgment?

And again, he uses the phrase with reference to us being God's enemies. If while we were enemies, while we were God's enemies, we've been reconciled through the death of Jesus, how much more will we be saved in the day when God judges humanity at the end of the age?

So God, by Paul, by using this phrase, how much more is emphasizing the fact that God's love is infallible, God's love will not fail, God's love will prevail, God's love and God's purpose for his people will be successful.

And so Paul is saying here that in giving his son in the incarnation, in giving his son to death and raising his son from life, these were the decisive acts in God's plan of salvation.

[24 : 20] Paul is saying that the crucial victory has already been won, that the difficult part is over. It was difficult, it was painful, horrendously so, but it's over.

And because it's over, there is no possibility of failure. It's interesting that, to come back to Frederick Lehmann, he, when he was given that verse which I quoted at the beginning of the service, he was composing, or seeking to compose a hymn about the love of God.

And one of the verses in that hymn, which he himself wrote, if I can just find it here for a moment, yes, here we are, one of these verses emphasizes that God's love will prevail on the day of judgment, and God's love will indeed embrace his people.

And let me read that second verse. When holy time shall pass away and earthly thrones and kingdoms fall, when men who here refuse to pray on rocks and hills and mountains call, God's love so sure shall still endure, all measureless and strong, redeeming grace to Adam's race, the saints and angels song.

God's love is infallible. God's love will prevail. God's love will not let us down.

[25 : 56] We can utterly trust in God and it is love and it is mercy. So God's love is verifiable, it is incomparable, it is sensational, and it is infallible.

And for all of these reasons we have very good evidence to rejoice in the enormous riches of the love of God.

Someone has said that God does not love us because we are valuable, rather we are valuable because God loves us. And that I think is true.

God loves us and those whom God loves, God will keep, God will preserve, God will not abandon them, he will keep them in the hollow of his hand.

Someone has said that we may not have enough to live on, but the basic question is do we have enough to live for? Now Paul here in this chapter is offering us something to live for.

[27 : 08] And that's what the man who I think several hundred years before Frederick Lehman received that verse, that man whether it was in a prison cell or whether it was in a mental asylum, we do not know, but he wrote on the wall of his room, these words, and he discovered the love of God.

He was in a predicament, he either was a criminal or he was someone who was suffering from mental illness, that he discovered the love of God and he wrote it on the wall.

And after he had died, when the painters came to repaint the wall, one of them wrote down these words and that was, people believe, 200 years before Frederick Lehman made these words more well known.

And that man found new life in God's love, found new life in Christ. And the discovery that he made in a cell or in his room is a discovery that by the grace of God can be made today.

And that is the point I would like to leave with you as we come to close our meditation that God's love has come to us.

[28 : 31] God's love is accessible and God is inviting us to respond to his love and to prove the promise that whosoever believes in Jesus, whosoever receives him as their Lord and Savior, will not perish, never perish, but have everlasting life.

May God grant that all of us who are participating in the service today may know the wonder of God's love and that God's spirit may pour it out into our hearts and into our experience so that we may indeed rejoice as Paul rejoiced in God's love and in God's grace.

So let us bow our heads in prayer. Our Heavenly Father, we bless and we praise you that you are love and that you've so loved us as to send your only begotten son that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life.

Grant, O God, that we may take that promise seriously and that we may respond to your love, that we may receive the Lord Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Grant that your Holy Spirit may pour out his love, that your love, into our hearts and that we may rejoice as Paul rejoiced in the assurance of faith and of salvation.

[29 : 55] So hear this our prayer. Bless each and all of us who are gathered in this Zoom service. We ask Lord that the Spirit of God may indeed touch and transform the lives of each one of us.

We ask this in the name of Jesus and for his sake. Amen.