

“THE EXTRAVAGANCE OF GOD’S LOVE.”

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church

November 5, 2023, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Romans 5:6-11

Prayer:

Introduction.

Last week Paul spoke of the love of God that has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (5:5). Now he shows us the extravagance of this love, how over the top lavish it is. There has never been a display of this kind of love, and this much love in the history of the universe.

Paul starts by creating a contrast by speaking in human terms. Would you be willing to give your life for someone else? Have you ever thought about whether you could lay down your life for someone else?

Maybe a husband might lay down his life for his wife or children. Maybe a sibling might die for a sibling, a grandparent for a grandchild. Maybe.

There are people who have died for the sake of others, firemen, policemen, rescue workers, soldiers, secret service agents. But that’s their job, in the line of duty, they signed up for it. The men on the Titanic who said women and children first, a sense of duty or moral obligation. Maybe a soldier who throws himself on a grenade for the sake of his fellow soldiers.

What’s Paul’s point? Maybe, perhaps, on a rare occasion you might find a person willing to die for a good person, but never will you find a person willing to die for an enemy.

Fathers, mothers, would you die for the sake of your child? Yes. But would you die for the person who kidnapped and murdered your child? No.

We can find things, events, in human history to illustrate concepts in the Bible. I can’t think of any example in human history of someone willingly laying down their life for someone who hated them. No one dies for someone who hates them and does terrible things to them. No one dies for an enemy.

What Paul is describing here is utterly outside of the range of human experience. There is no historical, human analogy for this. Nowhere in the history of mankind is there an example of love like this.

It is one kind of love when someone lays down their life for a good person. It is a completely different kind of love when someone lays down their life for their enemies. How would you measure the difference between those two kinds of love? It is infinitely greater. It is beyond comparison.

Why didn't God strike Adam and Eve dead, wipe the slate clean and start over. There was certainly nothing in them to convince God to keep them around.

God chose to use this to reveal His infinite love, grace and mercy. God bound Himself to us in the most extravagant love.

This is a massive truth that needs to get our attention and change the way we live and act and worship and treat others.

The Extravagance of God's Love (vss. 6-8)

The proof of the extravagance of God's love for us is seen in three things in our text, the timing of God's love, the object of God's love and the cost of God's love.

The Timing of God's Extravagant Love: Before We Changed.

At the right time, in the fullness of time.

Have you ever found yourself in some utterly dire straits and at that moment someone comes along to help, to save the day. Someone later you are sure was an angel.

When was the right time for Christ to die? While we were still weak. Actually, weak is a weak word here, it means *helpless*. The timeliness of God's redemption is it comes to us when we are completely unable to redeem ourselves. In fact we were dead in our trespasses and sin.

The saying, "God helps those who help themselves" is a complete lie. We are helpless. We need someone else to come and save us. We don't get our act together first. Jesus didn't die while we were being helpful, or when we were doing our part to contribute to our salvation.

About 20 years ago there was a best-selling Christian book, the kind Christians gobble up, in it the famous author wrote:

“I think the [turning point] in my life came when I realized, after reading the Gospels, that Jesus didn’t just love me out of principle; he didn’t just love me because it was the right thing to do. Rather, there was something inside me that caused him to love me” (Donald Miller).

Is that true? Does God look deep within our souls and find some small kernel of goodness that draws God to love us?

Salvation doesn’t come to those who aren’t as big of sinners as others, or those who have a little bit of goodness in them, or those who sort of obey God sometimes, or those who are sort of interested in spiritual things.

We can’t make ourselves acceptable or presentable to God, we can’t make ourselves qualified for the blood of Jesus. There is nothing to commend us to God and everything to disqualify us with God. At the right time while we were helpless before a holy God, God completely unmotivated or unmoved by anything in us, sent Jesus.

Don’t boast or brag or act superior, posturing like you are better. Pride disqualifies us from the blood of Jesus. There is no greater glory for a human than to die to our pride and humble ourselves and confess our sin. Never get tired of singing:
“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

The Object of God’s Extravagant Love: Ungodly sinners and enemies.

Notice who God chooses to love. Notice the progression, weak (helpless), to ungodly, sinners and enemies. First to be pitied, but then to be hated, under wrath, children of wrath.

We were the opposite of righteous and good. We were enemies of the worst kind, in a holy war. Our sin is an assault on the holiness of God, an offense and betrayal against our creator, traitors.

In history there have been all kinds of wars between all kinds of enemies. But our enmity with God is unparalleled. There have been some long wars, the 30 years’ war, the hundred years war, but our war with God is unlimited and without end, starting in the Garden and from our birth.

The number of enemies is unlimited, it is every human soul who has ever lived. And every part of every person, heart, soul, mind, emotions, will, strength. We have rebelled against God with every fiber of our being.

Death will not end the war. Those who do not believe in Jesus and are not reconciled to God will continue their rebellion and opposition for all of eternity, a most ungodly holy war.

God lays aside His enmity with us by putting it on Jesus. God made Him to be sin who knew no sin for the sake of our sin. Only the one sinned against can put in place a plan for reconciliation and peace. It is a unilateral peace, God made peace with us.

God shows His extravagant love by making the worst sinners, His worst enemies the object of His love, through absolutely no merit of our own.

I Timothy 1:15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

The Price of God's Extravagant Love: Suffering and Death of Jesus.

Christ died for us (3x). This is the proof, the demonstration, the confirmation.

God declares His love and shows how great it is in that He doesn't spare His own Son from dying for the most ungodly.

John 3:16 For God *so loved* the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

There are some who say one drop of Jesus' blood would have been sufficient to save us all. Not true, if it was then two drops would have been unnecessary. His blood cleanses our sins, but His death delivers us from the curse, from death and into salvation.

Jesus had to bleed and die. Nothing less would have or could have sufficed, satisfied the wrath of God, atoned for our sin and guilt.

Nowhere in human history is there an example of love like this. This is the greatest proof of God's love, when He laid down His life for us.

John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

I John 3:16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us.

Each of these aspects of God's love (timing, object, cost) shows how extravagant it is. Each of these aspects should shock us! Against all hope, against our utter unworthiness, we have been loved with an exceedingly great and extravagant love.

The Implications of God's Extravagant Love (vss. 9-10)

Paul says "therefore," from this proof of God's extravagant love for us, there are implications of this great love for us.

This text is written to Christians, who are helpless, ungodly sinners and it tells us not to despair. This is written to convince us and strengthen us and give us assurance of hope.

Paul understands our fears and doubts. Even if Christ saved us in the past, how do we know he will save us in the future, to the very end? What about judgment day? What about all my sins?

Paul uses two "much more" statements where he argues from the greater to the lessor. You know one of Paul's more famous greater to lessor statements.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

If God has justified us by the blood of Jesus, how much more then will He deliver us from the future wrath and judgment. Jesus was punished, so we will never be punished.

If we have been reconciled to God by the death of Jesus, how much more then will we be saved by the life of Jesus. As long as Jesus is alive, we are secure, saved.

"If the greater task was for God to send his Son to die for us while we were his enemies, how much more will He do now that we are His friends, indeed, his sons and daughters? If Christ died for his enemies, he will surely save his friends, His adopted and reconciled children!" (Sam Storms).

What good would it do for Him to gain our salvation and then not guard and keep us safe and secure to the very end? His rod and His staff comfort us, His goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our life.

"It is logically, theologically, and biblically impossible that God would love you less now, now that you are his child, than he loved you then, when you were his enemy" (Sam Storms).

Do you know why God's love for you is unchangeable? Do you know why you can't sin your way out of His love? Because His love isn't based on us, it isn't based on our performance, it isn't based on being good and doing good.

It is based on His unchangeable love for us while we were enemies. It is based on the blood of Jesus, on the self-sacrificing love of Jesus.

The grace that saves us is the grace that secures us. None that are His can be lost.

The Application of God's Extravagant Love: We rejoice (vs. 11).

Our justification, our deliverance from wrath, our salvation, our future secure hope is cause for and calls for unspeakable joy, pure, unadulterated real joy.

It is certainly cause for a greater demonstration of joy and gratitude than those yelling at a Seahawks or Mariners or Sounders or Lynden game.

Why are we so exuberant at our pagan religions and pagan gods but so subdued with the God who actually loves us and has never let us down or disappointed us the way our other gods have.

What is with us? Why do we love so little the one who loves us so much? The greatest victory in the history of the universe has been achieved for us by the God we were mortal enemies with, how is it we are so cool, casual, lukewarm?

We Reformed types could stand to have more joy, more exalting in Jesus. God's extravagant love is cause for rejoicing, it is cause for worship, it is cause for coming here every Sunday with full and glad hearts, it is cause for wanting to be here, for giving a little more, serving more willingly, singing a little louder than everyone else. God has shown His extravagant love for you, how will you show your love for Him? "Rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

Ephesians 1:3-4, 7-8 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight.

Prayer: Ephesians 3:14-19 Holy Father I pray for us what Paul prayed for the church in Ephesus. Would you grant according to the riches of your glory, to strengthen us with the power of your Holy Spirit so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith and that we may be able with all the saints to comprehend that is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, for His sake and in His name.