

“Through Jesus”
Romans 5:1-11
February 24, 2008

There are lots of words here, lots of words. Paul can be a bit wordy. This is a pretty thick text, theologically. I want to explain it, but I don't want to make it simplistic. I want to help us understand it, but I don't want to lose the wonder. On some level, we really *need* to understand what Paul is saying here, but on another, it is *impossible to understand*.

V. 6: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless...” When we were unable to even see how very wrong we were, when we were too weak to help ourselves, too rebellious to even care about God, when we were utterly helpless, Paul says, “Christ died for the ungodly.” “The ungodly.” That's you and me. This is the wonder of the gospel. This *is* the good news. It's not “Christ died for the holy.” It's not “Christ died for the good people” or “the religious people.” “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Paul was writing to Christians in Rome in the first century. But he also writes to us: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” When we were out doing our own thing, when we were disobeying and disregarding and denying God's ways and God's love, He put His own Son to death to save us from death – physical death and spiritual death. But more than that. Jesus' death made it possible for us to be friends of God.

“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” If you get nothing else today – if you get nothing else this whole year as you listen to our messages – *please get this*: Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary was *personal*. It was *for you*. **Vv. 10-11:** “For if, when we were God's enemies...” Now, to tell you the truth, I have never thought of myself as being an ‘enemy’ of God. That's a pretty strong word. Even in the midst of my biggest sins, I would not have called myself God's enemy. But I was. I lived in opposition to God. I did not love God with all that I was. I did not love people as I loved myself, unless it was convenient. Unless it made me look good.

James 4:4: “You adulterous people! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.” So that's the choice: Friend of the world or friend of God. The problem is we don't really see ourselves as *enemies* of God. We think there is something between ‘friends’ and ‘enemies.’ We think we can be *acquaintances* of God. We think we can have a little God *and* the stuff of this world we like. We think we can be a little naughty without being really bad. The metaphor of adultery that James uses is appropriate. In marriage, there's no such thing as a little adultery. You're either completely faithful to your spouse, or you're not. In God's eyes, there's no such thing as a *little* sin. You're either a sinner or you're not. And you can see how that goes. Every one of us in this room is a sinner. Whether your particular sin is adultery or murder or gossip or being judgmental or pride or self-centeredness, in God's eyes, sin is sin. Sin alienates us from God. Sin puts us in opposition to God. Sin makes us enemies with God. Sin makes it impossible for us to live in relationship with God, which is what God always intended for you and me. Not unlikely. Not difficult. Impossible.

Our awesome, holy, and perfect God cannot be in relationship with people like us: sinners. You folks who are joining the church today should be very clear on this: **You're joining a church full of sinners.** As I'm fond of saying: If we kicked all the sinners out, there'd be nobody here on Sunday morning. But through Jesus, the most amazing and wondrous thing happens: Through Jesus, I'm no longer called 'sinner' by God. Through Jesus, I'm no longer estranged from God, God's 'enemy' because of my sin. Now I'm called 'friend.'

Vv. 10-11: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."

"We were reconciled...having been reconciled...we have received reconciliation." This word in the Greek means to bring into friendship, to restore a relationship. It is a personal, relational word. It's not like reconciling your bank statement. It's like reconciliation between a husband and wife. It's personal. Think of somebody you're on the outs with. Maybe you don't have any *enemies*, exactly, but think of somebody with whom you need to be reconciled. A relationship which needs to be healed and restored, whether you think it's actually possible or not. Okay, got somebody in mind? Now, for reconciliation to happen, for the relationship to be restored, somebody has to reach out. Somebody has to admit they were wrong, or ask for forgiveness, or extend forgiveness. Somebody needs to make the first move if the relationship is going to be reconciled. What Paul is saying here is that God made the first move. When we were estranged from God because of our sin, He made the first move. Through Jesus.

"When we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him *through the death of His Son.*" If you get nothing else today – if you get nothing else this whole year as you listen to our messages – *please get this:* Jesus' death on the cross of Calvary was *personal*. It was *for you*. And I don't know how that sounds to you. Maybe it sounds just too good to be true. Maybe you just find it impossible to believe. I don't know what you came in here with today. Don't know what you brought with you. But here's what I do know: I know that when Jesus Christ carried his cross up the hill, that He wore a crown of thorns. And I know that nails were driven through His hands and feet. And I know that His side was pierced. And I know that He hung there on that cross and He died. And He did it for you and me. And I know that most of us have heard that before. Some of us have heard it so many times, it has lost its wonder. Today my prayer is that you would hear it like the first time. *I do not mean* that He hung there and died for some faceless mass of humanity. I mean He hung there and died, for you and for me. And it was personal. He knew your name as He hung there. He knew the foods you like. He knew the things that bug you. He knew every mistake, every compromise, every shred of pain, every sin, and it was for us and for those things that he gave His life. And when He walked out of that tomb that first Easter morning, He walked out having paid the price for every sin every one of us in this room would ever commit. *And He made it possible for you to be a friend of God.* Through Jesus. We were God's enemies, but we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son.

We are receiving new members into our church family today and we have the great joy and privilege of baptizing Josh George. While Josh was still a sinner, Jesus died for Him. So that he could be reconciled to God. So that he could be a friend of God. Josh is not saved because he

stands before you today, makes a public profession of faith in Jesus, and is baptized. Josh was saved 2,000 years ago when Jesus died on the cross for him. But today he proclaims that, regardless of whether or not he understands it, Josh knows he has been **justified** – made right in God’s sight, reconciled to God – purely by the grace of God, through faith in Jesus Christ. That – *because of Jesus, through Jesus, in Christ* – he is a friend of God AND that he intends to live that way. Through Jesus.

This is what these new members declare today: “Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior,” *my* Lord and Savior, the forgiver of *my* sins and the leader of *my* life. “While I was still living in sin, Jesus died for me. I am a friend of God. Through Jesus.”

Welcome, friends. When you’re friends with God, you’re part of a whole community of friends we call ‘church.’ Friendship with God is personal, but it is never private. Welcome to this community of sinners reconciled to God and now called friends. Through Jesus.