

Sermon 33: Romans 5:9-11: The Greatest Gift

OUTLINE

No Greater deed

No Greater joy

INTRODUCTION

One day when our teenagers go to university, some of them will no doubt be given an introduction to philosophy. One of the common practices in philosophy classes is for students to indicate whether they are Christians or not. Once they have revealed themselves the professor then attempts to put a problem to them that makes the whole concept of believing in God irrational therefore wrong. It usually comes in the form of a false dilemma. If God is all powerful can He create a rock so big and heavy He can't pick it up? The intent in this question is to show that if an all-powerful God can make a rock that He can't pick up, then He is not all powerful, and if He cannot make the rock then He is not all powerful. This argument is often used and felt to be a water tight argument against the existence of God. The argument carries two false assumptions in it. Firstly, if you are ever asked the question you should say, 'I reject the question because it is built on a false premise.' The false premise is that the question assumes that God is physical and limited by physical constraints like gravity. God is in fact Spirit, and to ask the question in this manner proves the ignorance of the question for God is not subject to physical laws and the question is thereby automatically disqualified. Secondly, because there are those who want to pursue the question trying to show that any limitation in God is somehow an argument against His existence, we also want to emphasize that perfection is not an abstract concept of endless possibilities, but defined by the person of God Himself. For example, God cannot lie and this does not violate His perfection in any way it is His perfection. The 'limitations' of His being in that He cannot lie, He cannot sin, He cannot abide evil. These are not limitations to perfection but the very definition of perfection. The first problem with the question is that it assumes God is subject to physical law, and the second problem is that is proceeding on a particular definition of 'perfection' that is false. This idea of perfection can be seen to be demonstrably false with this argument: let's say we are able to make a 'perfect' killing machine a machine that is unlimited in its possibilities to kill, is this perfect or terrible? Likewise when observing God's perfection we do not assume that endless possibility is the definition of perfection but one that is personal and moral and which is defined by God Himself. So then would God ever lie? Never, He would never deny Himself, and this is perfection. The answer to any question like this is, God would never do anything to deny Himself, and that is perfection.

I share this with you because a teenage girl approached me the other day with this question which one of her atheist friends had put on facebook, but also because it brings us around to Paul's way of thinking as he continues with his argument in Romans 5:9-11. Paul brings us into the area of what God does in v9-10. Let me put it to you in the form of some questions. Which of God's works are greater? What is the greatest thing that God has, can

and will ever do? Further, which is greater the creation of the universe out of nothing, or the creation of the New heavens and the new earth out of a fallen one? And bringing us to the distinction that is underlying Paul's thoughts in v9-10, which is the greater work for a holy God to do: to take a born again Christian who has been fully justified in Christ and to accept them into the new heavens and earth on judgement day, or to send His perfect beloved Son into this world, one who is infinitely valuable to Him to be mistreated, tortured and subject to the greatest punishments of God's wrath; and all for sinners who deserve to suffer it themselves? Allow me to speak in this fashion though no blasphemy is intended, which is 'harder' for a God who is perfect in holiness to do, to finally save a justified Christian or to send His own Son to die as their propitiation?

Paul is talking about our great benefits, and the total security of our salvation. He has been speaking about how the love of God is the ground of our hope, and now he rallies a further argument to prove beyond any shadow of a doubt that we will indeed be saved if we are justified by faith. I cannot get over the impression that Paul is writing for the likes of us who are so frail and unsure in our knowledge of God's love. Have you ever wondered about that day when you have to stand before the Lord, the day when the sheep and goats are separated, the day the books are opened, and our works will be the evidence of our standing before God? If you have any knowledge of your own sin, of God's requirements, if you have felt the sting of a violated conscience you have no doubt caught yourself wondering whether you will be accepted. Paul is writing now to allay all of those fears to prove with a further argument that our hope is sure. Paul employs a well-known form of argument of arguing from the greater to the lesser. Jesus uses an argument similar in the Sermon on the Mount when He is addressing the idol of our worry, by reminding us that if God provides for the birds and flowers how much more will He provide for His children. Likewise, Paul uses a much more, from the greater to the lesser form of argument in these verses. The lesser thing is to save the justified sinner from the wrath of God, the greater thing is to send the Son to justify by His propitiation in the first place. The reasoning runs like this. If God can do the hard deed of sending His Son, of sending the innocent second person of the Trinity to bear the punishment of those who have done nothing to deserve it. If God has willingly loved us by grace and paid with the highest price for our redemption, then it is a lesser thing to finally save those on judgement day who have been clothed in that righteousness and have not yet been perfectly sanctified in glorification. The hardest part of our salvation is already finished, the bigger part already complete, all that awaits now is the logical conclusion. It is harder to and more costly to justify a sinner who is unworthy than it is to glorify a justified person in Christ. Listen to how Paul puts it in 5:9-10, 'Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For 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.' V9 outlines a comparison between justification by His blood and the wrath of God on judgement day. Notice the words 'much more' between arguing that if God has done the justifying part final saving on the day of judgement is a lesser thing. V10 adds to the comparison contrasting what has resulted from His death—enemies are reconciled; and what will result from His life? Once again the 'much more' between them taking our expectations higher and higher, if His death reconciles enemies to God His much more will

His life do for adopted children. Paul is grounding our hope and assurance in the great work of the cross with a great confidence resulting from that influencing how we should view the final completion of our salvation. Once again Paul is rallying his arguments to help us see our security and feel assurance and hope.

No greater deed

Verses 9-10 then are not new truths, but the already proven truths that Paul has been teaching us pulled together in an argument meant to serve the purpose of making us feel the strength of God's salvation. What we want to do now is allow Paul to repeat himself, for repetition is the mother of learning. But take note how all the truths that he has been teaching us so far reach this amazing conclusion of our present security in Christ.

The first words of verse 9 prepare us to draw a conclusion, 'Since, therefore...'.

'We have now been justified by His blood.' Two points that Paul has already made that he repeats here. Firstly, we have been justified, this is a past tense reference describing a finished reality. We are not being justified, but have been justified. If you will remember this is our judgement day verdict brought forward. We do not need to be unsure about the verdict that we will hear on judgement day, it has already been given, and on that day there will be no surprises for those who have sought their righteousness in Christ, it will merely be repeated and openly declared. Justification is not merely an act of pardon, so that the famous memory aid, 'just-as-if-I'd never sinned' does not fully explain it. 'Just-as-if-I'd always obeyed and never sinned' explains it better. We are fully clothed in Christ's righteousness.

Secondly, Paul talks about 'blood' once again. Blood as you will remember is something that represents the substitutionary death of Christ. That He, like one of the Passover lambs in the OT, was killed instead of us. The blood then is a symbol that the life of the substitute has been given in the place of a sinner, that the penalty of death has been passed onto an innocent sacrifice not the guilty sinner. Blood you will remember has nothing to do with God being a sort of vampire who has a blood lust. Nor is the blood a type of magical potion that we are to plead over demon possessed people, our finances, our houses or the sick. No the blood is not a type of holy water to scare of the devil but something offered to God to satisfy the full requirements of His justice. Blood reminds us that Christ was our propitiation, that is, the sacrifice that removes the wrath of God towards our sins because He pays in full all that was ever due concerning our sins. The blood speaks of a fully settled sin debt where we can add nothing more for He has done it all.

'Much more shall we be saved from the wrath of God.' The word 'saved' as we find it here is being used differently to the way that we normally use it today. When we talk about being saved, we are normally talking about conversion. However, there are three ways in which we are saved. We are saved when we are justified, we are being saved as we are being sanctified, and we will be saved when we are glorified. It is this last sense of glorification, final salvation, when God makes all things new and every enemy is finally

punished and done away with. Likewise 'wrath of God' is talking about that final revelation of the wrath of God on judgement day. Rom. 1:18 tells us that the wrath of God is presently manifested in the world against evil, but the wrath that Paul is talking about here is a wrath that the world has only ever seen once before, on the cross. The measure of justice and punishment against sin that sin fully deserves has only ever been fully revealed once, and will only ever be revealed once more. It was revealed on the cross and it will be revealed on the final day of reckoning. And it we remind ourselves of Paul's argument, he is telling us that because we are justified and have already received our judgement day verdict, a verdict made possible since Jesus has taken the full punishment for our sins, we need not fear that we will have to give another accounting for sin, Jesus has paid it all, there is no double jeopardy with God.

V10 has two ideas that remind us that the war between a holy God and sinners is over for those who are in Christ, 'For 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. 'Enemies' now 'reconciled'. Reconciliation of course does not mean two parties who hate each other but who are not acting against each other in any active manner. Nor is it one sided, but God and man, who were split apart because God sent us out of the Garden are now forever reconciled. Jesus by His death has reconciled us. Paul's comments about what Jesus life can do for us are almost too wonderful. 'We shall be saved by His life.' His death brought us from death into life, from alienation in friendship; and now we anticipate what His life, His resurrection, will accomplish. We will not merely be rescued but we will be glorified, promoted, made heirs and eternal partakers of the pleasures of His right hand forevermore.

And there is his argument. If the hard work of giving the infinitely beloved and precious Son for undeserving sinners; the choosing to love those who are totally unlovely and deserving of nothing but eternal wrath and contempt; to choose to inflict that worst of punishment on the best of persons to bring the worst of persons into the best of rewards. For a holy God to act in grace and mercy and love and not give us our rightful deserts. Compared to that it will be easy to take those who are dressed in the righteousness of Christ, who are adopted as children, who are in the process of sanctification, who are indwelt by the Spirit, who are sealed for the final day, and who are fully acquitted and pleasing to God the Father through the Son, it is easy compared to accept them into glory and finally glorify them.

No greater joy

We come now to Paul's final benefit in these first eleven verses. He has been seeking to show us that the riches that are ours if we are justified by faith. Throughout he has been stressing that the riches are ours through Jesus Christ, and he comes now in v11 to the cherry on top, the greatest and richest treasure that we have through Jesus, 'More than that, we rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.'

3 times in these verses Paul talks about rejoicing. We are able now to rejoice in hope of the glory of God v2, rejoice in our sufferings v3, and after having grounded our hope in the love of God and argued from the greater to the lesser he brings us to the third thing in which we the justified sinner are now able to rejoice in, we rejoice in God v11. Are you beginning to get the feeling that the Christian life is a life of joy yet? You will remember that the word rejoice is the word 'boast/exult'. Paul is telling us that we boast, exult and rejoice in God. What a turn around. Think of our state in sin. We were those who would have robbed and murdered God. We want all His stuff, and none of Him. As sinners if we could have secured at eternal state of joy with no consequences of judgement for our actions we would have taken it. God was the total contradiction of our own sinful beings. We were by nature self-loving; self-enthroning; self-worshipping; God hating; law hating; sin loving, devil obeying, and every other perversity and enslavement that you can think of. We were by nature children of wrath whose only hunger and thirst was the addictive craving for sin. Like prostitutes addicted to heroin we would do anything for our fix, allowing ourselves to be manipulated because we wanted the sins we were being offered. All the while we hated God, hated holiness, despised prayer, the bible, Christians, worship and anything to do with God. Jesus Christ was our favourite swear word, and we were amongst the conceited who looked down our noses at those who needed God, and those who were truly sincere were branded as fanatics. If had the opportunity to design heaven it would be a big fat party of indulgence with no consequences, and God would be banned along with all rules and any service we would have to render. The orientation of our being was not to rejoice in God, but to loathe Him, not to boast in Him but to blaspheme.

But now, we have found the truth. And now along with Augustine we have found the everlasting fountain. We who were driven and enslaved by a deep emptiness of being, a fervent hunger that drove us to things with a hunger greater than they could satisfy; now in having God through Christ we have the truest and fullest joy. Our hearts had always been made for Him, our joys were always intended to be satisfied by who He is. Our hearts were restless and could never find their fulfilment until we found Him, and having found Him nothing else now satisfies. We rejoice in God. We who loved sin and hated God now deeply love God and mourn over our sins, hating the fact that some abiding desire for them still resides in us. We have found the pearl of great price and the loss of all other things means nothing, the Lord is now my portion.

Let me remind you how this has sustained the saints of God during terrible times in their lives. The Christian life is one marked by suffering, suffering allowed by the hand of our Father to perfect us and work out His purposes. We follow in the footsteps of Christ who was a man of sorrows and who was acquainted with many griefs. We follow in His footsteps in the same fallen world, with the devil thrown down to earth and who is waging war against the saints. But Jesus tells us in John 15:11 that His joy, the joy that He had while serving and suffering for the Father is a joy that can be ours, 'These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.' Jesus talks about us having His peace, and now His joy, think on the magnitude of that. Jesus who knew the Father perfectly who knew the Father as His perfect delight and satisfaction, we too have

been brought by Christ to know the Father and find our joy in Him. This deep joy is evident in the psalms.

Psalms 73 is a psalm of Asaph who writes about a time in his life when as a result of his poor health and the prosperity of the wicked he nearly became an atheist v2-3. He talks about their many 'blessings' v4-12. And how he felt he had wasted his life serving God when he did not have all these blessings to show for it v13-15. He was totally perplexed by the situation until he went to church/temple and God ministered to him by His Spirit v16-17. After being reminded of the certainty of future judgement, and an evaluation of his logic as beastly v18-22, we come to some of the greatest words in Scripture v23-26.

‘ Nevertheless, I am continually with you;
you hold my right hand.
24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will receive me to glory.
25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.
26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.’

In the midst of a world full of evil, in a life filled with pain and no apparent blessing, Asaph finds His joy in God as His portion. He is like the Puritan who was sat at a bare wooden table on a bare wooden chair, who had bread and water in front of him for his meal, and he says, 'All this, and Jesus!' God Himself is our greatest treasure and consolation. He has bound us to Himself forever, we are His and He is ours, and our hearts will find no greater and more satisfying thing.

Friends it is this joy that enables us to struggle through our sufferings with contentment. It is also this joy in God which enables us to withstand temptation. Our love for sin will be with us until the day we die, so we need to delight ourselves in God more fully that our temptations will lose their hold over us as our hearts are given to a greater joy. Your love for sin will correspond exactly to your joy in God. If you are not delighting in God, if you are forgetful of who He is and what He has done, then sin will seem fulfilling. As we apply ourselves to the word of God, sit under the preaching of God's word, avail ourselves of the free access of prayer won for us, and when in all these things we catch another Spirit taught sight of our God in the fullness of His beauty, our first love is revived and our joy in God restored.

And so Paul ends this short excursion into our various rich benefits having saved the best for last. In wrapping up let me quickly run us through these last eleven verses.

Paul began with our justification by faith assumed, and went on to speak of our various benefits. Here is a summarized list. Firstly, we have peace with God. Secondly, we stand in grace not law. Thirdly, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Fourthly, we rejoice in our sufferings as they bring various benefits to us in God's hand. Paul then made a detour where he sought to cement our hopes and show how absolutely secure our salvation is by

firstly grounding our hopes in the love of God, firstly and subjective proof in the inner witness of the Spirit, and then secondly, the objective proof of the cross. The next argument he used was one where he argued from the Greater to the lessor. Gathering up all the various themes that he had been developing from the beginning of the letter he demonstrated that if God can do the hard task of justifying the guilty, the lessor task of glorifying the saint is guaranteed. And finally Paul tells us of our greatest joy and treasure, God Himself. Each and every one of these things is for every believer. These are the portion of every sinner who sees their sin and comes to Christ as the only sufficient sacrifice to cleanse and justify them.