

Resurrection Sunday – Romans 5:1-10 & 8:31-39

Introduction

To be a “human beings” is, at the end of the day, **to be weak**. Think of how quickly and how easily any physical ailment can just incapacitate us. One day, we’re going strong, full steam ahead, and the next day, we’re literally bed-ridden with the flu. One day, we’re confident and “self-sufficient” and then the very next day we can’t do a single thing for ourselves. But we don’t have to wait for sickness to be reminded of our weakness. What about the fact that we’re constantly getting hungry over and over again, so that unless we eat on a very regular basis, we can’t function, and we eventually die? Or what about the fact that at the end of each and every day of our lives, we grow tired and lay ourselves down in a bed to sleep – unconscious for hours at a time. And then, of course, there are those “ultimate” reminders of our weakness: The vastness of the universe, and our tininess in it, as well as the constant passing of time and the shortness of our lives in it. When I think of true weakness, I might think first of all of a newborn baby, incapable of doing anything, utterly helpless. But even as adults, are we really, *relatively speaking*, so very different than we were when we first came into this world? We like to think of ourselves as strong; but at the end of the day, the honest truth is that we’re weak and feeble creatures.

In the Bible, the weak are those who can’t help themselves. Sometimes they’re the poor – without financial resource. Sometimes they’re the sick – without physical strength or hope of healing. And sometimes, they’re simply the defenseless – without power or protection against the enemy. In the Bible, the weak are the helpless – those without the power or the strength to do for themselves. So far, all these examples have had to do with our physical or our temporal condition in this world. So, then, what does it mean when the Bible says in Romans chapter five:

I. Romans 5:6 — For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Here is not a physical or a temporal weakness, but a weakness of a different kind – it’s a *spiritual* weakness. And who are the spiritually weak? They’re the *helpless* – those without the power or the strength or the resources to do anything for themselves. But here, too, we like to think that we are strong. I can decide for myself what is ultimate truth. I can decide for myself who God is—if I decide there is a God at all—and what that God will be like. We decide for ourselves what is “good,” and just how “good” we are, and just how “good” we need to be. But all the while that we’re deciding these things and thinking that we are “strong,” God, in His word, has said that we are weak—that we are spiritually *helpless*—without the power or the strength to do anything for ourselves. Not only are we helpless to save ourselves from God’s just judgment, but we were even helpless to do anything at all that is truly “good” in God’s sight. The weak, here, “designates that ‘total incapacity for good’ which is characteristic of the unredeemed.” (Moo)

➤ Romans 3:10–12 — As it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks [truly] for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

And right away our minds and hearts rebel, and we tell ourselves, “I can’t be *that weak*.” “I can’t be *that helpless!*” And so we set up our own word, which acknowledges some strength in us, against the word of God, which says that there was no strength in us at all to do any truly good thing in his sight. Later on in Romans, the Apostle Paul explains:

- Romans 8:7–8 — The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Hebrews says:

- Hebrews 11:6 (cf. Rom. 14:23) — And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

But the problem is, as we’ve already read in Romans three, there was not a one of us who would truly seek for God – not as God truly is, and as He has revealed Himself to us. Are you seeing what our weakness really is? It’s our total and complete inability to do anything truly and ultimately good – to do anything at all that is truly pleasing in God’s sight. And so our weakness is, in the end, our total helplessness; and our helplessness is, in the end, our ultimate hopelessness. We may not *feel* hopeless, but God, in His Word, has told us that we *are*—or that we *were*—without hope. And so for those of us who are truly redeemed this morning, how we love, now, to say these words with Paul: “For while we were still weak, at the right time—[in exactly the moment of our weakness and helplessness]—Christ died for the ungodly.”

Here are mysteries and wonders too great for our minds to ever fully grasp. And yet we may still acknowledge them to be true, and be glad! Very often, we think of the weak and helpless as those *deserving* of pity and of help – and very often this is right. But here in Romans five, the weak and the helpless are also the utterly undeserving. In fact, they’re called the “ungodly” because they’re unable to do or to be anything else – because their mind is set on the flesh, and so they cannot in any way be pleasing to God, and therefore they cannot in any way be deserving of His love – or *even* His pity. To say that we who were weak were also the ungodly is to say that there was nothing in us, or in our weakness, to elicit or to draw forth God’s compassions towards us. *And yet* we read in Romans chapter five: “While we were still weak, at the right time—[in exactly this moment of our weakness and helplessness]—Christ died for the ungodly.” Perhaps some of us are so used to hearing this, that we no longer see how preposterous, and how totally unthinkable, this is. Paul goes on to say in the very next verse:

II. Romans 5:7 — For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—

What is more valuable to you *in all this world* than life itself? Think about that. Is there anything? And which one of us, then, would consciously and purposefully, knowingly and willingly choose to give our own *life* so that someone else might keep theirs? **Maybe** for someone who’s inspired our love and our affections. **Maybe** for someone who’s inspired our pity and sympathy. **Maybe** for someone who’s inspired our honor and our respect. **Maybe** for that

generous friend, or that beloved spouse, or son, or daughter, or that innocent bystander or child. *Maybe.*

III. Romans 5:8 — but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

O that we might see and know for ourselves this thing that is beyond our ability to fathom – the fullness and the vastness and the greatness of God’s LOVE. It is this *love* that Paul is so at pains to set before our eyes. We know this because Paul has set all these verses up with these words:

- Romans 5:1–5 — Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, **because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.**

So, as Paul writes to all the believing saints in Rome, it’s this love of God poured into our hearts that he would have us grasp more fully and understand more deeply. O Church! **Know** this: “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Remember, the point isn’t, “while we were still those who did sinful things”—for all of us are still that even today—but rather, “while we were still *sinners* – ungodly, and utterly helpless to do anything at all that was in any way good or pleasing in God’s sight.” To say, then, “while we were still sinners” is the same thing as to say what Paul says in verse 10: “while we were [still] enemies.” Remember what we read earlier:

- Romans 8:7 — The mind that is set on the flesh is *hostile* to God.

We weren’t simply unengaged or neutral parties. **We** were hostile to God—to the *true* God. **We** were suppressers of the truth in unrighteousness. **We** were opposed to Him and His declared enemies. Weak and helpless to do any good thing at all; ungodly; sinners; enemies of God. It was **WHEN(!) – WE(!) – were all – of these things – that Christ – died – for US.** Behold! **HERE** is the LOVE of **GOD**. If **Christ** is the one who **died for us**, then never forget that it was **God** who **GAVE** His only Son **for us**.

But what do we mean – “for us”? We haven’t yet beheld or seen the love of God until we’ve understood these two simple words – “for us.” In Paul’s letter to the Christians who were living in Rome, the very next words he writes are these:

IV. Romans 5:9a — Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood...

Who were we? Weak and helpless to do any good at all; ungodly; sinners; enemies of God. And it was while we were all of these things that Christ died **for us**—so that **RATHER** than being eternally condemned as our *sin* demanded we might **INSTEAD** be justified by his blood. Here is a transformation—here is a change and a reversal—that could only be accomplished by the

power of God *and* as the outworking of His infinite **LOVE**. That I, who deserved the damning verdict of “guilty,” should stand before God the righteous Judge and hear Him say these words: “*Not guilty*”!

But *how* can this be? How can God be holy and righteous and just *and yet* justify the ungodly? (cf. Rom. 4:5) Did you really hear the question? How can God be holy and righteous and just *and yet* justify the ungodly? Even though I may know the answer, when I really hear the question again, I still feel at first that there couldn’t possibly be any way. So may we never take this question, or the answer that God has made known to us in His word, for granted.

- Romans 3:23–25 — For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood.

I’m going to speak **to the believers** now—to **the church**, but my prayer is that everyone who is here would hear these words and come to truly understand them. Christ, in His suffering and death on the cross, has fully satisfied the righteous wrath of God against all your sin by taking all your sin upon Himself and then providing **for you His** perfect obedience and clothing **you in His** perfect righteousness. Have you **fully understood** this, brothers and sisters? And so, in Him, and by the infinite atoning value of His blood spilled out for us, **WE** have been fully justified—wholly forgiven—declared *not GUILTY* but **instead RIGHTEOUS in HIS sight**. And so what are we seeing again? This is the **LOVE** of God!

- 2 Corinthians 5:21 — For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is what it *means* when we say: “**Christ died FOR US.**”

But there’s even more that can still be said. It’s one thing to hear the verdict in the courtroom, but then do you know the miracle that follows from this verdict? In order to understand this, we have to remember that as our Judge, God is not a neutral party. *Yes*, He’s impartial; but *no*, He’s **not** a neutral party. The one who is our **Judge** is *also* the very one we’ve **sinned against**. The one who is our **Judge** is also the very one that *we* were enemies of, and alienated from, and hostile to. And so the one who is our **Judge** was also **against us**. Can’t you feel the hopelessness of our case? Can’t you see our total weakness and helplessness? As Paul says in another place, we were the children of His wrath – the wrath of our Judge! But now listen to what Paul says, here, in verse ten:

V. Romans 5:10a — While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...

Remember what Paul is at such pains to show us — The love of God. And so here, again, is the greatness of that love. God gave His one and only Son not only so we might be justified, and forgiven, and spared from the wrath of God—not only for that!—but so that as the result of all this we might be fully reconciled **TO HIM** by the death of His Son. In other words, not only so that we might **no longer** be the children of His wrath, but also so that **we might be** His beloved

sons and daughters – the children of His constant and unceasing love and favor. How can I even say that to you? I can say that to you only because it's what God Himself has said to us. "**While WE** were enemies **WE** were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Remember: It was while He hung on the cross that Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus, the one and only beloved son of God was cut off and estranged from God so that we—who have believed in Him—might be brought near – so that God, the righteous Judge, might now be our Father, and we His treasured sons and daughters.

Here is a transformation—here is a change and a reversal—that could only be accomplished by the **power** of God *and* as the outworking of His infinite **LOVE**. When I was ungodly and still a sinner by nature, when I was an enemy of God and the child of His wrath, when I was weak, when I was helpless, when I was powerless to do any good thing—God did it all – every bit of it; 100%. "Christ died for us." By His death for us, we have been **justified!**—brothers and sisters—**justified, and reconciled** to God. Paul says it like this at the beginning of Romans chapter five:

- Romans 5:1 — Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul says "we" because he's writing to **the church!** And I say "we" in so far as I'm speaking even now to **the church!** But maybe you're here this morning and you know deep down that you haven't yet truly acknowledged your complete weakness and helplessness and cast yourself fully upon **this** finished work of Jesus. Christ didn't die for all without exception, but **only** for **all those** who will simply believe in Him – only for all those who will rest themselves finally in His finished work. Will you believe in Him this morning? **Are you** believing in Him this morning?

Conclusion

Well, today *is* Resurrection Sunday. And yet so far today, have we really said anything about the resurrection? Maybe not—or at least we may not think so—but we're certainly ready now. Only **now** can we really be ready to see in the resurrection what we couldn't have seen before.

There's a common, and also a very ancient form of logical reasoning that we call today, "from the minor to the major," or "from the lesser to the greater." In an argument like this we might expect to hear the phrase, "If this be the case (and we've established that it is), then **how much less** will that be the case." But then there's also the reverse kind of argument: "from the major to the minor" – "from the greater to the lesser." And in an argument like this, what do you think is the phrase we'd expect to hear? This time it's, "If that be true (and we've established that it is), then **how much more** must this be true." So listen to what Paul says, now, in Romans chapter five:

- Romans 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. 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.

What does the resurrection of Jesus mean? **This** is what God Himself wants you and me to understand this morning: If the **death** of Christ—while we were still weak and helpless, the ungodly and sinners, and the enemies of God—if this death was “for us” so that it’s *already* accomplished our justification and our reconciliation, then **MUCH MORE** will His **resurrection life** also be “**FOR US**”! **He** always lives to make intercession for us – to represent us unceasingly before God, **our Father**. (cf. Heb. 7:25) What else can the resurrection of Jesus **mean** if not that from this very moment all the way to the day of eternity all things are working together for our good – for our final and everlasting salvation? Consider, now, this wonderful, overwhelming **argument**, and let it conquer you completely: *If* God gave His only Son to suffer and die *for us*, and *if* then He has also raised Him up to life *for us*, then what else can this mean but that God Himself is wholly and completely, in every way and at all times — **FOR US**?
Brothers and sisters:

- Romans 8:31–34 — What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 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? Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who **indeed** is [even now] interceding **FOR US**.

Oh that every single one of us here could *see* and *know* for ourselves this morning what’s beyond our ability to ever finally comprehend – the fullness and the vastness and the greatness of God’s LOVE. It’s **this LOVE** that the Apostle Paul is so at pains to set before our eyes. We know this because of what he goes on to write in the very next verses of Romans chapter eight:

- Romans 8:35–39 — Who [then] shall separate us from the **love** of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who **loved us**. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the **love** of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Undoubtedly [Paul] wants to encourage any who are faltering or downhearted to contemplate again what he or she has in Christ — a new relationship with God (“justification” ...[and] “reconciliation”) that overcomes all adversity [in this life] and... provides absolute security for the life to come... Such contemplation can lead only to rejoicing. So Chrysostom [wrote some 1600 years ago]: ‘And so the fact of his saving us, and saving us too when we were in such a plight, and doing it by means of his only [Son], and not merely by his only [Son], but by his blood, weaves for us endless crowns to glory in.’” (Moo)

Hebrews 13:20–21 — Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.