

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH**SERIES TITLE: ROMANS | SERMON TITLE: A DIVINE & DISPROPORTIONATE LOVE****DAVE WAGNER**

Romans is the greatest letter ever written; it is the greatest book ever written; it is the greatest anything ever written. Ten thousand years men have suffered the evils of a fallen world and searched for a solution to the world's problems; Romans is that solution.

Romans is the solution because it gets the answer to the question right. It's also the solution because it gets the question right. If we ask what lies at the heart of man's problems, the world says it is inequality of education, wealth and opportunity. Romans says it is that man is wrong before God. The problem is not inequality, but our guilty standing before God. The world asks, "How can we make everyone equal?" Romans asks, "How can a man be right before God?"

And Romans gets the answer right. The world says the solution is multi-culturalism, forced diversity, redistribution of wealth and tuition-free college. Romans says the answer is the dying and rising Christ, who makes men right with God by faith.

Now the world assumes that we deserve a solution to our problem; that's often why they hate the living God so much; he says all we deserve is Outer Darkness. Romans says God has provided a solution, but not because we deserve it.

Rather, Romans makes the impetus for the solution the Love of God. The reason God gave a dying and rising Christ to save us is that God is love, and he loves his people with an immense, and an intense love.

So today our business is to consider how God displayed this immense, and intense, love in sending Jesus to die for us.

Quid Pro Quo

Earth functions by quid pro quo, this for that, something for something. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. You can have what you want, but you can't have it for free; you must pay for it. Heaven is very different.

Heaven operates by grace. Love and acceptance with God cannot be earned; they can only be received as a gift.

Paul points out that in order to demonstrate the immensity and intensity of God's love for his people, God gave Christ to die, specifically for a sinful people.

This was a people that God could not take joy in since they were sinful. Our sin repulses and aggravates, even enrages God. It offends him; it is vile to him. It stinks in his nostrils.

Our sin is an agony to God. It is misery for God to watch creatures in God's own image explore every possible perversion under heaven.

We are images of God. We bear the family resemblance. In a special way, we look like God, even lost people. So what we have is creatures who resemble God taking that resemblance into their filthiness of sin. The murderer slays a man while bearing God's image.

The fornicator embraces his foul partner while bearing God's image. The godless, worldly man ignores God all day long even while he looks like God!

Imagine you had a child who looked exactly like you. Now imagine them as a lowlife, a cheat, a robber, a dirty tramp whose been in every bed in town. It's your face, your image that they bring with them into all their dumpster of iniquity!

So is the sinner. Every sin of your life has been performed while you bore the family resemblance, while you wore God's own face. I can't help but think Satan would see this as a very great victory. Satan has no power to degrade God; but what Satan can do is take God's creatures, who wear God's image, God's very face, and degrade them lower than dogs.

Think of it this way: Satan wishes he could smear God with mud. Satan can't because he can't reach that high. But what Satan can do is find pictures of God and deface them. He can scrawl a mustache and goatee onto the picture. He can draw foul images on the picture, like people do in public restrooms. Satan can't get at God like he wants to; but he can deface and profane the images of God called Men.

When we say God loved the sinner by sending Christ to die for him, this is what we mean. So immense is the self-giving, the self-sacrifice, the sweetness and warmth, the tenderness and gentleness of God that he gave this gift to people who, at the very same moment, were wearing his face in their filthiness; they were dragging his glorious image and name through the mud while he died for them!

Can you imagine the husband who catches his wife with her lover, and then gives his own organs to save her from an illness? Imagine the mother who finds her son slandering and mocking her in every possible way, and responds by throwing herself in front of a truck to save him.

We are driven to exclaim, "That doesn't make sense! Don't save that floozy of a wife, and certainly not at cost to yourself! Throw her and all her belongings out on the front lawn! Don't rescue that ungrateful twirp of a son! Let him absorb the impact of the truck! How dare he curse his mother! Serves him right!"

And this is what we must feel in the death of Christ. If the death of Christ were not so precious, and so infinitely and gloriously right, we'd be forced to say it was just plain wrong. It's wrong! It's irrational! The bad guy should get it at the end of the movie! It shouldn't be the good guy who gets it!

In the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the good guy gets it; and what's more, he gets it for the bad guy! Talk about a twist!

But it's a bad twist, right? If you do good, you should get good. If you do bad, you should get bad. We did bad and got good; Jesus did good and got bad! This is all wrong.

No, it's not all wrong. It is the unpredictable, unforeseen, un hoped for, Love of God.

God displays the immensity and the intensity of his love by giving Christ up to death for us, not in response to us straightening up and walking right, but in response to us breaking every single law, perverting every single standard, refusing every single advance of God.

And this isn't God going soft in his old age. God says to his people, "Keep my law or I'll kill you." We respond, "We don't need no stinkin' law; we're not keeping anything." So Jesus says, "Then I'll keep it for you, and afterward I'll get killed in your place. And when the dust has settled, You Will Be Saved."

Who Dies For a Bad Man?

Paul points out that maybe, maybe you could get someone to die for a good man. The reason you might get this is that good men have some value. If they do what's right and work hard and help others and are generally favored, you'd hate to see harm come to them. Maybe someone would be willing to offer himself up to death to save such a man, since such a man has value.

When a thing has value we are willing to suffer loss to protect it. If I had a sick parakeet, I'm sorry to confess I would pay very little to the vet to restore it to health. It's just a bird; I'd let it die. It's not valuable to me. If Shepherd were hospitalized and it cost everything I had to pay for a life-saving procedure I wouldn't think twice. The doctor could demand the clothes off my back and I wouldn't hesitate. When Shepherd was better he and I would go home, he would be clothed and I would be naked, but I would count it a sweet deal.

So maybe, maybe someone would consider a good man so valuable as to be willing to die for him, but really, probably not. He may be a very good man, but what's that to me? I'd be willing to do something to help him, maybe a lot, but he's not so valuable to me that I'm willing to die to protect him.

Now that's a good man. How about a bad one? How about Barack Obama. Who'd be willing to die for him?

How about one of these child molesters over at FCI? Who would die for them? Any takers?

Think of someone who hates you with a passion. Got one? Think of the person who has harmed you the most. Ready to give your life to save them?

Anybody want to die for an abortionist? Anybody want to die for an old, worn out prostitute? Anybody want to die for some ISIS, Muslim murderer?

Of course you don't. Neither do I. And that, my friends, is the big difference between us and God. God doesn't require people to be valuable before he dies for them. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

When we were helpless; when we were weak; when we were sickly; when our souls were shot through with iniquity and ravening lust and merciless hatred and rank pride, that's when Christ died for us. That was our condition B.C., before Christ. That is what God knew we would be when he decided to put Christ to death for us. His plan is to save sinners! Not righteous people!

When it comes to the people of God, there is no Quid Pro Quo, no This for That. We did evil and receive eternal life! We are evil and receive eternal life!

You are beholding The Divine Love. Only God has power to love the rancid prostitute. Only God has power to love the pedophile. Only God has power to love the ISIS murderer. Only God.

And brothers and sisters, hear me: Only God has power to love you and me! Apart from The Divine Love, The Divine, Restraining Love, I am the prostitute! I am the pedophile! I am the murderer! Only Divine Love could ever love me.

Here's the Gospel: Divine Love does love me. Let's call it the "In Spite of" Love. It is the Love which hunts us down "In Spite of" what we are, and have done, and deserve. While we were still monsters, Christ died for us.

An Infinite, and Disproportionate, Love

The love of God is displayed by the disproportion between the sinner and the one who dies for him. The sacrifice is Christ himself. Christ is the eternal Creator, whose very hands laid the foundation of the earth and wove together the skies.

Christ is the one whose powerful word has continued to hold creation in place since the beginning, and which continues to do so at this minute. When the Romans and Jews together put Christ on the cross, even then Christ held up their very being; if he hadn't held them up, they could not have held him up to the cross to kill him. Christ had to help his killers to kill him. They needed his support, like a father who must stoop and pick up his toddler so she can reach his face to slap him.

And Christ is Lord of providence. When the murderous Romans and Jews went home to supper that evening it was a supper prepared by the hands they had just pierced with nails. Christ lovingly provided their supper, their bed, their wives and children, their wages, and a million other comforts for the rest of their lives.

Christ is the infinite Yahweh. He is the source of all Beauty, Goodness and Truth. He is joy, he is wonder and marvel. His glory is bright and his mind incomprehensible. This is the one who was slain for the love of child molesters and prostitutes. See the disproportion?

Or is there disproportion? He is infinitely good and we are hopelessly bad. Maybe there isn't disproportion. The reason the Sacrifice had to be so immense is that the offense was so immense. You know our sin must be bad if the only way to pay for it is to shed the blood of God.

On the other hand, if you compare the badness of our sin with the value of Christ's sacrifice, we find there is still disproportion. It is not a one to one equivalency. The goodness of Christ's death is far greater than the badness of our sin. That's why we say that, had God wanted to, he could have saved a thousand worlds of sinners by his one sacrifice.

Does He Love Us Because of Us?

Now if the love of God was given to us in spite of our sinful state, then fundamentally, the love of God for us is not based on any good thing in us; rather, it is based on God's own perfect love nature, and on Christ's perfect law keeping and atoning death.

But this is so not only when God gives Christ, not only the moment we are converted, but everlastingly. Perhaps you were converted 50 years ago. God's love for you, in this sense, is no more based on you, now, than it was based on you then. We know it couldn't have been based on you then because there was nothing lovely in you.

By the way, there are lovely things in you now. The Spirit of God begins working on the sinner the moment he is converted. And from that moment, however small, however hard to see, a divinely wrought loveliness has begun in the soul. You say, "But I know that in my flesh dwells no good thing!"

Indeed, in your flesh. But your flesh is no longer the whole story when it comes to you. There is a Spirit who also inhabits your life now. And that Spirit is Exultant Beauty. And he is making you into Exultant Beauty. The day is coming when that slowly encroaching loveliness is going to quit beating around the bush and swallow you whole. Hang on, brothers. The day is coming.

But if there is a real loveliness in us now, perhaps, after all, God's love is now based on something in us, namely, that loveliness? No; in the deepest sense, God's love for us is never based on us; it is not even based on the loveliness which God himself has put into us.

It is based on himself. God loves us because God is love. God loves us, not because we are good, but because Jesus is good. God loves us, not because we have done right, but because Jesus has done right. God's love for us is based on God.

And that means his love for us can never change or be removed from us; or, if it could, God must change first. God will never change, so his love for us will never change.

The One and Only Response to Such a Love

So what should we do? One thing: Turn and look to the God of Love, and be saved! Look with a look of neediness; look with longing; look with hunger and thirst; look with desperation; look with poverty of spirit and sinful wretchedness! Behold Christ crucified, the bloody love of God! God's love is infinite, disproportionate, unforeseen and unpredictable; it is aimed at the most unworthy objects; it isn't based on anything in us. Believe then, and be saved!

And enjoy. Rejoice in the love of God day after day. Enjoy the love of God and by enjoying cut the head off your sin. Become a sin murderer, like Paul says we must become; what weapon will you use? Faith in the love of God, as displayed in the justifying death of Christ.

What is the application? Have peace. Supernatural peace which passes understanding. Do you hear the news of the Gospel? Your sins, which are many, are paid for in full. The love of God is eternally and invincibly set upon you. And it has been manifested in a historical proof: The crucifixion of Christ. God, in his love, has done everything it takes to make you right with him. Perfectly, completely, irreversibly and invincibly right; right with God. Let your hearts be at peace.

And hope. Consider how lavish the love of God that his divine Son should die in your place. If he gives this kind of love now, in the present, what will he do in the future? God has promised eternal life and a resurrected world, all for us. Let the past and present love of God fuel your hope for what's coming in the future.

Believe, enjoy, have peace, and look forward in hope. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.