

Love Actually

Romans 5:1-10

What's the greatest act of love?

Isn't it to being willing to give your life for someone? If we give up our life for someone, we are literally giving up everything we have – we're giving it all! There can be no greater love than that. It's that kind of love that is recognized each Anzac Day when we remember the sacrifice of the young men and women who fought for this country. They gave their lives so we might be free. There's something heroic and noble about that kind of love. We admire that sort of love. We can understand and appreciate love given for a good cause, or a just cause.

Human love can give so much: for a noble ideal, or for the bond of relationship, but it still cannot compare with God's love. It's difficult for us to comprehend and appreciate the depth of God's love for us. His love was sacrificial. He gave everything he had. He sent his only Son, Jesus to die so we would have life. But, there's a huge difference between every other human act of sacrificial love and what Jesus did. You see, Jesus death wasn't a heroic sacrifice for a good cause. The recipients of his sacrifice were hardly worthy of the gift they received. Which makes God's love all the more extraordinary: when it comes to God's love, there are no ulterior motives, there are no selection criteria, there are no tests to pass. You don't have to be a special kind of person to receive God's love. You don't even have to be lovable.

God loves you. Full stop!

When he wrote to the church in Rome Paul didn't pull any punches when he described the human condition . . . our natural human condition . . . what our lives are like without God.

First, humans are weak (Romans 5:6). When it comes to spiritual matters we are weak, helpless, without strength to do anything ourselves. We did not have the power within ourselves to change our situation. All the self-help books and gurus and motivational speakers could not make us strong enough to have a relationship with God.

Secondly, humans are ungodly (Romans 5:6). Like the opposite of everything God is! We don't care much about God. We aren't interested in who he is, or what he has to say. We aren't interested in a relationship with him. We are more interested in going our own way and doing our own thing. We're more interested in making God in our own image!

Thirdly, humans are sinners (Romans 5:8). We don't measure up. We don't measure up to the standards God expects. Not just in what we do, but in who we are. Even if we wanted to, we could never be good enough for God, we could never be perfect enough. We just can't meet the mark.

Lastly, we are enemies (Romans 5:10). Enemies! Not just people who don't care either way about God, but people who hate God. We don't want a relationship with God. We are at war with him and we are going to fight him every inch of the way. He isn't good for us. There isn't enough room in this world for both of us. We can't afford to surrender to him and lose our independence.

That's our natural human state. We do not love God. Any decision we make in relation to God is always: No way!

It's a pretty bleak assessment of human nature! Can you see any good reason why God would love us? We're hardly a noble cause! We are weak – not very attractive to a God who has the power to create the universe! We are ungodly. Totally unlike God. We don't have anything in common. We are sinners. Imperfect, selfish, unrepentant. We are his enemies.

And yet, when we are in this state God chooses to show his love for us. God chose to demonstrate his love in the most powerful way love can be demonstrated: he gave up his life . . . not for people who were good enough . . . but he gave up his life for his enemies . . . for us!

God who is all powerful became weak for our sakes.

God who is totally other than us became a human being for our sake.

God who is without sin, took our sin upon himself for our sake.

God who was our enemy, allowed his enemies to kill him. He died so he could be our friend.

He died so he could be our Saviour.

That is love. We didn't deserve it, but he loved us anyway.

And the result of his love is . . . peace.

We have peace with God. We are no longer his enemy. We have nothing to fear from him. Now, we receive the blessings that come from being at peace with him. We are no longer weak, but have the power of the Holy Spirit within us. He gives us the strength to handle what the devil and our old sinful nature throws at us. Through the Holy Spirit we have become godly. Not godly in the sense of we are somehow perfect and live the perfect life, but godly in the sense of being set aside by God as his people. We have his promises. We have the seal of his approval.

We are no longer just sinners, but now we are also saints. The power sin once had over us – and it was a power leading us to eternal death – that power has been destroyed by Jesus' death. Now, as new people we can do what God wants us to do. We can obey his commands. We can live as he would have us live. But, we do it knowing we won't always get it right.

We won't always get it right, but, since God has proven his love for us while we were still sinners, we can be sure of his love for us now that we are his saints. When we don't get it right God shows his love for us by forgiving us . . . over and over again.

No wonder St Paul says we have something to boast about. We can't boast about ourselves because there's nothing in us worthy to boast about, but we can boast about God's great love for us. While we were still sinners, God loved us to death. Now we are his saints, he will love us through our own death and out the other side.

That's love worth boasting about. That's God's love.

And so the peace and love of God which passes all our human understanding keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus.

Amen.

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