

ATHE GREATEST NEWS STORY IN HISTORY@

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Rom. 5:8

I don't know whether or not you've ever visited a big city newspaper, but, for me, outside the ministry, there is no more thrilling job than the exciting task of putting the morning edition **A**to bed.**@** For more than four years while I was a student in college and seminary, I worked on a newspaper which, at that time, boasted the second largest home distribution of any daily newspaper of the United States. And there is something about the suspense of a great news break or the anticipation of an exclusive story that gets into your blood, and I love it.

Even now there are times when, for a moment or two, I get nostalgic memories of the deafening roar of the gigantic rollers of the huge presses as they poured out over fifty thousand copies per hour. I remember the warm, clean smell of the latest sheet hot off the press, telling the stories of the pathos and tears, the victories and defeats, the joys and disappointments, the glamor and, in a word, *color* of a teeming metropolis.

I remember the city room with the copyboy bustling about from desk to desk. The calloused, almost cold indifference of the City Editor. The reporters calling on their years of experience, research and study, as they bang away at their typewriters.

I remember the composing room and the great Linotype machines with their almost human-like arms swinging back and forth with whole handfuls of type. I remember the pots of molten lead waiting to be cast into the latest extra, and the ghostlike stillness of the giant presses at the close of day.

I remember the pressmen in their ink-sodden overalls. The Linotype operators with their green glass eye shades. And yes, I remember the ragged, patch-clad newsboys on the street corners shouting, **A**Extra! Extra! Read all about it!**@**

All of these are part of the mystery, glamor and romance of my years on a great metropolitan

newspaper as it measured the throb and heartbeat of a bustling city, telling the never-ending story of life and the pageantry of its passing parade.

Well, as I mentioned a moment ago, for more than four years I worked in that kind of atmosphere. I associated with some of the finest people in the newspaper business. And, it was an incident which took place during that period of time which later inspired this message I bring to you tonight.

It happened early one Sunday morning. The war in Europe was over. Only a few days earlier, news of the atomic bomb had rocked the world. Everyone knew it was only a matter of days, perhaps even hours, before Japan would surrender. Rumors were flying thick and fast.

I had finished my work for the night, and decided to stop by the city room to see if I could get any firsthand information on the state of affairs. Hal Riden, the big, redheaded night editor, was the only one on duty and, over the muffled chatter of the teletype machines, I asked him what was up?

Even the calloused indifference of this hardened newspaper man had been shaken by the intensity of the times in which we were living. He was dead serious as he brushed his hand through that heavy mop of red hair and leaned forward across the desk to reply, AJohnnie, I am about to start the presses rolling on the greatest news story of my career. At any moment the bell on that teletype machine will bust loose with a flash that World War II is over and the hell of this awful holocaust will be through for good. Yes, sir, that will be one of the greatest news stories in history.@

As we chatted on, I asked him what he thought really *was* the greatest news story in history. He mentioned several. The battle of Lexington, the first military action of the Revolutionary War. The inauguration of Washington as the first president of the United States. The fall of Napoleon. The story of the gold rush carried in the California Herald. The flight of Lindberg across the

Atlantic bringing in the Aeronautical age. And the dropping of the atomic bomb, bringing in the Atomic age.

Other reporters drifted in to begin their day's work and joined in the conversation. One mentioned the assassination of Lincoln. Another suggested the story of the San Francisco earthquake and fire as it was carried in the New York Sun under the headline: AThe City That Was@and called it Aa newspaper classic.@ One rather cynical young cub reporter said, AHow about the story of the ending of the *first* World War with the greatest headline ever written, >Peace on Earth!= That was a laugh!@

I left just after that and during the ensuing months I thought of Hal Riden's statement again and again, AThe greatest news story in history.@ The more I thought about it, the more I was impressed by the fact that the greatest news story in history was not any of those which had been mentioned that eventful morning. Nor was it yet to be written. For, one great story had been set down centuries ago which will never to be surpassed, and that's the story I want to talk about tonight.

It's found in the book of Romans, chapter 5, verse 8 and here it is B AWhile we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.@ Have you ever heard any greater news? Have you ever read a more amazing headline? AWhile we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.@ Indeed, this *is* the greatest news story in history.

In journalism they taught us that every great news story must contain at least three of the five A's@-- who? what? where? when? and, why? I'd like to use that method tonight in discussing this greatest of all news stories. To begin with, I believe Romans 5:8 is the greatest news story in history because of

The Who Of It

AWhile we were yet sinners, *Christ* died for the ungodly.@

Consider the power of that one word: AChrist.@ As someone has said, AAll we have is *in* Christ. All we are is *through* Christ. All we shall be will be in Christ and through Christ and *with* Christ.@

He is altogether lovely. He is our Savior, our Lord, our shepherd, our life, our priest, our peace, our pattern, our hope. He is all in all. He is the fountain which will never run dry and through which we need never thirst again. He is all power in heaven and earth. He is true God and true man. He is the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end. He is Christ, our present victory and our coming King.

From time to time we hear people say, AIt doesn't matter what a man believes so long as he is sincere.@ Beloved, that's the devil lie. In fact, the more sincerely a man believes error, the more disastrous it is to him. This is proved by the recent newspaper story of the chap who boarded an airplane in Chicago with the intention of going to New York City only to discover, as he left the plane, he was in San Francisco. His intentions were perfect. His motive was right. He was absolutely sincere. But he was sincerely wrong. No, sincerity just will not do.

Today peoples' hearts are hungry for something which will satisfy. Material riches won't do it. Just look around for convincing proof of that. Being honored by people won't do it. Many have received the highest honors this world can give and still hunger for something more. The pleasures of the world will not do it. Some of you here tonight have tasted the best pleasures this world has to offer, and know, without my telling you, mere worldly pleasures will not satisfy.

Nor will religion or formalities or superficialities satisfy. It is Christ, and Christ alone, for whom the hungry heart of humanity yearns. He alone can satisfy. He alone can touch the heart. He alone will work from the inside out, changing everything from the center to the circumference, making all things new. He alone is the One we all so desperately need.

Somewhere in scripture we are told he is altogether lovely, and that's true. In fact, he is so much a part of this Book that every doctrine it teaches, every duty it demands, every narrative it

records, every comfort it gives, every hope it inspires, centers around his person and contributes to his glory.

That's why Martin Luther could say, *I'd rather be in hell with Christ than in heaven without him.*@

That's why I believe Romans 5:8 is the greatest news story in history. And that's why we can sing with jubilant hearts the song of the poet,

AWonderful Savior, wonderful friend,
Wonderful life that never shall end,
Wonderful home he has gone to prepare,
Wonder of wonders, I shall be there.@

Which leads me to the second reason for believing this is the greatest news story in history, and that is because of

The What Of It

AWhile we were yet sinners, Christ *died for the ungodly.*@

One day, in the Sante Fe Railroad yards in Topeka, Kansas, during the lunch hour a young Christian was reading his Bible. A fellow worker came by, and, seeing what he was doing, said, *AWhat on earth are you doing? Surely you don't believe that book?*@ The young Christian replied, *AWell, to tell you the truth, I've just now read a verse I don't know whether to believe or not.*@

With an arrogant sneer on his face the agnostic said, *AI thought so. What is that verse?*@

The young Christian replied, *ARomans 5:8 -- >While we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.= To tell you the truth, sir, that seems too good to be true.*@

It *does* seem too good to be true, doesn't it? And yet the great good news of the gospel is that Christ *died for the ungodly*. Some folks have difficulty in accepting the resurrection story as a fact. That has never been my problem. The thing which has disturbed me is not that God in Christ should be raised from the dead, but that God in Christ should *die*! And when I add the fact

that he *died for the ungodly*, well, it's beyond my comprehension, and yet it's true. And it's true *because* of the love of our triune God.

As Robert Moyer has said, AOur salvation is divinely purposed by the loving Father. Divinely prepared by the loving Son. Divinely imparted by the loving Spirit. It was wrought out by God, the Father. It was wrought for us by God, the Son. It was wrought in us by God, the Holy Spirit.@

AChrist died *for the ungodly*.@ What a beautiful thought. He died *for the ungodly*. He died for all colors, all classes, all kinds, all casts, and all companies of people. He died *for the ungodly*. He died for the lowest, the smallest, the meanest, the worst. He died for the grandest, the highest, the noblest, the best. He died for you. He died for me. He died for us all. For Christ died *for the ungodly*.@

And then, this is the greatest news story in history not *only* because of the Who of it (Christ), and the What of it (died for the ungodly), but because of

The When Of It

AWhile we were yet sinners, Christ died.@

A young mother who was confronted with Rom.5:8 said, AI can't understand such love. I have two children and I wouldn't give one of them for the best friend I have in the world. And yet, this verse says God gave his *only* Son for his worst enemy. I can't understand such love.@

And I say to you, beloved, who can? And yet *that* is the love story of God's word.

Beloved, you may go to hell unsaved, but you will never go to hell unloved.

AFor God's love no end nor measure knows,
No change can change its course,
Eternally the same it flows,

From one eternal source.

Isaiah speaks of Jesus as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. That's true. Jesus suffered the pinch of poverty. The pangs of hunger. The parch of thirst. The droop of weariness. The sting of slander. The hurt of misunderstanding. The agony of loneliness. The anguish of rejection. These, and many other things, he suffered for you. Jesus was shut *out from* God so you might be eternally shut *in with* God. Tell me! Do you know of any greater love than that?

I think you know the story, but let me call to your remembrance how Jesus came into this world of sinners, *not* to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He lived a sinless, perfect life. He spent himself in healing the sick, feeding the hungry, giving sight to the blind, and hearing to the deaf. He preached good news to the poor, and deliverance to the oppressed. And yet, despite all of this, he was betrayed and subjected to a mock trial before Pilate.

When it became clear to him that there was no evidence against Jesus, Pilate turned to the crowd of onlookers and asked, "What do you want me to do with Jesus, who is called the Christ?" The people, whipped into a feverish frenzy by the chief priests cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him! Give us Barabbas the criminal, but crucify Jesus the Christ."

Thinking the bloodlust of the Jews would be satisfied if they saw Jesus tortured, Pilate gave the order for Jesus to be flogged. The governor's soldiers stripped him of his outer garment, and, using a whip tipped with bits of stone or metal, they beat him until his flesh was ripped and torn.

After twisting together a crown of thorns they set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand and a scarlet robe on his bleeding back, and they taunted him in a cruel Roman army game called "King for a day." "Hail, Jesus, king of the Jews," they cried with a sneer as they knelt before him in mock obedience. They spit on him and using the staff, they struck him on the head again and again.

But even that did not quench the thirst of the Jews for the blood of Jesus. Knowing an injustice was about to be done, Pilate called for a bowl of water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. **I** am innocent of this man's blood," he said, and turned Jesus over to the Jews.

They ripped off the scarlet robe and taking the wooden cross which had been prepared for Barabbas the criminal, they put it upon the shoulders of Jesus the Christ. And thus began the most infamous death march in history.

Along the dusty roads of old Jerusalem it came. There the people ridiculed him. Mocked him. Called him all manner of wicked names.

As he struggled along, weakened by pain and the loss of blood, Jesus fell. As he lay there, pinned to the ground by the weight of the cross, the dirt mingled with the blood and sweat to form mud cakes upon his face, and Jesus Christ, the sinless Son of God, was ugly to look upon.

Sensing Jesus was exhausted, Simon, the Cyrene, stepped forward and picked up the cross. Simon was a black man, and one reason I have always had great love in my heart for our black brothers and sisters, is because one of them helped carry the cross of Christ.

When they reached the summit of the hill called Calvary, they stretched him out upon the cross, and, placing nails in his hands and feet, the hammer began to fall, beating out the hate, hate, hate of men for God. After they had secured him there, so the weight of his body would not pull him free, they lifted him up. For a moment the cross teetered between earth and sky, and then, with a sickening thud, they plunged the cross with its sacred burden into a hole.

As he hung there like a bunch of purple rags, Jesus cried, **A**Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing." Later, as the weight of the world of sin descended upon his innocent soul, he cried in anguish, **A**My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

As the hours passed he said, AI thirst.@"

One of the bystanders ran and got a sponge, filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick and offered it to Jesus to drink. When he received the drink, Jesus cried out in a loud voice, AIt is finished!@" And he gave up the ghost and died.

All this, and more, the dear Lord Jesus did for you. Can you ever again doubt that the greatest news story in history is this? AWhile we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.@"

Jesus was shut *out* from God that you might be eternally shut *in* with God. Tell me, do you know of a greater love than this? Tonight, I put the same question to you that Pilate put to the crowd that fateful night two thousand years ago, AWhat will you do with Jesus, who is called the Christ?@" Do not reject him as they did. Instead, receive him as your own personal Savior and Lord. *Right now!*