

I've Got Too Much Dirt

Romans 5:6-10

Slide 1

There's a church legend about Barabbas, the criminal who was released so Jesus would be crucified.

Legend has it that Barabbas returned to his old rebellious, murderous ways. He was eventually arrested and was sent to an island work camp where most of the other prisoners were persecuted Christians.

Over time, Barabbas learned Who this Jesus was Who had died in his place, so he decided to repent and become a follower of Christ.

All the prisoners were tagged with an earring that had a symbol of Caesar to show that they belonged to him.

Barabbas took his earring, rubbed off Caesar's symbol, and replaced it with a symbol of Christ to show that he now belonged to Jesus.

Now, if someone with as much "dirt" as Barabbas could become a follower of Jesus, does anyone have too much dirt for God to handle?

Let's take a look at today's scripture to see how this concept of "too much dirt" gets addressed.

Romans 5:6-10, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

What an amazing thought is expressed here. While we were powerless, while we were still sinners (covered in our dirt), while we were God's enemies, Jesus died for us.

As a result, we've been reconciled with God, avoiding His wrath, and given a life full of rejoicing. Think about how incredible this idea is.

In verse 7, Paul wrote that someone might die for a good person, but he would rarely die for a righteous one, and the world tends to agree.

Many of our hero stories involve someone making a sacrifice, some even make what we call the ultimate sacrifice, giving their life to protect another person.

They do it because they see value in the person being saved. For example, the movie *Hacksaw Ridge* tells the story of Desmond Doss, whose convictions of faith led him to become a pacifist.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the army as a medic. He was determined to serve his country but in a role in which he didn't have to carry a gun.

Being in the military and refusing to carry a gun didn't make him very popular. He faced a dishonorable discharge, but he beat the charges and was sent overseas to serve as a medic.

During the battle for Okinawa, Doss was able to save the lives of 75 injured men while never wielding a gun.

He was the first conscientious objector to ever receive the Medal of Honor, the highest and most prestigious military decoration of our military can bestow on a soldier.

He received this award because he was willing to risk his life for those soldiers who believed in their cause. In a manner of speaking, he felt they deserved a chance to live.

Jesus, however, gave His life even though NONE of us deserved His sacrifice.

The story of Barabbas that I shared at the beginning of my message is a legend. There's no way to prove whether it actually happened or not, but it does give us something to think about.

However, I can share the events of Paul's life with complete confidence that what I'm about to say is historically accurate because he tells us these things in the Bible.

The Bible, which is God's inspired Word, has been passed down through generations so we can know Him and make Him known.

Slide 2

When Paul wrote these words I read a few minutes ago in chapter 5, I believe it was as much a reminder for himself as it was for the Romans.

Imagine you're on a jury and I'm presenting evidence. First, I give you exhibit A: Paul's life before knowing Jesus.

We know a little about his previous life since we met him earlier in Acts 7:57-8:1, where he was known at the time as Saul.

In this passage, we find him standing in the crowd watching Stephen witnesses about Jesus. Then he followed the crowd outside the city and collected the witnesses' cloaks after which they stoned Stephen to death.

Luke described him in Acts 9:1 as a man who was *“breathing out murderous threats against the Lord’s disciples.”* But he was not making idle threats.

In fact, he went to High Priests to get permission to go to Damascus so he could search for followers of *“the Way”* and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial.

Paul thought he was being zealous for God, but here we see the very definition of someone who was an enemy of God.

Overseeing the execution of a deacon, locking up other believers because of their faith, traveling to spread the persecution of *“the Way,”* made Paul a perfect example of an enemy of God.

Even though he thought he was acting with great zeal on behalf of God, he was actually sinning against the God he proclaimed to love.

In fact, being a Pharisee, he likely was there for the crucifixion and watched Jesus die for his sins.

He later described this former life to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:13, *“Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.”*

So, what does God do with this enemy? In Acts 9:3, we find Paul traveling along the road to Damascus. When, all of a sudden, a bright light shines down on him, rendering him blind.

Jesus confronts him directly, *“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”* Then Jesus identifies Himself to Paul and gives him instruction for what to do next.

Following three days of prayer and fasting, Paul received instructions from Ananias to get baptized after which he began a new life as a follower of Christ.

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Continuing in my example of a trial, I present exhibit B: The life accomplishments of Paul as a Christian.

In this exhibit, I explain that after spending some time among the Jews, he went on four missionary journeys and planted new churches everywhere he went.

He followed up with those churches by writing 13, or 14 letters if you believe he wrote Hebrews, with instructions for developing leadership, conducting worship, and handling various situations in which these churches found themselves.

Now, one may think, *“What an amazing change in Paul’s life. He’s done some wonderful things after getting baptized into Christ. Surely, life became a bed of roses for him once he became a follower of Christ.”*

Let’s take a look at just how wonderful Paul’s life became. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul summarized a hefty list of troubling times that he endured in the name of Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:21-28, *“Whatever anyone else dares to boast about—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they Abraham’s descendants? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.*

Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

Paul was a Hebrew, an Israelite, an offspring of Abraham, a servant of Christ and what did all that get him?

Imprisonments, beatings, stoning, shipwrecks, danger from nature and man, hunger and thirst, and exposure to the elements. Paul’s faith even cost him his life.

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That takes us to exhibit C. We’ve seen how Paul lived before Christ confronted him.

We’ve heard how Paul did some amazing things to further the cause of Christ after he was converted and how he suffered as a result.

Exhibit C explains what motivated him to endure it all. Recognizing that his time for this world was growing short, he penned these words in his second letter to Timothy.

2 Timothy 4:6-8, “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Read verse 7 again. Did Paul complain about the misery he had been put through? No. Paul said, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”*

I don't know about you, but I want to be like Paul. I want to be able to look back on my life and be satisfied because I know what's coming.

Like Paul, I look forward to the crown of righteousness that God will award me on the day of judgment.

I think my favorite part of this passage is when Paul tells us that the crown of righteousness hasn't been saved only for him, but for all those who have longed for Christ's appearing.

But what does that mean, *“all who have longed for his appearing.”* Who are these people?

That's everyone who has turned from their sin, put their trust in God through Jesus Christ, and were baptized to put their old selves to death and then brought up as a new creation.

You know, there are days when I look back on some of the dirt in my life and think, *“There's no way God could or should have forgiven me, let alone love me.”*

This is why Paul's words to the Romans are so reassuring. Because when we sinned, when we were covered with dirt and chose to be God's enemy, He sent His son Jesus to die on the cross for us.

Jesus did all the work to reconcile us to God.

Slide 5

Conclusion

It doesn't matter how much dirt we had before we came to know Jesus.

Even when we get ourselves dirty again, we have the assurance that Jesus has reconciled us to His Father.

In fact, we can rejoice because we know we've been saved from all our sins and will be forgiven as we turn to God.

I can look forward to the day when I can quote Paul and declare, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.*"

That's possible because God refuted the lie Satan wants us to believe that "*I've got too much dirt.*" God refuted this lie by sending His Son to die on the cross, even while we were still His enemy.

I recognize that most of us have already experienced this for ourselves. We've taken the plunge and accepted the gift of grace that God offered through Jesus' sacrifice.

If that's you, I encourage you to give thanks, but some of us may not have gotten there yet. You may still be holding on to the status of being an enemy of God.

That's why I offer this opportunity to change your status. You don't have to remain an enemy of God. I encourage you to trade that identity in today and become a child of God.