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Sermon for Sunday, March 12, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor  
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**"NO CROSS FROM THE DIME STORE"**

Romans 5:1-11

Text: "But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

One of my favorite stories is about the Irishman who was making his confession to his Roman Catholic priest and confessed that the night before he had stolen some hay from his neighbor. In order to make the punishment fit the crime, the priest inquired as to how much hay the Irishman had stolen. "Well, Father," replied the thief, "I might as well confess to the whole stack since I'm going back after the other half tonight." In a real sense, this determined Irishman is typical of us all. No matter how much we confess our sins and grieve over them, sin still remains. As St. Paul once put it, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

In our Scripture for this morning St. Paul tells us that we are all sinners. No, I don't suppose anyone likes being called a sinner. If someone walked up to you and said, "Listen, I happen to know you are a sinner," we would not react very well. If it were a friend we would be hurt and if a stranger we would be angry. Most of us like to think of ourselves in complimentary terms and we have a convenient psychological device that balances our good and bad traits and which makes things always turn out in our favor. So most of us think of ourselves in fairly good terms. We don't drink to excess or gamble for more than we can afford to lose. We are active in community activities, attend church with some regularity and support its work with our money. All in all, we are responsible citizens who are concerned about poverty, human needs, and the war in Africa and peace in the mid-East.

However, this morning I would like to distinguish between sins and Sin with a capital "S". In verse 10 of our Scripture for this morning we get a clue to the meaning of Sin. St. Paul writes there, "For if while we were enemies...to God.." Sins, with a small "s", refers to the various bad things we do. But Sin, with a capital "S" has to do with what we are. Do you see the difference? Sins are the things we do, while Sin is what we are, a condition that St. Paul likens to being an enemy to God.

Had you ever thought of yourself that way--as an enemy to God? That's shocking language isn't it? Yet, that is precisely what St. Paul says, that we are enemies to God. The word "enemy" is the same word used when a state of war exists, when diplomatic relationships are broken, when a no-man's land exists and there is no communication between foes. A couple of years ago some of us were in Egypt going to Israel and we had to go through Jordan. We got caught in a sand storm and we were delayed a day. On the day the people from Israel were to meet us at the border, we weren't there. We were desperate to get word to them that we would be there tomorrow and to please come back. But there were no communications--no telephone calls permitted--no radio messages--no mail--communications were cut off and broken down. A state of war existed. It means simply that Sin is like that. It has to do with our relationship with God--that there is a brokenness in that relationship.

Now, you might react to what I have said something like this: "Well, Andy, I'm not mad at God. I'm not at war with God. I don't hate Him and I don't think of Him as my enemy." But let me ask you this: "Do you have a perfect relationship to God? Do you live in perfect obedience and perfect harmony with His will for your life? Do you live the kind of life and do the kind of things that are exactly what God desires of you?" Well, if you cannot say "yes" to that, then your relationship to God is imperfect and you are indeed an enemy to God, you are in rebellion against God

and his perfect will for your life.

Perhaps you remember the incident recorded in Scripture where John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching and cries out, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." Notice that the word "sin" is singular. Jesus does not come so much to die for the various and individual "sins" that we commit, although that is included. But he comes to deal primarily with something far more serious, he comes to deal with man who is living in a state of war, a state of rebellion, he comes to deal with man living out of the will of God. Another meaning of the word sin is found in Jesus himself. He was perfectly in the will of God. Do you remember the scene in the Garden of Gethsemane, the cross eminently before him and our Saviour down on his knees with sweat coming from him as if it were in drops of blood. He didn't want to face that and go through it. He cried, "Oh God, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thine be done." He was perfectly in the will of God. He alone of all men has been able to say "I and the Father are one."

So then if you cannot say this morning that you have perfect fellowship with God-- if you cannot say that you and the Father are one then you are an enemy to God. In the post office, on the bulletin board they have pictures of enemies to the public. Do you know what--in God's heavenly post office there's your picture and it says enemy of God. But don't feel badly about it because mine's right beside it. All of our pictures are there. I suppose St. Paul is as great a saint as ever lived outside of Jesus Christ. Yet, it was this same Paul who cried out, "I am the chief of sinners." He could very well have put it another way, "I am God's biggest enemy." St. Paul was the greatest evangelist for Christ that the world has ever seen and yet here is a man who says that his fellowship with God is imperfect, broken.

The Bible says that God is a Spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. And it is right here that we fall down. Of course, we have a spirit! And on rare, beautiful occasions we can have some sort of fellowship with God. But, oh!, what a fleeting thing it is--how seldom it comes and how imperfectly we know God even in those mountain top experiences. And do you know why? It is because we are not only spirit, but we are also sinful flesh. St. Paul once put it this way, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me."

Has this been your experience? Haven't you really--deep down in your heart--wanted to do good? What would you give this morning to have perfect fellowship with God? It would be worth a lot, wouldn't it? It would be worth a lot to have God when life goes wrong, when trial and tribulation comes, when tragedy and sorrow comes pouring in on us. It would be worth a lot this morning to know that whatever happened God was on our side and everything was going to be all right.

Maybe you are thinking, "well, that's pretty wonderful, but what you are talking about is so idealistic and I know I could never get it." Well, if you said that you would be absolutely right! You can never get it. There isn't anything you can do this morning to wipe out your sin, to get rid of the rebellion in your heart against God. There isn't a single thing you can do on your own to clear your record and give you a fresh start. I have people say to me, "Well, I would join the church, but I know I'm not good enough. One of these days I'm going to do better I'm going to start living right and then when I can do my part, I'm going to join the church." Let me assure you that anybody who is waiting this morning to do something on his own to get right with God is going to be waiting an awfully long time.

Come to think of it, what would you give this morning to pay for your sins? Would you be willing to pay as much per year as you do on your income tax to insure eternal salvation? Would you give your home and possessions for your immortal soul? Just how much would you give? Yet, if you gave all you had--even your life--it wouldn't be enough. You are an enemy to God and you don't have enough to buy him off. From your side, from my side, there is no hope for either of us.

What would life be like if we had to drop the matter there on that hopeless, helpless note? Life would hardly be worth living. That's why the story of the New Testament has been called "good news". It is good news for men in despair. It is good news for men who are lost. It is good news for men who are hopeless and helpless. It is the good news that while we may be enemies to God, God never looks upon us as his enemies. The good news is precisely our text for this morning--"But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Whoever you are this morning, God has never quit loving you. Whoever you are, whatever you may have done, God himself has paid the price of your sin, your rebellion, your brokenness for Jesus has died for your sin. That is the miracle of love. The miracle that while we were yet sinners, yet rebellious, yet enemies of God, God sent his son to die for our sins.

God offers his enemies two things this morning. First, he offers them forgiveness. As a free gift of love in Jesus God holds out the offer of forgiveness. This is not any cheap forgiveness. This is no dime store cross. I have an article written by a doctor that tells what happens physiologically to a person when he is crucified. Some Sunday I'm going to bring that in and read that for my sermon because I don't think we appreciate the human, physical agony that Jesus endured on the cross and when you read this medical description of all the things that happen to a body that's crucified it is an incredible thing. And yet that agony was the least of what Jesus bore, for on the cross not only did he die physically, but he suffered spiritually. He suffered to be cut off from the presence of his father as he became sin for you and for me, as he bore the sins of the world upon himself. No, it was no dime store cross and the price of Calvary was so very high--and yet God offers that forgiveness to every enemy of his this morning. It can be yours this morning--without cost, without price. The only requirement is that you accept it, that you receive it. If I have a gift to give you and hold it out to you it is not truly yours until you reach out with your own hands and receive it. I hold before you this morning Jesus Christ. He is God's gift to you, God's forgiveness. But it is not yours until you receive him, until you reach out and accept him as your very own, as your personal Saviour.

So the first gift God offers his enemies is forgiveness. The second gift God offers is power to begin now to live a new life for him. God offers you power to live not as an enemy, but a member of his family, not as a foe, but as a friend; not as a challenger, but as a child. That power comes when we open our hearts and lives to let in the presence of God, the Holy Spirit of God. Then we feel in our hearts and up-surge of power that enables us now to live like children of God.

That's the miracle of love--that God offers us who have been enemies to him the gift of forgiveness and the gift of power. There will be times when we blow a spiritual fuse and the power won't come on, there will be times when we shut the switch off and try to live in our own power. Still, as long as we try again, as long as we will turn the switch back on, we are people who live under the costly cross and God urges us to get up and try again. God knows you will not always be successful, but as long as you keep trying to live for him you will always be forgiven.

God's offer to each of us is forgiveness for what we have been and power for what we can be. For the enemies of God the war can be over--it depends on you. You see, a war is over when one side surrenders--if you don't want to be God's enemy, you can always surrender.