

8/31/18

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Saul and Jude grew up in a poor neighborhood of New York City. Despite loving parents, these identical twins never seemed to appreciate how much their parents sacrificed for them. They got in trouble in school and with the police. They were living worthless lives, but when Saul was 25, he realized he was wasting his life. He began building a life as a responsible adult. Eventually he moved to the West Coast and became a successful businessman.

Jude continued to spend money recklessly. He took unnecessary risks. He had one girlfriend after another. Jude always bragged to Saul what an important man he was in New York. Saul knew better.

Then one day Jude sent Saul a text—911. It was their code for an emergency. When Saul couldn't get hold of Jude, he bought a round trip ticket to fly to New York to find his brother. For two days Saul could not find Jude. Finally, they met as Saul took a shortcut through a dark alley. From the shadows Jude explained he had an affair with the wife of a mob boss. He was hiding, but sooner or later, the mob would find him and kill him. Jude couldn't go to the police. He couldn't run away. He didn't know what to do.

Saul quickly gave Jude his own driver's license and airplane ticket. Saul and Jude would trade places. Jude could fly to the West Coast and start his life over. Saul would stay and suffer the consequences for what Jude had done.

How could a man love his worthless brother so much?

The apostle Paul understood. He loved his own people, the people of Israel, that he wished God would curse Paul in their place. God had blessed them with the privileges of being adopted into his family, entrusted them with the Ten Commandments, and established them

as ancestors of the Savior. They had wasted these privileges, but Paul was still willing to be punished for them.

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit—I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen. Romans 9:1-5

How could Paul love them so much? Jesus had loved Paul that much.

God has blessed all of us with our bodies, abilities, family, friends, food, clothes, and everything else. We have hijacked these blessings to meet our goals and not God's. We deserve God to give us hell—literally.

Instead, God's Son Jesus chose to become our brother. He chose to switch places with us and suffer the consequences for what we've done. Jesus has given us a fresh start in life by forgiving our sins and adopting us into his family.

Jesus' overwhelming love for Paul filled him with overwhelming love for others. Jesus has done the same for us. We can't save others by being damned for them. But we can save others by sharing with them how Jesus took the blame for all they've done wrong.

Prayer: *Jesus, thank you for switching places with me. I know I can't die to save the people I love, but I can tell them how you died to save them. Use me to show them your love. Amen.*

(WELS E-Devotion, adapted)

...See you in worship.

Keep looking up because the Lord is always looking down – Psalm 121

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