

## **“But GOD...”**

*Romans 5:6-8; Acts 13:26-37*

September 1, 2024

**WHAT?** What is this all about? How can there be significance in just two words? **“But GOD!”** What are these two words all about? These two words occur over three dozen times in the Bible. Entire books have been written on these two words: I have read one and am in the process of reading another. James Montgomery Boice wrote, “May I put it quite simply? If you understand those two words—‘but God’—they will save your soul. If you recall them daily and live by them, they will transform your life completely.” There is a dramatic turn of events from what comes before these two words.

Casey Lute, author of *But God: The Two Words at the Heart of the Gospel*, writes, To the left of “But God” is hopelessness, darkness, and death. But to its right, following “But God,” readers of Scripture will find hope, light, and life. Following God’s intervention, the story of Scripture becomes one of grace, righteousness, and justice.

“But GOD” reminds each one of that God is the One who intervenes in human history. God does not wait for us, but instead, acts for His glory and for our good. “But GOD” tells us that we cannot do life without God.

**ILLUS.:** It was the fall of 1986 and Brenda and I, along with our three oldest boys, were living in Maine. The Boston Red Sox and the New York Mets were in the World Series. You can readily conclude which team the folks in Maine were hoping would win: their beloved Red Sox. The World Series is the best of seven series so the first team to win four games wins the championship. The Mets were down 3 games to 2. It was the bottom of the 10th inning with the Met down 5-3, with two outs, and nobody on base. As a Mets fan, I was sure it would be another season of disappointment. I got up to turn the TV off and Brenda asked why I was doing that. My response, “Because they’re going to lose.” She said they still have one more out and they’re your team. So, I left it on, and I am sure I was the only one in the area going wild after the Mets rallied to win Game six. The next night they would win the seventh and deciding game. It was one of the most improbable victories in World Series history.

Yet, this cannot be compared to what the phrase, “But GOD,” communicates across the pages of Scripture and in the lives of God’s children.

Casey Lute, “But God” marks God’s relentless, merciful interventions in human history. It teaches us that God does not wait for us to bring ourselves to him, but that he acts first to bring about our good. It also teaches us of the potential consequences if God were not to act. Scripture shows over and over that without God’s intervening grace, without the “But God” statements in the Bible, the world would be completely lost in sin and under judgment.

We hope and pray that as we go through this series there would be a fire ignited in our hearts to search the Bible for other “But GOD” references and that we would be looking for those “But GOD,” moments, times, and seasons in our lives. Let the journey begin.

### **WHERE?**

Each week we will look at a different “But GOD” passage that will be prefaced by a personal testimony like we had this morning. Please let us know if you would like to share your story.

I thought this morning, since it is communion Sunday, that we begin with the following two accounts where we see this phrase. We will look at two passages today. The first place is Romans 5, *In Jesus’ Death*, and the second place is Acts 13, *In Jesus’ Resurrection*.

### **IN JESUS’ DEATH**

#### **Romans 5:6-10**

Let’s begin by reading Romans 5:6-10 in unison. Note the “But God” phrase in the middle of this passage.

**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 man, though for a good man 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, when 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!

I want to begin by highlighting 4 adjectives the Apostle uses to describe the condition of each one of us.

**Romans 5:6** You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

*“powerless:”* other translations have “helpless,” “weak,” “without strength,” “feeble,” “sluggish in doing right.”

There is nothing, in and of ourselves, that we can do to earn our salvation, a right standing with God.

*“ungodly:”* impious

**Romans 1:18** The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

James Montgomery Boice, “In these verses, “ungodly” and “godlessness” mean not so much that human beings are unlike God (although that is also true), but that in addition they are in a state of fierce opposition to Him.”

We want to do what we want to do when we want to do it! To come to faith in Christ means giving over ownership of our lives.

**Romans 5:8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

*“sinner:”* falling short of God’s standard

**Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

**Romans 5:10** For if, when 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!

*“enemies;”* we are actually fighting against God! We are opposed to God!

So, there’s the four adjectives: powerless, ungodly, sinners, and enemies of God. You would think that with all these adjectives God would have nothing to do with us. While we were still in this state Christ died for us. Paul is going to make a huge contrast in verse 7.

**Romans 5:7** Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die.

Literally: “for the good man someone might possibly dare to die.” This does not describe any one of us. Following this verse, we have the “but GOD” phrase.

**Romans 5:8** But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

*“demonstrates:”* this is a present tense. God is still demonstrating His love for us by the cross. Jesus Christ took our place, taking our punishment on the cross, for our sins. It is why while on the cross, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!” As Jesus bore our sins on the cross, God the Father had to look away. This is the greatest act of love EVER!

Who sent Jesus to the cross? Many answer that question: “We did.” Actually, God the Father sent Jesus to the cross.

John Piper writes, “The ultimate answer to the question, Who crucified Jesus? is: God did. It is a staggering thought. Jesus was his Son. And the suffering was unsurpassed. But the whole message of the Bible leads to this conclusion.” (John Piper, *The Passion of Jesus Christ: Fifty Reasons Why He Came to Die*)

What did Jesus pray in the Garden of Gethsemane?

**Luke 22:42** “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”

It was the Father’s will that Jesus die. This was the mission that Jesus came to earth to accomplish. Yet, Jesus also died willingly for us.

**John 10:17–18** The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. **18** No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

This reminds us that salvation is all of God. There is nothing for which we can take credit. God doesn't look at you or me and say, “Look at all they can offer. Look at all their talents and abilities. Look at their wonderful personality. I'm going to save that one.” No, while you and I were still a mess before God. While we had no way out, nothing to earn God's favor, and nothing to impress Him. While we were in utter rebellion against God He demonstrated His love for us. The Apostle Paul mentions three results of the cross for all who come to faith in Christ.

**Romans 5:9** Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

“*we have now been justified:*” this is a past tense, passive verb in the original language. This means it has already been accomplished and because it is a passive verb, this means God is one who is doing it. It literally means, “to declare righteous.”

“*we shall be saved from God's wrath:*” this is a future tense and is also in the passive form. Jesus Christ took on the wrath that we deserved and God is the one who is doing the saving!

The results of the cross don't stop there!

**Romans 5:10** For if, when 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!

“*reconciled:*” both times this verb is in the past tense (accomplished fact) and passive: God is doing the reconciling. We have been made right with God. We who were once described as the enemies of God have had our relationship with God restored.

“*shall be saved:*” just like the previous verb, speaking of being saved, it is a future tense and in the passive form. God does the saving! AMEN!!!

**1 John 5:11–13** And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. **12** He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. **13** I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.

Who receives the glory for salvation? You and I not only come with nothing to impress God, but we also come with baggage and condemnation we can do nothing to remove. Is this not the ultimate “But GOD” example. We see it in Jesus' death and we see it:

## **IN JESUS' RESURRECTION**

**Acts 13:26-31**

**Acts 13:26-31** “Brothers, children of Abraham, and you God-fearing Gentiles, it is to us that this message of salvation has been sent. The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath. Though they found no proper ground for a death sentence, they asked Pilate to have him executed. When they had carried out all that was written about him, they took him down from the tree and laid him in a tomb. But God raised him from the dead, and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.

This passage assures us that Jesus was killed and that He was buried. The religious leaders had finally gotten rid of Jesus.

**1 Corinthians 15:3–4** For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, **4** that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

The men who put Jesus to death thought they were the ones in control. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

Peter preached about this to his fellow Israelites. This is the same Peter who had denied he even knew Jesus. This is how the resurrection changed everything for Peter.

**Acts 2:22–24** “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. **23** This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **24** But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

After Jesus was buried, we read: “But God raised him from the dead.” Without the resurrection Jesus’ death on the cross has no power and is meaningless.

**1 Corinthians 15:14–19** And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. **15** More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. **16** For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. **17** And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. **18** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. **19** If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

Talk about a great reversal! It was predicted in the Scriptures. So, some ask, “Who resurrected Jesus?” In Acts 13 it is stated that God the Father did. As we look at all of Scripture, we see that all of the Trinity was involved in the resurrection of Jesus.

**Galatians 1:1** Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

**1 Peter 3:18** For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

**Romans 1:4** and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Romans 8:11** And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

**John 2:19** Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

**John 11:25** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies;

**Revelation 1:18** I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

The resurrection guarantees the resurrection of the believer. Because He is raised so shall we be raised.

**1 Corinthians 6:14** By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

**1 Corinthians 15:20–21** But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

**21** For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. Picture of empty tomb

Casey Lute: “So the resurrection served as much more than an epilogue to the story of Jesus. It gave a victory cry, an eternal declaration, a triumphant shout in which God broke the chains of death and emphatically declared Jesus to be his divine Son, the one spoken of in times past as coming to defeat sin.”

## SO WHAT??

So many times in conversation when somebody responds with, “but,” it can be an excuse or an opportunity to blame someone else. When joined with the word, God, in the Bible, it pictures a great reversal. What would you and I do without the cross and empty tomb? We would be dead in our sins, separated from God, no hope for the present or eternity.

**John 10:10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

\*Have I come to know the One who has provided the greatest deliverance ever

*And Can It Be*  
By Charles Wesley

Stanzas 3 & 4

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;  
Alive in Him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Refrain:

Amazing love! How can it be,  
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

\*Am I willing to trust God even when the circumstances look bleak?

\*With whom will I share my "But GOD" experiences?

\*Spend some time reading and meditating on Genesis 6-8 for our next "But GOD" message.

