

The Love of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 July 2010

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Many of you have been to the dunes and around Lake Michigan and you know what it is to stand at the bottom of one of those giant hills of sand and say I'm going to reach the top and so you start climbing and you know what it is it's like your feet go out from under you time and time again and it's hot and you're sweating and as you come up to the top you turn around and even though you're huffing and puffing maybe the view is worth it the view made all the work worth it and so there you see in front of you Lake Michigan stretching out sparkling as clear and as blue as can be to the edge of the horizon and all the work was worth it.

Well the love of God is something like that except it's not a little Indiana dune it is a mountain it's more like Mount Everest and so we stand at the at the bottom of Mount Everest and today we want to begin to climb and it is going to be hard work but the view is worth it.

And I'm going to ask you as I asked myself not to let this be just some sort of summary Sunday school lesson about the love of God where you mentally say oh yeah I've heard all of this before and you sort of check it off the list and you move on.

If we do that if I teach that way and you hear this lesson that way then really this will be a complete and utter waste of time. I mean if we're honest with ourselves but if we are willing to do the hard work that it takes to think again about the love of God I think the view is going to be worth it.

It's going to be something glorious. It's going to be something that will take your breath away. So let's begin with that commitment that we are going to work hard to understand God's love.

[2:03] Two times in 1 John chapter 4 the apostle says one of the most remarkable statements in all of the Bible. And listen to them. Verse 8.

Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. Verse 16. God is love.

Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. Two times John says God is love. And in some ways that is one of the most one of the easiest statements to understand.

There's just three words. They're simple words. God is love. They're simple. They're short. And yet they are very profound.

They're very hard to understand. They're easy to understand on the surface. But to dig into them is one of the most daunting tasks that we have.

[3:05] But just because it is daunting and people misunderstand that statement a lot. It doesn't mean that we can avoid it. And it doesn't mean that we should try to avoid it. Because it is going to be worth it to dig into it.

This is a mountain that we want to climb. So what does it mean when John says God is love? Well, this is a truth that has a lot of overgrowth that's kind of grown around it over the years.

And we need to cut it back. Cut back some of the overgrowth. So picture a beautiful garden. And over the years, people have stopped coming to it.

Gardeners have stopped coming. And the hedges and the trees and everything is sort of just all overgrown. And then one day a gardener comes and he begins cutting back the trees. And he begins cutting back the weeds, taking out the weeds.

And then the garden's glory begins to shine again. You begin to see what it used to be and how beautiful it was. And that's what we need to do with this truth that God is love. We need to cut back a lot of the things that have kind of attached itself to it so that we can see its glory and how it shines.

[4:22] And the way we're going to do that is by saying, first of all, and this is your first point in your handout, that God is love is not the whole truth as far as the Bible is concerned.

It's not the whole truth as far as the Bible is concerned about God. So God is love is not some abstract, all-encompassing statement of what and who God is.

It's not the beginning and end of the story. John is writing to fellow believers, and it's to them he's saying, God is love. But you know, John, he knew the Old Testament. He walked with Jesus. He knew that God was much more than just sort of an abstract definition of this is God is love. He wasn't ruling out all the other things that the Bible says about who God is and what God does.

So this question is super easy. It's like a 10-foot beach ball. You can barely miss it. And I want to ask you, what are some of the other things that the Bible says about who God is and what he's done?

[5:36] He's a consuming fire. What else? He's truth. Saw that last week. What else? He's majestic.

Lou. He's the creator. So he's a definite person, and he's created us. Okay.

He's the one that plans things. He's personal, and he's planning. What else could we say? He's holy, holy just.

Holy and just. Right. God is light. In him there is no darkness. John says that.

Yes, Dale. He's unchangeable. God is the judge, isn't he? He judged the whole earth in a flood.

[6:34] There was one family saved. God is the one that brings his people into Jerusalem. God is the one that brings his people into Jerusalem. Lamentations is that his compassion never fails.

Okay. His compassion never fails. Lamentations is Jeremiah's lament for when Jerusalem was destroyed.

God is the one that brings his people into Jerusalem. And as we saw in Hosea and a lot of the other prophets, God is the one that brings his people into judgment. And then he's the one that promises restoration.

And so that is something of who God is. God came in the person of Jesus Christ. And as he's riding into Jerusalem, he is weeping over the city.

Because in a few short years, it is going to be destroyed. God's going to send his judgment on it. God is the one who sovereignly chooses people.

[7:36] God is the one who sovereignly chooses people. So there's this nobody down in Ur of the Chaldees. And God says, Abram, come. I'm going to go to the land that I'm going to show you.

And so he chooses Abraham and says, I'm going to make a great nation out of you. And that's what he does. So that is the God who John is saying, God is love.

It's not the whole statement. But obviously, God is more than just love. God is not some sort of pushover.

Some sort of like senile old grandpa in the sky that a lot of people think. Where he's just like this benign spirit in the sky that just can't help doing good to all people.

God has edges. He is the creator and he's a person. He has edges and he has points that will break people. And destroy people.

[8:36] He'll destroy nations and individuals. In one of the Chronicles of Narnia books, a little girl named Jill meets Aslan. And Jill asks Aslan, do you eat girls?

And Aslan replied, I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms. It didn't say this as if it were boasting.

Nor as if it were sorry. Nor as if it were angry. It just said it. And that's our God. He's not tame. He's not just automatically benign.

No one can take God as love as if that is saying that that is all God is. But now, we have to walk on a nice edge.

And we have to say something that sounds contradictory to what we just said, but it isn't. And so, listen carefully, and it's the next statement. God is love is the complete truth about God as far as the Christian is concerned.

[9:47] God is love is the complete truth about God so far as the Christian is concerned. And so, no one missed this.

John is really telling us that in everything that God does and is and feels and thinks and plans for the Christian is wrapped in the garment of love.

So, every thought that God has for the Christian is love. And sometimes, he's angry with a Christian, but that anger comes from a heart of love.

And sometimes, he disciplines the Christian and brings them into very difficult situations, but he does it out of love. And so, yes, John is saying everything that God does and is for us is love.

He does it because he loves us. And so, at all times, love is in the driver's seat when he's dealing with his people. And all of his actions and feelings toward his people, love is in the driver's seat. [10:55] And so, he loves you with all of his heart. And the only face that you ever see of God is a face of love.

And sometimes, it looks angry, and it is angry, but it's a loving anger. And sometimes, it's a frowning love. And sometimes, it's a furious love. But no matter what, for the believer, God is love. And so, he's completely, utterly, from the bottom of his heart, passionately, can we say, in love with you.

And you say, I don't know. It doesn't feel like that. It doesn't seem like that. And I can tell you how you can know that God is love. Because the same John that says God is love, he said this. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. He laid down his life for us. And how deep the pain of searing loss.

[11:59] The Father turns his face away as wounds which mar the chosen one bring many sons to glory. God is reckless in his love to you.

And by that, I mean, he doesn't count the cost of loving you. So, does love demand his son? Then he sends his son.

He gives his son. Am I saying that anything outside of him is compelling him to love you? I'm not saying that. I'm saying his heart, he has sovereignly decided to set his entire heart and love on you. His own love compelled him. And so, in Hosea, God in anguish says, How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over?

And with the same passion and with the same anguish, God says, How can I let my children die? Go, my son. Go and die in their place.

[13:05] And that's how we know that God is love for us. Because the cross is screaming that God is love.

And in every moment and every day of every one of the Christians' lives, love is falling on them. Love is falling on you.

And so, you are a ship. And you are in the current of God's love. And God's love is taking you to a heavenly harbor where for all of eternity, he is going to pour out his love on you, the riches of his grace.

And so, we can't miss this glory that God is love is the sum total of what God is for the believer in Jesus Christ.

We can't miss that glory. So, we've cleared away some of the debris of that phrase, God is love.

[14:07] We've said it's not the whole story about God, but it is a summary of who God is for his people. And so, now let's put a microscope on God's love. We've kind of cleared it away.

Now, let's look at what is God's love. Packer gives a definition of God's love. And it's on your handout. And this, it sounds rather clinical as you read it.

It sounds sort of scientific, but I think you will see as we dig into this, that this is majestic. God's love is glorious.

So, you have it there on your paper. God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward individual sinners, whereby, having identified himself with their welfare, he has given his son to be their savior and now brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relationship.

So, Packer breaks this down into six constituent parts, and that's where we're going to spend the rest of this time that we have, just briefly going over each one of these. So, first of all, God's love is an exercise of his goodness.

[15:25] It's an exercise of his goodness. You can think of God's love as his cosmic, or God's goodness as his cosmic generosity.

Listen to some of these texts. Well, listen to all of these texts. Luke 6.35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back, then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. So, God is good to all men. God is good to the evil and the good. God was good to Hitler. God was good to Stalin.

God was good to Nero. God is good presently to Hindus and Buddhists and Muslims. He is good to them. His love, his goodness, extends to everyone in some way.

Acts 14.17 Paul is speaking to the pagans in Lystra, and he says this, Yet he, that's God, Yet God has not left himself without testimony. He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and

crops in their seasons.

[16 : 35] He provides you with plenty of food and fills your heart with joy. Joy. We don't think about that very often. But God is the one who gives joy to pagans.

Well, it was raining a few weeks ago, and we were driving in the car, and I asked the girls, So, who is God sending the rain to?

The good or the bad? The good people or the bad people? And one of my girls, I don't remember which one, said, The good people. And that's how we think a lot of times, don't we?

God does good to those who are good. But the Bible says wrong. The rain was falling on the bad people's houses, too, and the good people's houses. It was falling on everyone's grass.

It was falling on everyone's field. It was falling on everyone's garden. God is good to everyone. And that's God's goodness. And God's love is an expression of that goodness.

[17 : 40] His love comes, springs from that, from his heart. It's his inclination to be generous to all of his creatures. And so God's love stems from his character.

It comes from who he is. It isn't forced. It isn't contrived. He doesn't have to pretend or put on airs. It comes naturally from who he is. So God is generous to all he has made.

The first part. That's the first part of the definition. The second part. God's love is an exercise of his goodness toward sinners. Because that's all there are as far as people are concerned.

Ever since Adam fell in the garden, God's goodness to man has always come in the form of grace and mercy. It's always been in that form. Grace and mercy.

It's grace because we don't deserve it. And it's mercy because we are in a very miserable state.

And he pities us. What is amazing about God's love is that there's nothing in us that calls it forth.

[18 : 48] He doesn't look at us and see anything lovely that he just has to love us. And you've heard this illustration a million times, but men, when you were dating your wives, I assume there was something in them that you found attractive, that you loved them.

And God's love isn't like that. He didn't find anything attractive in us whereby he just had to love us.

And yet, his love has been boundless towards us. He loved us because he chose to love us.

Sometimes you see a dog and a cat sleeping together.

And I don't really think dogs and cats are natural enemies, but over the years, the dog and the cat, they become so comfortable with each other that they sleep together.

And they become very familiar with each other. I don't know if you call it love, but some sort of love grows between them. And humans are the same way. You know, if you work with someone for long enough, people that you would never be friends with, that you would never love, you grow attached to them.

[20 : 02] You grow to love them in a certain way, even though they're very different from you. And even though in some ways there's nothing in them that you would naturally gravitate to.

We become comfortable with each other. And so, you know, we love each other in a way. That is possible for creatures. But that sort of love is not possible between God and sinners.

God could never become comfortable with sinners. God could never just get over the sin. And the sinners could never become comfortable with God. God abhors sin.

It's the direct antithesis to everything that God is. Sin attacks God at every place that He is God. In every way that God is God, sin opposes Him.

And so, they could never become comfortable. We could never, as sinners, come to some sort of comfortable conclusion or with God. And so, when God loves us, it's pitiful love.

[21 : 09] He pities us. It's undeserved love. And so, brothers, the fact that God sends rain on the wicked should absolutely stagger us.

It should really stun us if we weren't so used to it. It is glorious. Third, God's love is an exercise of His goodness toward individual sinners.

Toward individual sinners. sinners. And we begin to narrow it down to sort of general how God loves all creatures and all people.

And this is how He really begins to love His people. He loves individual sinners. It would be totally wrong for us to think that God's love is some sort of you know, like, vapor spreading around or some spiritual amorphous kind of love without shape.

It's just sort of this benign spirit that He loves everyone in general but no one in particular. That is not what God's love is like.

[22:20] His love is an exercise of goodness to individual people. And that's why Paul could say, the life I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Paul says that in Galatians 2.20. And you know, that whole context is how we're justified by faith alone and not by works. And so Paul is saying, the grounds of my justification are actually very, very, very narrow.

I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. Paul, why, how can you be justified? It's because Jesus loved me and He gave Himself up for me.

He died for me. My justification rests entirely on God, on Jesus Christ and God's personal love for me, on His specific saving love.

And so, Paul's theology was not a theology of generalities. He always hones it down to the very specific things, to specifics.

[23:29] So listen to how Paul put it in 2 Thessalonians. But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers, loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

He called you to this through our gospel that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says, you are loved by the Lord.

The Lord loves you. And His love showed itself in very particular acts. He chose you. And then, at the right time, His love came to you through the gospel and the gospel came and Paul came to them.

God sent them a missionary specifically to them. And so, brothers and sisters, think of that. God loves you.

He loves you individually. You aren't confused in His mind with anyone else. And you're not loved because you belong to some sort of group and He loves that group in sort of a general way.

[24:41] He loves you in particular. He knows you personally. That's what Psalm 139 is all about, isn't it? He knows you personally and particularly and His heart goes out to you.

And that's glorious because we can sort of love a lot of things in general. But when God loves us in particular, that is glorious.

Four, God's love to sinners involves His identifying Himself with their welfare. Identifying Himself with their welfare.

Love is essentially longing and working with all your heart for the good of someone else, for the good of another person, for the good of the object loved.

And in great compassion, God identifies Himself with His people's good, with their welfare. So you have a father who has a son who is addicted to drugs.

[25:50] And the father isn't upset at all about it. And he goes on his life as happy as me while his son destroys himself.

And you can tell that the father doesn't love the son. because if he loved the son, he would be heartbroken. He would identify with his son's difficulty.

The father isn't seeing the son's good as his good. Do you get that? Do you understand that? He doesn't see his son's good as his good. His welfare, the father's welfare isn't wrapped up in the son's welfare.

And so he isn't identifying himself with the son. He doesn't love him. And on the other side, you have a husband and a wife who love each other. And you have a man that loves his wife and then her successes become his successes.

When she is doing well, he is doing well. And when she is struggling, he is struggling. And when someone says something nice about her, his heart is thrilled.

[26:58] And that husband is identifying with his wife. His good is her good. His welfare is her welfare. And so he is investing his well-being into her.

He is putting it into her. And the amazing thing is that God does that with you. Does God seek his glory with all of his heart?

Yes. Yes. God is absolutely passionate about pursuing his glory. That is his chief end.

He wants to exalt his name. And he wants everyone everywhere to stand in amazement of who he is. He wants his perfections to be paraded so everyone can just stand in amazement at how glorious and how worthy and how exalted God is.

But that truth, we need to balance it with this truth. Listen to what Packer says. It needs to be balanced by a recognition that through setting his love on human beings, God has voluntarily bound

up his own final happiness with theirs.

[28 : 15] He's bound up his own final happiness with theirs. In other words, God's glory and our good have been tied together. They've been married. And it's not for nothing that the Bible habitually speaks of God as a loving father and a husband of his people.

It follows from the very nature of these relationships that God's happiness will not be complete till all his beloved ones are finally out of trouble.

God's happiness is tied to our good. And if you get a hold of that, that will transform you. Or if that gets a hold of you, that will transform you.

God's happiness is tied to your good. And that means God not only saves you for his glory, he saves you to make himself glad.

He saves you to make you glad. He does it to make himself happy. And God will be faithful to you to the day that you die and forever and ever. not so much because you have been faithful to him and not because you're so worthy of that faithfulness.

[29 : 28] It's because God is pursuing his joy and he's pursuing it in your good. And so he's absolutely committed to making himself happy and that means he's absolutely committed to doing you good.

And so it's not a drudgery to bless you. God isn't slow to bless you. He is quick to bless you because if he blesses you that means that it makes him happy.

Does that make sense? If he does you good then he makes himself glad. That's what it means that he's invested himself in you. He's identified with your welfare.

And so it's his joy. And so think about that. What does that mean for your prayer life? what kind of confidence should we have as we pray when we ask God to do good things for us?

What does it mean for your assurance? Are you sure, assured of your final salvation because of something in yourself or is it resting in God's who God is?

[30 : 42] And what does it mean that what is possible? What does it mean for what's possible for your life through his grace? If God has a hair trigger, however that phrase goes, where he's ready to pull the trigger in giving you grace, what does that mean about what your life could be if you asked?

And we don't have time to go into all the ramifications of that, but I hope the Spirit of God will teach you what that means as you think about it.

How good that is and how glorious God's love is. Fifth, God's love to sinners was expressed by the gift of his Son to be their Savior.

We've already mentioned this, but God's love is supremely expressed in his gift of his Son, in sending his Son to die and then raising his Son to be your mediator.

And it's that one act of love and one act of generosity that ensures that guarantees absolutely and completely all the other acts of God's love. So Romans 8.32, this is familiar, it tells us, he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

[32 : 04] If I loved you so much that I gave up one of my daughters to die for your good, do you think I would be slow to give you five dollars if you need a gas for your car?

It's absolutely inconceivable that God will not keep blessing you if he's given you his son. He will give you all things, it is guaranteed. And yet how hard it is sometimes to believe that he is just that good.

the Christian life isn't so much a struggle to make it to the end, it's a struggle to believe that God is going to keep you to the end, that God has told you that you are going to make it, because there is no doubt, there is no doubt that the victory is already won, the victory is yours.

You don't have it yet completely, but it will be yours one day. See, Jesus already won it all on the cross. He won all of our blessings forever and ever on the cross.

And the question is, will we believe it and will we rest in it or will we not? 1 John, right before he says God is love, he says this, and so we know, we know and we rely on the love God has for us.

[33 : 28] We rely on it. And that's how the Christian lives. We trust that God is going to keep loving us to the very end. And that God is going to provide us with everything that we need for life and godliness because God has already shown us the greatest act of love that he could ever show us.

So, sixth, finally, God's love to sinners reaches its objective as it brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relationship.

It reaches its objective as it brings them to know and enjoy him in a covenant relationship. God's love has an aim. It has a target. And it's to bring all of his chosen ones into a covenant relationship with him.

A covenant relationship is a permanent relationship. relationship where two parties are tied together for better or for worse.

And where their good is tied together. And each of their powers and their abilities and their gifts and their strengths are tied together.

[34 : 47] And so that they are mutually working together. Their energies and their efforts and their aims are the same. They're one. And so marriage is a beautiful picture of how two people can become one in a covenant relationship.

And marriage is a perfect picture of what God is doing with his people. Where God's love is taking his people. It's all about absolute unity, intimacy, commitment to the other person's good.

So when you become married, you no longer think of your own, but you think of the other person's good. And so, just like what we talked about, it's identifying yourself completely with the other person's welfare.

And it goes both ways. Now, that is what God's love does for his people. He brings them into that relationship. And the Bible has one phrase that marks out God's covenant relationship.

There's one promise that binds him and his people together. And it says this, and you see it throughout scripture, I will be your God and you will be my people.

[36 : 07] I will be your God and you will be my people. And that is the greatest promise that anyone could have. And that means that God is all for us.

All of God is all for us. His power is our power. His grace is now our grace. He exercises all that he is for us.

So listen to what a Puritan, an old Puritan said. You shall have as true an interest in all my attributes for your good as they are for my glory.

My grace, says God, shall be yours to pardon you. And my power shall be yours to protect you. And my wisdom shall be yours to direct you.

And my goodness shall be yours to relieve you. And my mercy shall be yours to supply you. And my glory shall be yours to crown you. everything that God is, every single attribute is now working completely for his people.

[37 : 24] And only for his people. And that's what God that's what God's love does for his people. If you have God, brothers and sisters, then you have everything.

And it simply means that God is going to do the best he can for you. He's going to do the best he can. And what is the limit of how good God can do?

What's the best that God can do? It has no measure. It's omnipotence. It's omniscience. It's holy, holy, holy.

It's transcendent righteousness for his people. It's infinite power. It's infinite wisdom.

And that's what God's heart is for his people. And that's what God's heart is doing for his people even now. And what he will be doing for them forever and ever and ever.

[38 : 35] So what should you do? Take home your sheets and worship because that kind of love deserves all of your heart and all of your joy.

We are dismissed. may