

God's Love Is

Sunday, February 15, 2015

Good morning! Yesterday was what day? Of course it was Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day is all about love. I know here in Japan we also have White Day and the men reciprocate the gifts that the ladies gave them. Traditionally, in America men and women both give flowers, candy, and other gifts to each other to show our love. How many of you know the true story of Valentine's Day?

I want to tell you a story about a man named Valentinus. Valentinus was a Roman priest during the reign of Emperor Claudius. This emperor was not a fan of Christianity and he persecuted the church. At that time the emperor passed a law that forbid young people from getting married. His reason for passing this law was that he believed that unmarried men made better soldiers. He thought that married soldiers wouldn't fight as hard because they were worried what would happen to their families if they died. Valentinus disagreed with this law. He actually thought the opposite that married soldiers would fight harder to end the war quicker so that they could get home. Valentinus would secretly marry people in the church. As it happens he was eventually caught and thrown into prison. At this point in the story of his life that it is hard to separate fact from the legends but one of the legends says that one of the men who was going to judge him had a daughter who was blind. The story says that Valentinus prayed for this daughter and the young girl was healed so that she could see again. This resulted in her father becoming a Christian. Even though he was in prison, Valentinus fell in love with this girl. It was in the year 269AD that Valentinus was sentenced to die. The story goes that the last words that he wrote were to the girl that he had healed. He closed the letter by signing it 'From Your Valentine'.

How much of that story is real and how much of it is fiction is up for date. But the fact is that people celebrate love in the world. Unfortunately, the word love has become overused in society today. We hear the word love all the time and it has real lost its meaning. You can hear people say, "I love that movie," or "I love ice cream" or "I really love that song," or "I love the way I look in these clothes." Other people say, "I love my wife, I love my kids, I love my husband." The question is do they really love ice cream as much as they love their spouse? DO they love that song as much as they love their children? Of course not. The love that they experience from ice cream or music is just a good feeling of enjoyment that they have when they eat the ice cream or they hear the song.

There is a song that I like that has had a positive impact on my life. It is called "How He Loves" by a man named John Mark McMillan. In this song, it talks about God's love for us. John Mark says he wrote this song about love but it is not about Hollywood, a pretty type of love. It is a love that loves during the difficult times and during the worst of times. This song was written during a very difficult time in his life. One of his best friends had just been killed in a car accident and he couldn't understand why. He says that he was mad at God. He was frustrated with God. He really didn't know how to respond to the news of his friend's death. He decided that he needed to have a conversation with God. In that conversation he told God exactly how he was feeling. He didn't hold anything back. He really expressed his anger and frustration to God. It was during that conversation he felt God loving him even though it was a very messy conversation. It was at that moment that he knew that God would love him no matter what. In this song that he wrote it is the expression of the love that God has for us. At the end of my message I am going to have the song played and you have the lyrics in your bulletin so that you can follow along with it.

Today I want to talk to you about this love that God has for us.

1 John 4:7-16 ⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

This passage is all about love and God's love. In verse 8, John states that God IS love. This is such a deep topic that we could spend a lot of time talking about it and never fully cover the entire subject. What I want to do today is share with you 5 things that God's love is.

Number 1. God's love is gracious. Do you realize how gracious God's love is for us? When you think about it, do you understand what we really deserve? God loves us for who we are not for what we can bring to the table. A lot of times people love other people for what they can offer them or based on their superficial characteristics such as they are good looking, have money, they dress nicely, and they attract us to others. There is nothing IN us that can attract God to us. In fact our very sin nature should make God want to run away from us but He doesn't run away from us. God loves us in our dirtiness, in our smelly clothes, and in our sin.

Romans 5:6-8 ⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—

⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

These verses talk about how God was willing to sacrifice his son for us while we were sinners and how no one will even die for a good person let alone people who are trapped in sin. That IS a gracious love. Being willing to die for someone whose very nature is filthy in your sight. This is really a love that we don't deserve and that is why it is a gracious love.

Number 2. God's love is unlimited. Have you ever been to a buffet at a restaurant? They tell you that you can eat as much as you want and you can have unlimited food. That really can't happen though because if you sat there and just continued to eat and eat eventually either you would get full or the restaurant would run out of food. God's love is unlimited and it will never run out. We can sit there all day and take God's love and He still has more to give. One of God's main characteristics is that he is infinite. Infinite means immeasurably great or unlimited. No matter how hard we try we cannot grasp or comprehend the greatness and the enormity of God's love. If you were to compare God's love to the highest mountain, His love goes higher than that mountain. His love is deeper

than the deepest ocean. Ephesians 3:17-19 ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

These verses talk about the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge. Think about that for a minute. God's love surpasses all knowledge. We live in the age of technology and part of that technology gives us knowledge in an instant. It is right there at our finger tips. If you don't know the answer to something you just pull out your smart phone and ask google your question and you get your answer. Even with all of this knowledge available to us, we cannot know the extent of God's love.

Number 3. God's love is unchanging. Human love changes over time. Certain points in people's life they love a certain activity but as they get older their tastes or their interest change. Right now if you talk to any little kids here in Japan they love Yokai Watch. It is 'the thing' right now to love. You know as the kids get older or new things come along they will stop loving Yokai Watch and they will begin to love something new. People they fall in and out of love because their love changes. God's love though is unchanging. It doesn't change with every new season of life. He doesn't stop loving us when someone new comes along or something new comes into existence. His love doesn't change when we go through the rough times in life and the dark times. When it feels like we are going through a losing streak, God's love for us doesn't change. He is right there with us going through that losing streak with us. When we hurt Him and offend Him, he doesn't fall out of love with us. His love endures without change. I read this quote from a pastor this week and he says, "Love that will love no matter what the cost, love that will love no matter what way you turn out, or no matter what you do, or no matter what you say right into the face of the one who is loving you." THAT is God's love. Because this love that God has for us is unchanging it also means that nothing can separate us from that love. We are joined to His love and we can't be pulled away from it.

Romans 8:35-39 ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verse 35 asks, 'Who can separate us from the love of God?' and the verses go on and ask, "Can trouble, danger, famine, and even death separate us from the love of God?" The answer given to us in the bible is that no, nothing is able to separate us from the love of God. The exciting thing is that not only is God's love unchanging and unlimited but it is also eternal.

This brings us to Number 4. God's love is eternal. Human love is limited to our time here on earth but God's love isn't limited to time here on earth. God's love is a love that has existed from the beginning and it will continue forever.

Jeremiah 31:2-3 Thus says the LORD:

"The people who survived the sword
found grace in the wilderness;
when Israel sought for rest,
³ the LORD appeared to him^[a] from far away.
I have loved you with an everlasting love;
therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

This verse is a great verse. Think about this. Before we were born God knew that there would be us. He knew that one day I would walk this earth and before my existent came into being God loved me. Looking out here today, God knew that each one of you would be sitting here this very day before you were even born and He loved you and He does love you. God loves the people that are going to be born 100 years from now. He has loved and does love every person from the beginning of time but when our time here on earth ends and when this earth ends that doesn't mean that God's love is going to end. His love is going to continue in heaven and we get to be in heaven for all of eternity soaking up God's love. We in our heavenly bodies turn will give back our love to Him by worshipping Him day and night. This love will be unlike anything we have given before. It is not a human love. It is a love shared between the Creator and the created.

Lastly, number 5. God's love is a saving love.

John 3:16 ¹⁶"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

This single verse really sums up God's love perfectly. God loved the world so much that he sacrificed His son so that we could be saved and that saving love doesn't exclude anyone. The saving love is inclusive. To me, this is the single most important aspect of God's love. In my mind and for me personally, I look at it this way, without God's saving love then other aspects of His love are not worth anything. Let me explain what I mean by that. If I can't be saved by God's love, then it really doesn't matter if His love is gracious. It doesn't matter if it is unlimited because in actuality if it can't save me it is limited and it is not gracious. If God's love isn't saving, then it really isn't good for all eternity and it can change then. It doesn't do many any good to believe that God's love is unchanging, unlimited, gracious, and eternal if salvation isn't involved. This is really what separates Christianity from any other belief system. Our God loves us with a saving love.

If you look at God's love as a circle, you see at this point there is His saving love and as you go around the circles that saving love is eternal. You keep going around in the circle and that saving love is unchanging and you keep going and you see that saving love is unlimited. When you come back around to the top of the circle you see that the saving love is gracious. Just like that circle there is no beginning or end to God's love. It is all united.

Now as I conclude this today, I am going to have the song played that I mentioned earlier. I want you to listen to the song. This song is an expression of God's love. I want you to sit there and delight in the love that God has for you. If you have not experienced God's love, I want you to really think about what I talked about today about how much God loves you. As this song plays, I really want you to think about God's love. After the song finishes, I will come back and pray to close today's message.

(INSERT PLAY SONG)