

- **Last Sunday we started a short series we are calling “The Greatest Power in the Universe”... this, of course, is LOVE. Not just some generic concept of love, but the LOVE OF GOD. If you missed last week, I really encourage you to go back and listen to it, or read my notes. (AUDIO NOW ONLINE)... THE BIG IDEA THAT WE EXPLORED...**

✠ God Is Love... No ‘yeah buts’ allowed!

Reality! Love is not just one of God's attributes. Love is the totality of God's nature, character, presence, and essence. God's countenance toward all of creation and all of humanity, for all eternity, is Love!

- **Because this is true... important “THEREFORE...”**

Any teaching- Biblical or otherwise- that seeks to place a limitation on God's love (and our calling to love others with the Love of God) must be evaluated through the lens of God's love for all people that we see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- **This may sound like Christianity 101, but it is a profound perspective to really consider- to REALLY think about when it comes to how we think about and relate to OTHER PEOPLE. In fact, as we've touched on several times over the past year, if the essence of God is LOVE, then the essence of sin is a failure to love.**
- **Friends, this gets practical really quick. But before we can really wrestle with what it LOOKS LIKE to LOVE the people of this world, we FIRST must begin to comprehend the NATURE OF THE INVITATION GOD EXTENDS- to all people- to RECEIVE and ENTER INTO the goodness, redemption, and hope of His Love.**
- **This is what we are doing today. We're going to outline some NT realities about the Father's Love (things many of you well know)- CHALLENGE is to take this, find some time across the next week or so, and go back and read through these scriptures. Consider HOW THEY BECOME REAL- RELEVANT- in your life.**
- **If you have questions, things you have trouble understanding- WRITE DOWN.. then spend time praying through this, perhaps reaching out to another believer to discuss - Because this is one of the most basic, most essential realities we must come to terms with as we seek to experience God's presence.**
- **SO, let's jump in. Attributes of the NATURE of....**

✠ The Father's Love- is undeserved and unconditional.

- **SO MUCH scripture that speaks to this- but consider just these...**

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

- **THINK... when we were defined by the brokenness and self-centeredness of the human condition- with absolutely nothing to render us deserving of God's love or mercy- save the critical truth that we are His Creation- IN THIS CONDITION, CHRIST DID EVERYTHING necessary for us to be brought back into a living relationship with Him.**
- **WHERE THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO, CHRIST DID EVERYTHING.**
- **You see, GOD IS NOT THE GOD OF PERFORMANCE BASED ACCEPTANCE. HE is the God of MERCY and LOVE based acceptance, and the mercy and love is HIS.**

Titus 3:3-5 *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and*

pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

- **THIS IS THE HUMAN CONDITION!**
- **By the way, observation here. Over past year I almost continually hear some people-believers- say things like “Our word is falling apart. We are surrounded by foolishness, things that make no sense, people don’t want to be obedient to anything, much less God, people are deceived and enslaved by every kind of passion and addiction you can imagine, our culture seems full of malice, envy, so much hate. Turn on the news... the republicans hate the democrats, and the democrats hate the republicans... WE’VE PASSED THE POINT OF NO RETURN, COME LORD JESUS.**
- **FRIENDS... this has ALWAYS BEEN THE CASE. In or around the year AD 63, the Apostle Paul takes a look at the world around him, and THIS IS WHAT HE SEES! In fact, in some areas, things were worse THEN than they are NOW. But I digress....THIS IS WHO WE WERE....**

⁴ But (**BUT! FULL STOP! THE END OF WORD IS PREMATURE! THERE IS HOPE!!!**) when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,

- **One more... Ephesians... Paul has just finished with a majestic statement about the identity and authority of Jesus... then he says...**

Ephesians 2:1-9 As for you,

- **Okay, pause again... one of the most basic temptations we face as believers is to say to ourselves- maybe just subconsciously- something like “Yes, I know I was only saved by God’s grace and mercy, but now that I’m a believer, I’m good- I know what is right- I’m acceptable to God and one of the moral ones- I’m better than all these lost sinful people around me.... THE ENEMY loves to attack with the temptation to elevate ourselves by looking down upon- devaluing- other people.. especially lost, sinful, immoral people...**
- **PAUL KNEW THIS... Just maybe, prompted by the Spirit, Paul thinks here... HOLD ON A SECOND. Before you get on your righteous high horse and start looking down upon the world around you, REMEMBER WHO YOU WERE, and STILL WOULD BE apart from the mercy of GOD....**

AS FOR YOU... you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works (**NOT BY OUR MORAL DESERVEDNESS**), so that no one can boast.

- **CHURCH! The love of God to us- and extended to ALL HUMANITY- is undeserved and unconditional. This is absolutely essential for us to understand.**

✠ **The Father’s Love - is close and continual.**

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

- *Could preach entire message on this! But just one thought- GOD DOES NOT LOVE FROM A DISTANCE.*
- *Where is God in relationship to us? RIGHT NOW? HE IS WITH US, IN US.. He has brought us into UNION WITH HIM. GOD GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US, so he could bring His life TO US, so he would place his life IN US, JOIN HIS LIFE WITH US, in order to live his life THROUGH US. The NT virtually shouts this from every page.*
- *TIJUANA... dump... Esperanza (place of hope)... Bright light in a sea of desperate human suffering. Many of us from Trinity have been there- we have served, fed, played with kids, prayed with- been close to the people there. But after a few hours, we leave. It would be VERY HARD to stay.*
- *But there a few of the La Roca leaders who don't leave. JULIAN... He stays, is there almost all the time.*
- *This last trip we had extra bags of fruit and water, and Julian led us from shack to shack. These people are heroin addicts, hopeless, at the bottom of the worst conditions you can imagine. They are filthy. And yet, HE LOVES THEM. As we walked he would call out to a person- by name- for he knew their names, their stories... He led us to pray for them, to hold their hands, to get close to them, to validate their worth as creations of God just as important and beloved to God as you and I.*
- *Friends, God doesn't love from a distance. He is right here, even in the depth of our brokenness. He never leaves or forsakes us, even when all of life may seem to do so. HE. LOVES. US.*

✠ *The Father's Love - shows that God is for us.*

- *A few years ago, when we went through the book of Romans, I described how Romans 1-7 is like climbing a long mountain. Up and down, through slogs, bogs, and glimpse of the peaks beyond. Then, at the beginning of Romans 8, we finally reach the top ridge and behold the stunning majesty of the land- of God's kingdom revealed before us. Romans 8:1 says... THERE IS NOW NO CONDEMNATION FOR THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS.*
- *From there, Paul goes on to describe the conflict of the flesh and the spirit, and how God has made a way for us to live in freedom from the flesh. We see that we now are God's children and CO-HEIRS WITH CHRIST of God's kingdom.*
- *Paul describes how our present sufferings aren't even worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us, and that in these sufferings, in our weakness, that the Spirit of God intercedes FOR US before the father, with groans our own words can't even express..... AND THAT SOMEHOW... IN ALL THINGS... God is working for the GOOD of those who have entered into His Love and his purposes.*
- *Then, in Romans 8:31, Paul says....*

Romans 8:31 *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

^{MSG} *So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose?*

- *Friends... GOD LOVE US... and this means that GOD IS FOR US. His love isn't just tolerance... it is an active presence, in the midst of GOOD AND BAD- ALL THINGS- working in us that we would know HIS GOODNESS, as we are about HIS purposes.*

– **And God isn't just FOR US...**

✠ **The Father's Love- pursues us.**

– **In Matthew 18 Jesus tells a parable illustrating the Father's Love for people....**

Matthew 18:12-14 *“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴ In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.*

- **God's love pursues us. God doesn't sit back and say... I'll forgive and accept you, but you have to come to me. You have to cross the barriers... once you get your act together and get yourself cleaned up, then you can show up and I'll be happy to let you in.**
- **NO. God pursues us. His love is not passive, it is active.**
- **Quick story... friend JOE, pastor in BV. Years ago Joe hit the bottom of his life- place of great brokenness and pain, including pain he had caused others. Joe was (and is) a big outdoorsman, and in this place of pain he fled into the mountains. I can't tell the story as Joe can, but he tells how when his father learned what he had done... and how he had run... his father did not condemn him. He didn't wait for Joe to repent and seek forgiveness. KNOWING his son's love of the mountains, he went up into the mountains searching for him. His son was lost, and he pursued him.**
- **Today Joe is one of the kindest, gentle, and loving men I know- part of the reason is that when he was literally lost in the wilderness, the love of his father sought him out, and restored him.**
- **NOW- LISTEN. This can be hard- there are times when the Spirit will lead us – out of love- to have difficult boundaries with people in certain circumstances. We talked about this last week. Jesus let the rich young ruler walk away. The prodigal's father let his son reject him.**
- **HEAR.. God will let us run from him, but he does not run from us. He pursues us- meaning, the minute you lift your eyes to look for him, he is right there.**
- **Moving on... this love that is close, that pursues, even when we don't understand it or it seems like we cannot see it....**

✠ **The Father's Love- surpasses knowledge.**

– **In Ephesians 3 Paul is praying for the church....**

Ephesians 3:14-19 *For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, **(God's love is close)** ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

- **The point here isn't that God's love is beyond our ability to know... as if our brains were bigger we could eventually grasp the knowledge of God's love. RATHER- it's that God's**

love surpasses the concept of knowledge- it is something known by experience, in our hearts- not just by doctrine and in our heads.

- *GOD'S LOVE Doesn't contradict good doctrine, but is bigger than doctrine. Bigger than theology.*
- *For many, our old human nature likes to figure out the rules- the biblical moral formula for who we love and how much we love.*
- *It's like when the disciples came to Jesus and said, 'how many times do we have to forgive people'... In Matthew 18- Jesus's essential reply was... there's no formula. You don't stop forgiving.*
- *God's love is bigger than our theological and doctrinal formulas and issues. IN FACT, Paul goes on to say it ISN'T through our knowledge about God that we are filled with his presence, but through HIS LOVE that we are 'filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.'*
- *YES, God calls us to grow in our knowledge of God, but even more in His LOVE. I love what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8...*

1 Corinthians 8:1-3 *We know that "We all possess knowledge." But knowledge puffs up while love builds up. ² Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. ³ But whoever loves God is known by God.*

- *NOW- I want to acknowledge something really important- Somebody may be listening to everything I've said- all this scripture- and deep in your heart you are crying out... IF GOD LOVES ME THIS MUCH, WHY IS MY LIFE SO HARD.*
- *If God is both sovereign and loving, why is there so much brokenness and suffering in the world?*
- *IF this is where you are, let me just say a few things...*
 - *You are not alone. This is one of the greatest and most persistent dilemma's in Christian history.*
 - *There are answers to this, but they aren't simple and easy. You need to talk to another loving believer, pastor, Christian counselor who can listen to you and walk with you through this valley.*
 - *This may be hard to grasp in the midst of your struggle... but something we ALL need to understand- and is easily lost in today's consumeristic nature of evangelical culture....*
- *God never promises us that if we just love him right, do the right things, that we will be spared the brokenness and suffering of the human condition.*
- *YOU SEE, we often have a formula in our mind, one that is peddled by purveyors of the prosperity gospel... A+B=C. A- our religious and moral efforts, plus B- God's love and riches =C, God's favor and blessings in our lives.*
- *We look at scriptures like Matthew 7:11...*

Matthew 7:11 *If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!*

- *We misinterpret... God wants to give us good gifts! Be it health, relationships, finances... We just need to position our life and thinking to receive God's gifts, and he will give them to us.*
- *MAKE NO MISTAKE! When we are living increasingly free from the bondage of sin, when our lives increasingly and genuinely express the health, character and nature of God, IN GENERAL, OUR LIVES WILL BE BETTER! But this is a principal, NOT A PROMISE. A+B does not = C.*

- ***It is a profound scriptural error to interpret the blessings of God primarily in circumstantial terms. RATHER....***

✠ **The Father's Love- is *the blessing.***

Ephesians 1:3 *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.*

- ***HAS BLESSED US... EVERY SPIRITUAL blessing.. IN CHRIST. PAST TENSE- COMPLETED TENSE. ALREADY TRUE for EVERY believer, ALWAYS.***
- ***God's blessing is his PRESENCE. HIS nature to us and in us. His courage and strength. The fruit of HIS SPIRIT... Peace. Love. Hope. Joy. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Gentleness. Self-control. Contentment.***
- ***God's blessing is his LOVE TO US. It is always here, present, pursuing... and it never stops.***
- ***LASTLY... to wrap this up for today, bring us full circle to our big point from last week.***

✠ **The Father's Love- is how God will lead us to love others.**

John 13:34-35 *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

- ***Are there boundaries? Yes. Details matter. Truth takes on reality in the nuances of individual lives and stories.***
- ***But the truth remains- As God has loved us, so we are called- and equipped by the Spirit- to love other people.***
- ***So here's where I'll leave us...***

Before God, will I wrestle with the questions of how I love?

- ***How do I place conditions on who and how I love?***
 - ***What are these? Am I acting out of health or fear? God centeredness or self-centeredness?***
 - ***Do I love 'from a distance'? Is my love for people active and pursuing, or passive and waiting?***
 - ***What does that look like? Think.. listen...***
 - ***Am I for people? What does this look like? How do I try to place limitations on this? How can I be for a person with whom I deeply disagree?***
 - ***Do I believe God may be leading me to love people in a way I currently don't understand? Is my heart open to this?***
 - ***For much of my life I've allowed myself to hide behind my doctrine and theology to keep some people at bay. God is working on me in this, by His Spirit and through His word. I don't always understand... but I'm seeking to have an open heart to what the Spirit is doing.***
 - ***Right now, what is the Love of Christ in me calling me to do?***
- May this be an open prayer- a posture of expectation- as we go through our daily lives***