

# Such Great Love

By Don Green

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**Truth Community Church**

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road

Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

I want to refresh your heart and mind tonight, frankly, with an extended meditation on the love of God for us and the love of God, of course, is the source of all love that we enjoy anywhere in the world but particularly for us as believers, the theme of the love of God is one that we should come back to again and again and again. You know, a proper understanding of the love of God joined with a proper understanding of the providence of God, which I'm also going to come to sooner rather than later on Sunday mornings because I want to go back to that doctrine for us, but a proper understanding of the providence of God and the love of God is necessary for us to have a proper view of reality in the world for us as believers. It's necessary for us to fully give God the glory that he deserves, to have an appreciation of how deep and how broad and how wide is his love for those that are his elect, for those that Christ died for, for those that he's adopted into his family, and as I've said often, probably not often enough, one of the great temptations for us as believers is to lose sight of that love and start to think accusatory thoughts toward God, especially when the nature of life and the circumstances of life start to turn against us and there is still that residue of corruption in our hearts that is quick to doubt God, to question God, to accuse him of unkindness and those things, my brothers and sisters, should never be. We should never have any kind of doubt about the favorable disposition of God toward us, especially in light of the cross of Jesus Christ. Those things should not be and when you join the love of God, the eternal love of God toward us with a proper understanding of his providence in our lives, that he is sovereignly orchestrating everything that ever happens in the universe including in our individual lives, then when you join those two things together, you have a worldview that is sufficient for you to be able to go through life and to have a framework by which to process any joy or adversity that would ever come to you. If you are deficient on either side of those things, the sovereign providence of God or the sovereign love of God, you're going to have a distorted view of reality, you are not going to grow as you should and could in Christ, and you are also very likely to make a lot of foolish decisions in life that are born out of panic rather than faith and so we want to consider these things again and again and again.

Now when we talk about the love of God, and if you like to put titles on your notes, I've titled this message "Such Great Love." Such great love. When we consider the great love of God, we have to continually remind ourselves that this is not the sentimental love that we find displayed for us in silly movies of different kinds and of different value. The great love of God is – listen to me – the great love of God is an eternal love that gives us our ultimate reason to live. It is an eternal love that gives us our ultimate reason to live. It

is the one constant in life that will never change. Family comes and goes, children come and go, prosperity comes and goes, health comes and goes, life comes and goes, the love of God in our Lord Jesus Christ is the one constant upon which we can rely knowing that it will never leave us nor betray us, and this must be central to our thinking about the nature of God and central to our nature about our approach to life.

Now let me just give you a few different lexical definitions of God's love that are found in various standard resources. One dictionary, Bible dictionary, defines it this way, that the love of God expresses the deep and constant interest of a perfect being toward entirely unworthy objects. The deep and constant interest of a perfect being toward entirely unworthy objects. Another source says this, to have such an interest in another that he wishes to contribute to his well-being. So God takes an interest in us. He wishes to contribute to our well-being. He has this deep and abiding and constant concern for his people, for his elect, for those for whom Christ died, that he is continually seeking their well-being in everything that he does. There are no exceptions to that. God's love is not like ours that rises and falls and waxes and wanes, so to speak, and the tide comes in and the tide goes out. No, God's love is constant. One final source says that the love of God reflects his concern for and his action to bring about the welfare of his people. So what we see common to those lexical definitions is that the love of God is reflecting the fact that he has taken an interest in our well-being and he is pursuing and advancing our well-being in ways that we will see so clearly as we go through Scripture here tonight.

Now when we talk perhaps more specifically about the love of Christ, the love of the second person of the Trinity, when we talk about the love of Christ, we're talking about this: the love of Christ is expressing the reality that a gracious Redeemer took an interest in us and died and rose again for us when we were entirely unworthy of his care. Christ when he went to the cross, going back further, Christ when he descended, as it were, from heaven for the Incarnation and lived his perfect life knowing that his face was always set toward Jerusalem where he would be crucified, is an expression of the fact that he loved us and was concerned for our well-being to the point of self-sacrifice so that we might be secured and delivered from the sin and judgment and the domination of Satan, that so lost were we and so great was his love and concern and interest in our well-being that he at great personal cost acted to deliver us from that dominion so that we would be delivered, so that we would be safe, so that we would be in the family of God forever. So what we find, then, is that love, when we talk about the love of God, we should not think about the realm of mushy feelings which we often think about, the love of God caused him to give Christ for us, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life." You see the fact that God took an interest that we might have eternal life and be forgiven of our many sins against him. You see that his love caused him to give on our behalf, to seek out our well-being at a personal cost to him.

So this is such great love and the way that we're going to approach this, this evening, is to turn to the book of Ephesians, turn to the book of Ephesians where we will find contained in that one book five distinct aspects of the love of God that will strengthen our reverence for him, our reciprocal love for him, and our confidence about his plans for us as we go

forward in life and one day cross the river to be with him in heaven, speaking to those who are believers in Christ, and we're gonna go through these rather quickly. You could find books written about the attributes of which I'm going to speak for a few minutes each, and I would say one other thing, beloved, and one of the challenges in preaching a message like this is that I understand that the nature of ministry and the nature of church life is that we preach a message and we go on to another one, and we go on to another one, and it's kind of hard to remember three weeks later what was preached on. If you've ever felt that way, please know that I sympathize with you because it's kind of like that for me sometimes also and I'm the one who preached it. So there's a challenge here that a message like this might just kind of fall into that pattern of one more message that we've heard from God's word and we love the text of God's word but we're always moving on and building things brick by brick. Well, this message is a little bit different than that. This message calls for your earnest meditation over time of the things that we're talking about. In one sense, the things that we're going to look at are right there on the surface of Scripture, easily grasped in our minds, but in another sense these five aspects of the love of God are things that require our deep and prolonged meditation on them so that they actually take root in our hearts. These are not things that you can fully grasp in the 60 minutes that we'll spend in this time together, these are things for you to go back to again and again and again and remember in different seasons of life, that they would shape your perspective on the nature of God, the God who saved you. We are all far too quick to be suspicious of him, we are all far too quick to doubt his love for us, and these things ought not to be. And of course, we have a spiritual enemy, the devil, who wants to push us in that direction and his spiritual hosts work against our minds and confuse us and distract us so that we lose sight of this wonderful love of God, and that's why it is our privilege and our responsibility to meditate on these things again and again and again, rehearsing them in our minds that it might become central to the way that we view him, and out of an understanding of the love that he has bestowed upon us in Christ would grow a deep and abiding trust that sustains us through everything that life might bring to us.

So with those things in mind, let's look, first of all, at the first aspect of love, God's love for us that we see in the book of Ephesians and it's this, point 1 is that God's love is eternal. God's love is eternal by which we mean that it transcends time. God's eternal love for us had no beginning and it will have no end. Look at Ephesians 1:3 where the Apostle Paul opens with this thunderclap of praise to God and he says in verses 3 through 5,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. [And here it is] In love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Notice that this electing love of God was set upon us before the foundation of the world. Before creation, before Genesis 1:1, God in eternity past before time itself began determined that he would love us and take interest in our well-being. This transcends

time. This is before the foundation of the world that he predestined us in such love and so it is an eternal love.

Charles Spurgeon says this in contrasting the eternal love of God with the nature of human love, he said and I quote, "You can trace the beginning of human affection, you can easily find the beginning of your love to Christ, but His love to us is a stream whose source is hidden in eternity." Now, beloved, that has a lot of implications. Let me just draw one out very briefly that is a great encouragement, especially for those of you with sensitive tender consciences that mourn over your sin in a way that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 5. Beloved, the timeless nature of the love of Christ for your soul means this: it does not rise and fall with your obedience or with your sin. You may feel comparatively better or worse about yourself in response to your progress in sanctification, but understand that that is a perception in your mind that does not reflect on the eternal unchanging nature of the love of God for your soul. His love could not change because he, himself, does not change, and if you have entered into the realm of his love through faith in Jesus Christ, he loves you with an abiding unchanging love that is rooted before time began, that was established before you had done anything good or bad.

So he loved you before time began and that means that his love will transcend anything that occurs in time or in life to you. Now, we need to understand that in our minds because we are so prone to interpret the love of God through the circumstances that we find ourselves at any given time, right? We think that way, at least we're tempted to think that way before our minds are transformed by the renewing work of the Holy Spirit applying the word of God to change our thinking. The most common way to interpret the love of God is by what's happening in my life now. Are my circumstances favorable? He's showing his love to me. Has adversity hit? Uh-oh. You see, there should never be that uh-oh in your mind when you're reflecting on the love of God because his love is eternal, it is unchanging, it is established, it is permanent, it cannot vary anymore than the nature of God itself and the essence of God can change. So his love is eternal and that means that you can rest in it.

Now secondly, as you read on in this passage in Ephesians, you can see that God's love is sovereign. God's love is sovereign and we kind of use verses 4 and 5 as a hinge point for these two points here in Ephesians 1. Look at verse 4 with me again, "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself," and notice in context what comes next, he loved us, he predestined us, look at the end of verse 5 with me, "according to the kind intention of His will." God loves us because it was his will to love us. He determined to do that before time began. That means that his love for us was not influenced by anything within us. He did not love in response to anything that we did or anything that we offered to him. He did not love in response to our faith. He loved us rooted in an eternal love that is rooted in his own free and sovereign will. His love for you was an uninfluenced decision that he, himself, made.

That's humbling to realize that. You say, "Well, then that means that His love for me is totally and absolutely undeserved. He loves me because He loves me." That's right. That's

right. You say, "Well, then why did He love me, then?" And you see, you're asking the same question and missing what the answer is. "Why did He love me, then?" Well, beloved, what Scripture is teaching you is that God loves you because it was his kind will to love you. It was his intention. He freely did that. It was something that he determined in eternity past to do. It was never rooted in anything about you. There was nothing in you that caused it. There is nothing in you that can alter his disposition of love to you. There is nothing you can do to diminish his love for you. His love is free, it is sovereign, and beloved, that means this, it means that if he loved us once, he will love us forever because he never changes.

Again quoting from Spurgeon, he said, "The Lord loves you, Christian, not because of anything that you are doing or being or saying or thinking. He loves you because His great heart is full of love and it runneth over to you." Now what we need to see from that, then, is that while this utterly humbles us because we realize that we're on the receiving end of the most wonderful thing in the universe and we had no deserving of it, there wasn't anything that prompted it in us, in a Romans 9 kind of way, he chose Jacob over Esau before they had even come out of the womb. It was eternal electing love that was his decision, sovereign in his choice.

Now at one level when we think through this, it's very humbling to recognize and the carnal mind balks against that, rejects it because we want something that we can take credit for, we want something to say that distinguishes us from others who are not in the love of God at the present time, but that's such an utterly wrong and carnal way to think. It is far better for God's love to be free and sovereign and uninfluenced by anything in you because that means that his love is stable, that his love is permanent, that it is unchanging, that it is immutable. If it was rooted in something about you, at the very least it could rise and fall depending upon the particular kind of day that you're having. No, it's not like that. What this means is that the highest, greatest, infinite, most assured concern for your well-being is unwavering in the heart and mind of God in his disposition toward you. And you say, "Well, what if I, you know, what if I stray into sin? What if I stumble into sin?" Well, do you know what? He loves you so much and his love doesn't change in such a way that he will simply discipline you like any good father would discipline his son when he strays into disobedience, but the discipline and the sorrow and the consequences that come are not an indication that his love has turned to anger, it's simply the love of discipline to correct you so that you will not stray into that which would harm you and dishonor the one who saved you.

His love is eternal. His love is sovereign. It is independent of us. It is rooted in him, not in you. In other words, the love of God finds its expression from the overflowing eternal essence of God and the eternal nature of who he is rather on the changeable nature of who you are. Isn't that far better? Isn't that far better that it would be rooted in him, not in you? The only way that someone could object to that is that they had no sense of the reality of their own fickleness, of their own sinfulness and so we rejoice in the fact that God's love is not rooted in who we are, it's rooted in who he is, because that means it is secure and it is secure forever once we are in Christ.

Well, there's a third thing that Ephesians says about the nature of the love of God as you just go through the text, and we can say this, our third point for this evening is this, is that God's love is great. It is great. How great is it? Well, let's understand the condition in which we found ourselves when God saved us. Ephesians 2:1. These first three verses giving us further indication that the love of God could never have been rooted in anything that we were or anything that we did because everything about us called for an opposite reaction from God than being on the receiving end of such great sovereign love. Ephesians 2:1,

1 ... you were dead in your trespasses and sins,

You were dead. Have you ever been around a corpse? Nothing too lovely about it, is there? The cold unresponsive nature of a corpse, this was us spiritually, cold, unresponsive, dead to any stimulus in the spiritual realm from God.

Verse 2,

1 ... you were dead in your trespasses and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.

Dead in sin, dominated by the devil, and in verse 3, doomed to suffer the wrath of God. Look at verse 3 with me.

3 Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

An utterly deplorable judgment-worthy condition is you and me in our time of life before Christ came to save us. There was nothing in you that deserved the love of God, quite to the contrary, you were a child of wrath, rightfully so because of your rebellion against God, against his word, your indifference to his love, your contempt for Christ, your abounding in the lusts of the flesh, everything about your life being an indication that you had no love for God in your heart, no true love for God. Proud, boastful perhaps of your self-righteousness. Oh, the sin of man can manifest itself in a lot of different ways, can't it? The arrogant academic proud of his achievements and the letters after his name but socially sophisticated, just as much a child of wrath and deserving the wrath of God as the drunk in the gutter, the promiscuous man, the promiscuous woman, all manifesting, simply manifesting in different ways the reality of the same condition of heart, dead in trespasses and sins, dominated by the devil, living in the lust of the flesh, and a child of wrath even as the rest. That's who we were. If you ever want an autobiography written about you, understand that your life prior to Christ, the autobiography has already been written. It's found in the first three verses of Ephesians 2. Scripture pulls no punches in telling us the truth about who we were.

Now that just sets the context for us to marvel all the more as we consider point 3, God's love is great. His love is vast, it is immeasurable, because look at this in verse 4, "But God." But God. Martyn Lloyd-Jones famously preached an entire sermon on those two words.

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

It was when you were like verses 1 through 3 that the Holy Spirit came to you, opened your mind to understand the Gospel of Christ, and the Father put his hand upon you, drew you to saving faith in his Son and said, "Henceforth and forevermore you will be Mine. I will act and I will deliver you from your dead and sinful condition." And going back to what we said the definition of love was and is, is that this is a manifestation of the great way, the vast immeasurable way that God sought for and secured your well-being and your interests in your salvation. You were utterly undeserving of this. You were hostile to God and Scripture says in great love he came to you and he saved you, he regenerated you, which is what it's referring to when it says he made us alive together with Christ, God acted on you to bring you to life, you didn't cause your own resurrection, you didn't cause your own spiritual birth, it was a gift from God and it is a gift that expresses how great his love is because it was given to you in such a condition as that.

You see, it's not just that you were neutral, it's that you were hostile, and in your hostility God loved you like that. Such stupendous love, beloved, is great. Such stupendous, marvelous, profound love is beyond our ability to understand it. It's great love. It's awesome love. It's hard to find adjectives that haven't been corrupted by dumbing them down in the English language, isn't it? You know, "What a great hamburger. What a great game." But when we talk about the greatness of the love of God, we're not talking about it in such superficial ways, we're talking about that which is truly awe-inspiring and produces great reverence and gratitude in a human heart that was previously dead in trespasses and sins.

We could say this about the greatness of the love of God: its greatness is measured in part by how contrary it is to human expectations. By human standards, by human reasoning, this makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. By the way that everything in life is conducted on a human level, this should not and could not happen. Since when do deserving objects of wrath become the undeserving objects of such great, eternal, sovereign, divine love? This is utterly contrary to human reason. This turns every expectation on its head. "You punch me, I'll punch you back." God says, "You punched Me, I'll save you. I'll rescue you from your deadness in trespasses and sins. You blasphemed My name, I'll write your name on the wounds of Christ and draw you to Myself. You're hostile toward Me, I want to reconcile with you."

This is the nature of the love of God. It's great. It's vast, boundless, immeasurable, which flows right into our fourth point here this evening, remembering that we're consciously realizing that we're treating in a few minutes things which could be the subjects of books

and we're simply trying to plant seeds that will sprout up in your heart and that you will come back to again and again, and you will pluck the future fruit and eat from it and be refreshed by it as your mind goes back and contemplates the great love of God, the great love of Christ for your soul.

Fourthly, we see from the book of Ephesians that God's love is infinite. God's love is infinite. His love for us as his children cannot be exhausted. It cannot be fully understood. It certainly cannot be fully explained. Look at chapter 3 and we'll start at verse 14 just for fun. Chapter 3, verse 14, Paul having expounded on so many aspects of the greatness of the love of God, the reality of salvation by grace through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone, he turns to prayer in verse 14 and part of the reason that he turns to prayer is because the magnificent things that he has expounded up to this point in the epistle are so far beyond human understanding that he understands that his readers in the first century and by the work of the Spirit of God there is this understanding that all believers in time subsequent need a supernatural work of the illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit to help them grasp the profundity and the wonder of what he's just been describing, and so in verse 14 he turns to prayer and he says,

14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you [you see, he's asking God to give his readers something], according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

"God, I pray that Your Spirit would work in the hearts of these people who are reading these words." And as he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he was expressing the very mind and desire of God for those of his children who would come and read this passage in the future. There is this work of God, there is this desire of God for us to understand these things being expressed through the human writer of Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit himself.

So what does he pray? What does he want God to give to his readers? Verse 17,

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

So he's praying that we would understand, that his readers would understand how immeasurably infinite the love of God is for us; that we would understand something of the measure of the divine interest in our well-being as expressed supremely at the cross of Christ and in the empty grave that followed; that those historical facts would provide the ground of our justification and would be the proof to our wandering unbelieving hearts that God's love for us is genuine, it is true, it is real, it can be trusted.

How broad was his love? So broad that any sinner can come to him for grace and ask for salvation and receive it. How long is his love? It's so long that he conceived your redemption in eternity past and will bless you through all of eternity future. How high is his love? It is so high that it carries you to the heavenly places; it is so high that our elder brother Christ is at the right hand of God pleading for us and interceding for us and representing us in the most holy room of the universe, securing our well-being before God even now as we speak. How deep is his love? Oh, my Christian friend, it is so deep that it cleanses you from your darkest sin. It has washed you from the deepest of your rebellion even in your Christian life. It has washed you thoroughly. It has made you white as snow, in the words of other Scripture, so that you with an infinite debt of sin against a holy God have a surpassingly infinite love that has washed and cleansed you through the work of Christ so that you are now counted as righteous before God and there is nothing to act as a barrier between you and him. His love was so great that he secured that kind of reconciliation on your behalf.

Now, beloved, we talked about the breadth of his love, the length of his love, the height of his love, the depth of his love, beloved, I want you to understand something whether you recognize it as we say these things or not, that one of those thoughts goes beyond human comprehension, that fact that any sinner anywhere at any time can find a free and complete salvation through faith in Christ, billions of people are invited to come to him and he will receive every one that will have him, that his love is eternal into a realm before time that we can't even comprehend or conceive of, and that it will last into the future in a realm that will never end that we can't conceive of, to think of the intercessory work of Christ after his ascension representing us as he does faithfully before the Father, pleading his wounds as our reconciling basis before God, that he would love you and cleanse you from your darkest or your most recent or your most shameful sin and erase it all saying erasing in the sense and the recognition that he took it upon himself, he bore the punishment for it, he absorbed the wrath on your behalf so that the Father could look on Christ and then look on you and pardon you and accept you and receive you for all the treachery that you've shown to people in the past, the lies that you've told, the adultery that you've committed either in physical act or in your mind, your thefts, your refusal to love God as you should, your covetous heart, and to recognize that the love of Christ was so great that it gathered all of that up, he said, "Father, I accept the blame. You may punish Me. I accept the punishment. I voluntarily submit Myself to the punishment because I love these people that You've given to Me. I care for them. I desire their well-being so strike Me, Father, that they might go free." And the Father obliged, as it were, and punished Christ and out of deep anguish as he bore that, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" the love of Christ was put on its most crystal clear display as he suffered in your place because he loved you with an eternal, sovereign, great, infinite love.

That leads us naturally into the fifth and final point from Ephesians here as we just continue to walk our way through selected passages is that God's love is sacrificial. It is sacrificial. The love of God is fully revealed in the cost of the sacrifice that secured it for you. Look at Ephesians 5:1 and understand that in all of these passages that we've been looking at, we have been looking at the love of God for us. We have not been looking at

commands that tell us to love God in response, we are looking at passage that describe the nature of God's love toward us as his objects, as the objects of his love. We are the object, God is the actor in these transitive verbs. Chapter 5, verse 1, as we see that God's love is sacrificial. Ephesians 5:1,

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love [yes, that's a command but that's not the point of what we're looking at, it's premised on what follows], walk in love just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

He offered himself up as a sacrifice on the cross. He was our great High Priest offering the sacrifice and the sacrifice was he himself, the sacrifice was Christ himself and he offered himself up, he sacrificed himself, he laid himself down for us, and when you remember, beloved, you remember who it is that is this sacrifice, the pure and holy, spotless, eternal Son of God, that that one is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, that that one is the one who went to Calvary even though he could have called down legions of angels and put a halt to it, that he used his power to redeem us, to save us, to offer himself up instead of exercising that power to defend himself against a humanly unjust execution. None of us would do that. None of us would do that. Christ did it for us.

Paul goes back to that as he sets the theme for marriage in Ephesians 5:25 as we talk about this consideration of the sacrificial nature of the love of God. Verse 25, you know what it says,

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Christ loved the church so that all of that sin from the first three verses of Ephesians 2 might be washed away and in its place the perfect righteousness of Christ deposited upon our account and that he would sanctify us and conform us in the future to the nature of his glory so that we might belong to him and be perfectly conformed to what he is like, not sharing in his deity but sharing in his resurrected glory in the place that he has been preparing for us for the past 2,000 years, taking the language of John 14 in that way.

You see, the cross, as we've said so many times, reveals the love of God. "In this the love of God is manifested, that He sent Christ to be the propitiation for our sins," 1 John 4:10. "But God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," Romans 5:8. Beloved, do you see it? We're not at all talking about something abstract and academic, we're talking about that which displays the reality of the eternal, sovereign, great, infinite love of God. We have a plumb-line by which we can measure that and the plumb-line is the vertical and horizontal pillars of wood upon which our Lord

was crucified for us. That's how great his interest in our eternal well-being was. At great personal cost, he died and rose again to take away our sins and to secure our eternal well-being. This is the simple plain word of God to us.

Now beloved, let me work out, suggest to you perhaps may be a better way to say it, some of the ways that we can process this and bring it home in a way that matters to us in our daily life because I want to tell you without fear of contradiction that this great love of God of which we have been speaking here this evening, is what gives you your ultimate reason to exist. This is what sustains you no matter what comes in life because isn't it true, we don't like to think this way, but isn't it true that everything that pertains to this life is temporary and passing in the end? We could have the best of spouses and enjoy 60-70 years with them but it's temporary. Eventually one of us will lay the other to rest in the eternal arms of God, as I sometimes say at funerals. I say it at weddings too. I think about it a lot. "Oh, that's so romantic." I know. But our children, they grow, they move away, sometimes they disappoint us, sometimes we know that they are lost and they have no interest of Christ and we may be facing an eternal separation from our own flesh and blood, there's nothing permanent and secure in that. Prosperity comes and goes. Scripture says you set your mind on wealth, man, it'll take up wings and fly away. Fame and fortune, pfft. Beauty, pfft. There's not a model who was prominent in the 70s who hasn't lost the battle to gravity here in 2019, is there? It's passing. It's fading. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, Proverbs 31. And you could go on and on. When we look through and we see through the very nature of life, we see that ultimately it is all passing, it is all temporary, so much so that even life itself we will one day lay down. And for every one of us, if the Lord carries, every one of us, someone else will be laying down and dealing with our bones. It's temporary. It's passing.

Now, it is so important for us not to turn away from the nature of our transitory existence here on earth to turn away because it is so uncomfortable to think about. No, beloved, I beg you, do not do that because that understanding of our transient nature, indeed Scripture, Psalm 39:4, Psalm 90:12, prays and the people of God pray, "Lord, help me understand how transient I am." Well, one of the benefits of coming to grips with that is recognizing that by contrast to have the unchanging love of God, in contrast to that is the greatest most wonderful thing that could ever happen to us. That very love of God of which I have been speaking from his own inerrant word is the refuge for your afflicted soul here today and always. It is the answer for every sorrow in the past. It is the answer to every threat in the future that causes you to tremble. Beloved, listen to me as I walk through a few things here to recognize that that love of God excels every adversity that this fallen world could ever impose upon you. Period. End of quotation. No contradiction, no argument to it, because what we find in Christ is this, is that in Christ this is even a love that identifies with us in our weaknesses and in our sorrows.

Beloved, I'll just ask you a series of questions here and then answer them from the life and the love of Christ. Have you found that human love is fickle? Have friends or family betrayed you? Look to Christ. Look to his love. The kiss of Judas was still moist on his cheek when Roman soldiers took him away. He knows what that's like. He sympathizes with the experience.

Has death separated you from one that you just especially loved and your heart aches over the separation? Well, our Lord wept at the tomb of Lazarus. He's felt the weight of human death. He shared in the sorrow at that tomb and he can share in the sorrow now because of his great love for you. He's identified with that in his earthly life.

Oh, my friend, have you been slandered? Have you been falsely accused? Has someone taken a knife to your reputation and ruined it and gleefully stabbed again and again? Well, may I remind you that Christ knows what that's like. His earthly enemies aligned him with Beelzebul, said he was doing his work by the power of demons. They attributed the work of the holy Son of God to the ruler of demons. Slander of the most base vile kind and Christ knows what that's like.

Do you suffer with physical affliction? Is your body breaking down? Christ knows what that's like. He laid exhausted in a boat, slept through a storm. On the cross, he said, "I thirst." He felt the weight of physical affliction even as he was undergoing the greater aspect of spiritual affliction on our behalf.

My friends, have material riches failed you? The Son of Man had no place to lay his head.

Does your conscience relentlessly accuse you of that past sin? His blood paid for it in full. At the end of his sufferings on the cross he said, what? "It is finished." Paid in full, the answer for your accusing conscience found in the wounds of Christ, offered up to God as a sacrifice for you in love.

Are you afraid to die? Does death threaten you? Death has lost its sting for those united to Christ, 1 Corinthians 15 tells us. There's no fear in death. None at all. Not for the Christian because if we are united to Christ, that means we are united with him in his death and in his resurrection. Scripture says because he lives, you will live also. What happened to him will happen to you. He went to the grave and was resurrected, so shall it be with you. You will pass through the flame of death but you will not be singed by the fire.

You see, beloved, the love of Christ thus answers all the problems and dilemmas of life and thousands more that I haven't even described. Turn to Hebrews 4 with me. Hebrews 4. In light of everything that we have said, beloved, about the eternal, sovereign, great, infinite, sacrificial love of Christ, now we see with renewed understanding, with expanded capacity in light of the earthly events of Christ which I've so briefly alluded to, now we see something of the wonder of the greatness of what the significance of this familiar passage in Hebrews 4:15 is.

15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of

grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

We have a Savior like that who has loved us like this. Then of course, beloved, when we go to him he will be a glad dispenser of grace and mercy to us as we ask him in our dependence and our weakness to help us. Of course, he will. Such love on unworthy sinners. Such love never never to cease.

Romans 8:38,

38 ... I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from [what?] the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Imagine every possible created thing that you might want, every hostile force invisible or visible, every possible affliction, trial or adversity, and realize that the sovereign, eternal, great, infinite, sacrificial love of God transcends it all and abides through it all and will come through unchanged and unhindered in the end. That is the kind of love that God has put on you in Christ.

Now beloved, what I would say to you in closing is this, is that God intends for you to derive your ultimate meaning in life, your highest satisfaction, your full identity in life from your union with Christ who loved you like this rather than anything earthly. I am not defined by the fact that I am a pastor. I'm not defined by the fact that I married a wonderful woman 31 years ago. I am not defined by my six children. I am not defined by what I've done in the past or what will happen to me in the future. None of that matters compared to this. My life, my existence is defined by the fact that I am the object of this great, saving, sacrificial love that the Lord Jesus Christ put on me and that's true of every one of you that are in Christ. You have that same privileged position and this eternal, sovereign, great, infinite and sacrificial love – listen to me – this eternal, sovereign, great, infinite and sacrificial love is greater than anything that this world can give to you and it is greater than anything that this world can take away from you.

The key to remember, look at the end of Romans 8 one final time, is that this love of God is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. It is in Christ and in Christ alone, Christ alone is the dispenser of this love. In part, that is why we stand opposed to every false religion. We are not loving in telling them that their way is an equally valid way to get to God. No, if they are not seeking God through Christ Jesus our Lord, they are separated from the great magnificence of this love of which we have spoken. Love compels us to tell them the truth because this great love of God is found alone in Christ Jesus who is received by faith alone.

So beloved friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, are you in Christ today? This love of which Scripture has spoken here this evening is yours forever. It will never be taken away. Christ said, "They are in My hand. No one can pluck them from My hand," John

10. But my friend, I ask the corollary question: have you refused Christ? Are you outside of Christ? This love is not yours yet. You're missing it. And yet the love of Christ is found in the fact that while you have been in rebellion against him and you have rejected him to this very moment, he pleads with you through his word and extends the offer to you and says, "No one who comes to Me will I cast out. Come to Me all ye who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." That promise of his is secured by divine love, the kind of which we have been speaking. It means his promise is utterly trustworthy. You can come to Christ tonight, today, right now, and enter into this realm of inexpressible love.

Let's pray together.

*O dear Father, we gather up all that has distracted us today, over the past several days, we gather up all of the joys and the sorrows of life, our fears about the future, we gather it all up and bundle it into one great big burden and we lay it before Your feet and say this is all subordinate, it is secondary to the reality that You have loved me in Christ and we love You in return. We give You our gratitude, we give You our lives, we give You our praise, all of this to Your great glory. It is by Your grace and for Your glory that we find ourselves in this wonderful position of being the objects of eternal, sovereign, great, infinite, sacrificial love which is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Our Lord, we love You. We honor You. We bow before You. And in great humility of mind, knowing that there was nothing in us that prompted this great concern of Yours for our eternal well-being, we humble say thank You and bow before You with such trust that we unreservedly pray, "Thy will be done as in heaven, so also upon earth." Lord Jesus, as God's will was done in Your life, so carry it out in ours. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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