Returning to the source of love

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[0:00] your word, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So our New Testament reading comes from the book of Hebrews chapter 10, before we turn to finish our short study in that central section of 1 Corinthians 13. So Hebrews chapter 10, and we'll read from verse 19 to verse 25.

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching. And then for one last time in the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 13, let's read again verses 4 to 7.

Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. And then our verse for today. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. So we're going to close our series looking at verse 7. As we thought about love as the most excellent way, we are going to return to consider Jesus as the source of love for us as God's people. And to help us, we'll think about an oasis. Now I don't know if anybody here has been to Marrakesh. I imagine we all have destination wish lists, maybe especially this year. Marrakesh would always be one of those places for me. Beautiful, colourful, architecture, rich history. I discovered this week that it was founded some thousand or so years ago, and it was built next to an oasis in the desert. Now an oasis is one of those fertile parts of a desert. You find you have sand everywhere, but then you find this sort of rich, lush growth. And that's because there are natural underground water sources that then in certain areas seep and bubble up to the surface. And in order to enjoy a provision, then farming communities will drill down some wells to tap into that, to have that supply of water. So these oasis are really fertile places, but they're also acknowledged to be fragile as well, because of the desert wind and the desert sand. And so again, farming communities will typically plant lots of strong palm trees around the edge in order to protect it from the wind and the sand coming and stopping up the water source. Let's take that oasis image as we come to think about, for one last time, the idea of love that we find here in 1 Corinthians 13. I think all of us would recognise that love, as we experience it, is something that is life-giving and refreshing, like finding water in the desert, when love is patient and love is kind. When people are humble, when we're loving what's good rather than what is evil, that's life-giving and refreshing. But we probably also recognise that love can be a fragile thing. Paul certainly recognised it in this church. He wrote this letter to protect the church.

He was aware that there were aspects in which a lack of love could be seen, as they are, for example, having lawsuits against one another, as they are fighting to show that their spiritual gifts are the most important, or as there are class divisions within the church. Love is a fragile thing. And so what Paul wants to do is he wants to take them back to the source of love, to remind them of God's love in Jesus. Just as for an oasis, it's vital that there's that underground source of water, so it is vital for our lives as God's people, if we are to refresh others, if we are to bless others, if we are to see loving relationships be protected, that we have that life-giving source of love flowing in our lives. And as we've been thinking all the way along, that source of love for us is God's love for us in Jesus. Jesus, in a sense, draws on this image and idea in John chapter 4, when he's sitting by the well with the Samaritan woman. And at verse 14 there he says to the lady, whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of

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water welling up to eternal life. If we are to love the way Paul is encouraging us in 1 Corinthians, we must first receive and be refreshed by the love of God that comes to us from Jesus. So that's why as we finish our study on love from 1 Corinthians 13, we're going to return to
Jesus as that life-giving source of love that we must be drawing from, not just once but always. So let's think about these phrases that we find in verse 7, beginning with that first one, love bears all things, recognizing that love bears all things when we treasure Jesus and His love.
[7:09] So there's a switch. In verses 4 to 6, the focus is how we love other people, whereas verse 7 has Jesus in view. And so this first phrase, love bears all things, has the idea of love that is willing to bear suffering and shame for the sake of Jesus, because we love Jesus and the love that He's shown to us. So Christians are ready to suffer for Jesus. For those of us who are around for our studies in 1 Peter, we saw this time and time again in his letter. For example, chapter 2, he wrote, to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in His steps, reminding the church we follow a king who is also the suffering servant. And so the pattern of the Christian life involves, as Jesus said, cross-carrying involves being ready to suffer for

His sake. Now, of course, that will look very different depending on our circumstances and depending on where we happen to live. So this week, for example, I read the story of a lady called Sylvie from the Camoro Islands. And for her, she's facing intense pressure and has been rejected by her community because she's not sending her two girls to the local Islamic school. She is a Christian.
I also read last month in Eritrea, in Africa, 21 women were recently released from prison, having spent three years in jail because of their faith in the Lord Jesus. For some of our brothers and sisters in Christ, suffering is real and intense. For us, the suffering is real, but it's not of the same type.
What might it look like for us? Perhaps it looks like a loss of reputation. Perhaps it looks like mockery. Perhaps it looks like being marginalized from certain conversations. Are we ready to suffer for Jesus, to not retaliate like for like, to return love when we receive hate?
To continue that idea, Christians will put Jesus on our first ahead of our own. This is something we see so clearly in Paul's own life. So in Philippians chapter 3, just before verses 7 and 8, we find Paul sharing, as it were, his religious CV before coming to faith in Jesus. I had all of these qualifications, humanly speaking. I had everything. And then he says, but whatever were gains to me, I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ. My own reputation, my own achievements, I will consider them garbage, I will consider them garbage because I found greater worth, greater value, greater honor from having Jesus as Lord.
[10:40] To know Jesus Christ as Redeemer, to know that he has loved us and given himself for us, to know him as Lord and King, to know that he is ruling and reigning for the sake of his people, to know him as friend, to know that he is always with us and never leaves us, to receive God's love and his grace, his forgiveness through Jesus' death on the cross. That's where true treasure is found.

That's the well that we want to be drawing from. That's where we want to gain our source of honor from. How do we handle the dishonor that others might show towards us because of our faith in Jesus?
We find our hope and security in knowing that we are honored by the Lord God himself. Christians live for the Father's approval, not the approval of the world.
We probably recognize that from childhood there is that inbuilt need, desire for approval. With children, especially when they're little, so often you'll hear them say to a parent, watch me, look at me, look at what I can do. Why is that? It's because they take delight in the approval that they find from a parent. It's something that really matters to us as people.
Now, through life, that may switch. Who we live to please may well switch. It may switch to a husband or a wife. It may move to a coach or an employer. But that desire to be noticed remains. That desire to hear, well done, you have value, that remains with us, doesn't it? And what the Bible teaches us as Christians, that we are to look for our ultimate sense of approval and value from God, our Father's view of us. To live to hear His well done, good and faithful servant.
[12:53] To find our source of security as people from who we are in the Lord Jesus.

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And the result of that is then we are equipped to cope with rejection. We have this connection to a loving God so that we are enabled by His grace to return love for hate.
To find our deepest joy from being adopted by God, our Father. And so that we are then able to love others well. Love bears all things when we treasure Jesus and His love.
Perhaps you know the story of Jim Elliot, the Christian missionary, who was working in Ecuador. And as he worked, he developed this profound love for the Auka people. And he had this deep desire to go and share the love of Jesus with them. And he and some missionary colleagues eventually made their way to that remote island. And within days, each of them were killed. They died because they loved Jesus and they wanted to share the love of Jesus with others. And just a few days before he died in his diary, Jim Elliot wrote, He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. He understood that love bears all things, even death, when we treasure Jesus and His love. To know that Jesus in love was willing to bear suffering for us, to bear our sin, to bear in His body the wrath of God His Father to save us.
And it fills our hearts with love, doesn't it? That's what's going to make us willing to bear suffering for the sake of Jesus and His mission, willing to love well. Secondly, love believes all things and hopes all things when Jesus is the source of our love. So I guess lots of us are probably busy now if we've got gardens in the garden.
[15:30] And you've probably also noticed that your gardens are busy with birds. So this time, about this time last year, I think in the height of lockdown, we built ourselves a makeshift pot and pot is a bit of a grand term.

We've got a basin and filled up with rocks and some water, basically, so that the birds and the bugs could have some water to drink. Well, we have some pigeons that have kind of made it their own, but we also sometimes get smaller birds that come and enjoy a little drink before they flutter off. Well, this week, as I was sitting outside doing some reading, I felt really bad because I saw some sparrows coming and some goldfinches coming to get their water to drink. So it was hot last week, and they kept discovering it was empty.
It had run dry, and I hadn't found the time to fill it up. They'd come to their little garden oasis, and it had failed them. That can be true for us as well as people. As we are built to seek out love and joy and satisfaction. The Bible tells us so many times, if we go looking for that love and joy and satisfaction in the wrong sources, just like the birds, we will come up empty. The good news of the Bible is that there is a love from God in Jesus that endures forever. There is a supply of love that never fails. There is in Jesus that oasis that constantly is there to refresh us and will never run dry.
This central section of verse 7, it says, love believes all things and hopes all things, points us again to the source of our love. That love that we receive from Jesus, that's what fuels our faith. That's what drives our hope. Faith in Jesus is about believing. What is it that we believe? Well, we certainly believe as Christians that Jesus is the Son of God, who by the miracle of the virgin birth became one of us, and ultimately going to the cross to be the Savior for sinners.
We read Hebrews 10. We believe that Jesus, by his death on the cross, cleanses us from sin, cleanses us from our guilty conscience, gives us access to God by his blood shed on the cross.
[18:10] We believe that through Jesus, we are reconciled to our Father. That sin that separates us has been taken by Jesus so that we can draw near. We believe that through Jesus, we can be adopted into the family of God and to enjoy his love as his children. And we believe that, yes, Jesus died, but he also rose again, and he is alive today, and he is for us in heaven. He is still speaking as our prophet through his word and by the Spirit. He is still ruling as our king, governing all things according to his purpose.

And he is still acting as our priest. He's praying for us, and he's pleading our cause on the basis of his great sacrifice. So we believe all things. But how do we come to the point of believing?
It's an important question to ask. How do we come to the point of faith? And the Bible is really clear on that. It's not our reason. It's not our logic. It's not the basis of our background or heritage. No, it's a work of God. Faith is a gift from God. God must open our eyes by his Spirit to see the truth about sin. Our need of a Savior to see the beauty of Jesus as the Son of God, to recognize the plan of salvation, and to believe that he died for me. It's a gift of God that God pours his love into our hearts.
We speak about conversion. We speak about new birth. This isn't something we work in ourselves. This comes from God. God's love is the source for our faith. And then our faith is strengthened and grows as we see and appreciate more of that love. So today, if you're here and you're a Christian, if

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you see the love of God in Jesus, give thanks for that faith. Keep going with joy to that well of salvation. Never grow cold and complacent to that wonderful good news. But if you're not a Christian, knowing that this is a gift from God, ask him for that gift. Ask that he would show you what Jesus has done for you and who Jesus is, that you too would believe and have this love that's spoken of in his Word.
We're also told here that love hopes all things. Again, for a Christian, hope is in Jesus, and Jesus fuels our hope. When we think about hope, especially as we think forward, what's our hope as God's people?
[21:15] Our hope is that the world won't always be the way it is, with so much brokenness and sadness and the loss of love. We hope, with certain expectation, that Jesus will come again and he will bring evil to an end. He will make his enemies a footstool under his feet. He will establish a new creation.

He will bring his people to live with him in glory in that world of perfect love. And we're invited to hold on to that hope, not as wishful thinking, but as certain expectation.
Because we trust in who Jesus is. We trust in the character of our God, that he keeps his promises. But again, as we think about our hope, we see how central Jesus is to it. His love for us, his loving commitment to his church, and to bringing the work of salvation to a climax, to completion, is what our hope rests in. So again, I wonder, is this our hope, really and truly? As we dig down, is our life founded on what Jesus has done, what he is doing, what he will do, what he's promised to do?
Do we have this one sure thing as we live in a very uncertain world? Every month or so, I have a call, a Zoom call with some guys around the country who are involved in ministry.
And we chat through a book, and we have a discussion, and we pray. And this month, we were talking about the phrase, identity in Christ. Is that a helpful phrase, or is it just one of those buzzwords that's kind of bandied around, and people talk about it without you thinking about it?
Well, for me, when I hear a phrase like identity in Christ, I find it really helpful. I really appreciate it, because I think it reminds us as Christians that central to who we are is Jesus. And especially as we think about today, his love. Think about how vital Jesus' love is for us as Christians, and for our identity.
[23:38] His love in the past. Let's think about his coming to live in perfect obedience, and then to die in our place for our sins. The cross shows us God's love, and we can't be saved without that.

We can't know God without that. So his love is vital to who we are. But think about his love for us in the present. Right now, Jesus is ruling and reigning for the sake of his people, his church. He sends us the Spirit so that we can hear him speak. Jesus is interceding in heaven for us. His love for us today is vital. But think about his love for us promised in the future. He's not just going to leave the world as it is. He's not going to leave us as we are. Rather, he's promised he's going to return, and he's going to take us home. So from beginning to end of the Christian life, our identity is rooted in the love of Jesus for us. So his love, then, is the basis for our believing all things and hoping all things, because Christ is, must be, our hope in life and in death. Like the city of Marrakesh, founded around an oasis, God's church must be built around the love of Jesus. We must be drawing from that love in order for the love of Jesus to be the basis for Christian unity. So we've been thinking about that in 1 Corinthians 13. And also the basis for our mission. What is it that we want the world to know? We don't want them to know about us. We want them to know about God's love for them. And then finally, to look at that last clause in verse 7, love endures all things, our love perseveres always because we are loved and kept by Jesus Christ.
All the way through sort of studying 1 Corinthians 13, these verses, there's been a danger, sort of a tightrope, as it were. There's the danger that this could be presented as self-help, well, a bit of moral self-improvement. This could be, you know, the Bible says love is patient and love is kind. And so you and I, we need to do better and try harder at being more patient and more kind. We could take God out of it and just put all the emphasis on ourselves. That wouldn't be good news, would it? Sometimes we'd feel okay, but other times we'd feel crushed.
We could have operated from a basis of guilt. You know, the Bible says love should be like this. Why don't we love better? And again, that wouldn't be good news, and that wouldn't be where the emphasis on the Bible falls. Rather, the truth that brings freedom is that, first of all, we receive God's love for us in Jesus, and then and only then are we equipped, enabled, empowered by God's grace to show God's love to others. It is God's love, God's grace from beginning to end that we must be drinking from. It's the source of who we are and how we live. And so when it comes to

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Christian love that endures till the end, we don't want to be saying, it endures because I'm going to work jolly hard at making sure it endures. No, Christian love endures because and only because of God's unfailing, never-ending love towards us, expressed in the sending of Jesus. Let's think about that in three ways. Love endures because we're given a new nature. Christianity is not a makeover project that we engage in where we are going to turn over a new moral leaf, and we are going to work jolly hard on our character. No, in Christ we are given a new identity. In the gospel we are given a new heart. God comes and he renovates us from the inside out so that Paul can say, in Christ you are a new creation. God has done a powerful work in us. The power of sin is broken. Sin is no longer our master. Jesus is. Now we're able to love God, please God, enjoy life with God. And the wonderful news is that no one and nothing can reverse that process. Love endures because that new nature endures.
[28:21] We are a new creation. Love endures because of God's work. And we can think about Jesus' words in John chapter 6. John chapter 6. Jesus says, This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

Now do we see God's commitment here? This is the will of God that he won't lose any of his people. This is the will of God that all who trust in Jesus will be raised and enjoy eternal life.
This is Jesus' commitment to come on this mission to make sure that none of his people will be lost. Love endures not because of our work, but because of God's work through Jesus, that love that has come to us by his grace. Love endures because in Christ we gain eternal life.
That's what Jesus has just said in John chapter 6. To trust in Jesus is to know that he will raise us up, to know that we will enjoy eternal life, and that eternal life will be marked by eternal and perfect love. So love will endure because of that life that we receive from Jesus. So it's all about Jesus.
In Jesus, we're loved with that everlasting love. In Jesus, his resurrection life is the guarantee of ours. In Jesus, we have a living hope. We look forward to knowing and sharing in this perfect and enduring love for all eternity.
[30:24] The love of Jesus is for us our source of living water. He is our oasis. So as we close our series on love, where I'm sure, if you're anything like me, God's Word has challenged us about our love in the church and in the world. But I'm sure it's also encouraged us as we have been reminded of God's perfect love towards us, of Jesus, the model of perfect love.

So as we come into the summer season, and hopefully some of us, maybe many of us, will get to go on holiday and get a bit of break, a change of routine. Let's enjoy that holiday. Let's enjoy that rest.
But let's not take a holiday from Jesus and his Word. Let's recognize that in Jesus and his Word, that's where we find true rest and renewal. As our habits change, let's not change the habit of spending time with Jesus and his Word of drinking deeply from this love. To remember how we began in Isaiah 12, let's make sure that with joy, we're drawing water from the well of salvation, that we would be refreshed by God's love for us in Jesus, so that we might then refresh others. Let's pray together.
Lord, our God, we thank you for your eternal love. As Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you exist in that eternal fellowship of perfect love. But in your kindness, you have poured out that love into our lives. You have invited us as your people into your perfect love.
We thank you that Jesus has come as that great demonstration of love, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Lord, may each one of us in the building and watching on the internet, may we know your love for us in Jesus. May it be our source of true delight and satisfaction.
[32:51] May it be our source of hope and joy, that as we live knowing your approval as our Father in heaven, knowing your welcome. May that then enable us to love others well. Lord, as we look ahead to the summer season, may it be a time where we know much of your goodness, much of your kindness, and may we grow to appreciate more of your love for us in Jesus. We pray it in his name. Amen.

Now let's draw our service to a close, hearing the hymn, folks at home, you can sing, How Deep the Father's Love for Us.
How Deep the Father's Love for Us.
How Deep the Father's Love for Us. How vast beyond all measure, that he should give his only Son to make a wretchedest treasure.

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How great the pain of searing loss, the Father turns his face away.
[34:28] As woods which mar the chosen love bring many sons to glory.

Behold the man upon the cross, my guilt upon his shoulders.
Ashamed I hear my mocking voice All out among those offers It was mercy that held Him there Until it was accomplished His dying breath has brought me life I know that it is finished I will not boast in anything No gifts, no power, no wisdom But I will boast in Jesus Christ His death and resurrection Why should I gain from His reward? I cannot give an answer But this I know away from my heart His wounds have made my ransom Let's stand to close our time in prayer It's a prayer drawn from the end of the book of Jude To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling And to present you before His glorious presence Without fault and with great joy To the only God our Saviour Be glory, majesty, power and authority
Through Jesus Christ our Lord Before all ages Now and forevermore Amen Amen

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