

God Loves Us

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning everyone. Here we are at the beginning of our new series for Lent. And we start, of course, with when was the last time that you told God that you loved him so much? The thing is, the theme is that God loves us. But let's spin that. When was the last time that you told and poured out to God how much you loved him? Now, as you know, I'm heavily into film. And I love those black and white films that probably from the 1940s where you have people waving goodbye, like Brief Encounter on a railway station.

And it goes something like this, doesn't it? Goodbye, darling. I think I'm really going to miss you. I know. I know, darling. I'm going to miss you as well. Isn't it awful that we have to be part of the life? This is, darling. But you know that I have to go. And all you're screaming at the television is, kiss her. Tell her that you love her before they go.

Strange, isn't it, that we're in a relationship with someone. And maybe, again, when we think about our relationship with God, that we wait for an hour on a Sunday and then tell him how much we love him and what happens for the rest of the week. You know, do we, moment by moment, tell him how much we appreciate his love for us as much as we love him? Well, you're in it for a treat this morning because, actually, we're at the movies. And one of my favourite psalms is 139, but also one of my favourite musicals is A Fiddler on the Roof. And there's a lovely clip in here, which is a song that I love. And basically, the Jews are being oppressed and being driven out of their land by the Russian forces. Sounds quite familiar, doesn't it? And Tevye and Golda have three daughters. There's trouble in the town, there's trouble around, and life is changing rapidly.

And Tevye asks Golda, do you, do you love me? Do you love me? I sense that question because that love has never really been openly spoken about between them. And maybe sometimes that's our relationship with God. You know, it's not worth waiting 25 years. It's not worth waiting 25 weeks, 25 minutes, 25 seconds without telling God how much we love him, how much we appreciate him, deepening that relational bond that is there. But so often goes unsaid, just like in our clip, the things that need saying. And as we enter this series with the heart of God, that God loves you, I appreciate many Christians and not yet Christians struggle with that statement, that they're going to look at this band and say, what does that heart mean? And the heart means that God loves you. But God, people will say, well, how can God love me? That will be the question. Because so many people who I find come on offer, who you talk to about God, God says, you know, how can they love me because of the way that I am?

They struggle with that statement. And whether it's because of their lifestyle decision, whether it's because of a mistake or a choice, something that they've done, something that they're holding on to, like guilt, resentment, anger, whatever it is, sin, man, inhumanity to man, and all these things, the message is that God loves you. And that's a hard thing for people to appreciate and receive that love. Philip Yancey says in the world-selling book, What's So Amazing About Grace? Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more. The grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less. Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infant God can possibly do, that we are loved, greatly loved.

[4 : 37] In a recent, we've just come back from a conference in Harrogate, and James Aladaran has said in his book, *In A Life on Fire*, I think there is a massive difference between functioning in our relationship with God for his love and functioning in our relationship with God from a place of love.

This might sound like a subtle distinction, but it has a huge impact on the quality and longevity of our spirituality. It's important to understand that God loves us all the same, whether we fast and pray or not. But the more of his love and presence we encounter, the more we desperately want to give ourselves to him. So my response in fasting and prayer would come from a place of complete confidence in his love for me and a desire to seek more of him. We are called to seek more of God in his love for us. And it's not something that God does. It's who he is. It's who God is.

That actually, that we can encounter that love. Even before we were born, like the psalm says this morning, even before we were born, God loves you.

Paul, who experienced that love and abundance when he wrote to the Romans, from a life moved from persecuting Christians to finding that deep, deep love that can only change hearts and minds and lives, says, for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither the angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus.

And of course, the ultimate demonstration of that love is the cross, as we move towards that during Lent. For God so loved the world, you and me, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life. With God, we are not alone.

[7 : 07] So why is it that the people feel so alone? And the psalmist says, where can I go from your spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? God love is with us. And each of us will have our own story today.

One of the biggest tricks and deceits of the enemy is to isolate and convince us that we are alone and unloved. Especially in today's society, we are reeling from a world pandemic where we isolated, where we were on our own, where we spent times, where people's anxiety went through the roof, where we were locked away. People need to know that God is with them and remains with them in that.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit are always and forever with us. It is impossible to escape from God's love. Believe me, I have tried.

He is mighty to save. David knew this in the psalm and these qualities as he was chased down by a crazed King Saul and exiled to hide in a cave.

You know, the issues that we look at here in here that God is here with us. We are never unloved. So if we are so loved, and we are, how do we express that love in our life?

[8 : 47] How do we do that on a day-to-day basis? You know, when did you first fall in love with God or find out that realization of that love with God?

Mine was at a children's camp where suddenly I was stood at the back of the room where I'd given up trusting in God. I'll be totally honest about that. And the children saying, I'm special because God has loved me. I found this overwhelming sense of God's love that I'd never experienced before, and I will never forget since. This overwhelming sense of God's love for us.

When was that realization in our own being that we want to share with other people so that they can come into that relationship as well? In that expression of reciprocal love that marks out our discipleship. In John 13, 35, by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. Lean into my love.

That expression of God's love that we share is worked out every day by the things that we do, the things we say, how we behave, how we respond to others and show that love, because we know that ourself. And when Jesus is asked a question in Luke 10, 25, teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

What is written in the law, Jesus says. How do you read it? He answered, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself. You've answered correctly, Jesus replied. Do this and you will live.

[10 : 36] When was the last time we poured out our love consistently to the one who never gives up on us? Who gave everything to secure that love for us? Personally, I don't think an hour on a Sunday is good enough. You know, it's about an everyday, 24-7, 365 days a year, that we express that love.

And then people will be drawn to us because they need to experience that love. Think of people that you have been drawn to because of the love of God, shown in various different ways.

But how could somebody love me? I hear it again, some people make it difficult to love them, and I appreciate that. You know, the sense of the evil one lies that our sins have separated us from God. You know, it shouldn't become a barrier. We've just said our forgiveness, we've received that forgiveness. There is no barrier to God's love. And so here this morning, as we begin our Lenten series, you know, some people would want to come and say, yeah, but why doesn't God love me? Why can't I experience that love? And also because sometimes when there's been struggle, when there's been disappointment, when you've struggled with a lack of faith, when you've gone through tough times, the thing is, in Lent we recall how Jesus took up his cross and followed me. I'm really sorry to say that I think some people have been groomed in the evangelical thing to say that once you become a Christian, you become actually that there will be no suffering and no more harm, no more worry.

You know, it's not true. Jesus says, take up your cross, but with the confidence that his love is always there. He will never let us down. We're thinking about constant love.

And if like me, you waver slightly, you know, God loves me this much, but then on another day doesn't love me as much because something I've done, then that is a lie that we need to break.

[13 : 16] Because the evil one will do everything to break us from the love of God that is constant. When did you last tell God that you loved him? When did you express that love in a way that was personable, tangible, and outpouring of that love for him? Because it works both ways.

I believe as Christians, we are in a new season. There is a new season that the Spirit of God is ushering in, a season to express that love openly and unashamedly, a love that is visible, is active in order to set people free. Whatever it is that diminishes the fullness of that love in us and through other people. There is a song by Delirious that goes, lead me to the cross where we first met. Draw me to my knees where we can talk. Let me fill your breath. Let me know you're here with me. We draw people to this cross because that's where the love is. That's where love came from.

That's where love is personified. In a father who loved his son so much that he gave him for us so that we can know that love forever.

So this morning there's three things I want to share with you and our sense that we needed to share today. The first one, there are those who are here and may be listening online where something in life has created a wall for you. It's created you to doubt God's love and it's created a stronghold in your life. It's a place you go back to all the time where God can't love me because of this and it takes you back. Today be freed from that because to know God's love and again and again will free you from that being dragged back again and again. Number two, you became a good religious person. You know, but religion took precedence over an intimate and loving relationship with God and a spirit of judgment over others is taken over in your life. You love God but sadly struggle to love your neighbour as yourself. And three, you've never experienced the fullness of the love of God in your life and you desperately, desperately want to know that more.

We know God's love through the power of the Holy Spirit he gave to all people. So at the beginning of this series, which is a very good place to start, I think that came from the sound of music, didn't it?

[16 : 19] So at the beginning of this series, to reveal in this place his power and his gracious love, his life-giving spirit for us. If any of those things resonate, I'm just going to invite you to maybe hold out your hands as we receive that love in all its fullness.

There's an ancient prayer and it's very simple and it says, Holy Spirit, come. Shall we just wait on the Lord to fill us afresh with that love?

Holy Spirit, come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come.

Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. Come. There are barriers to that love. Ask him to show you what those barriers are.

And to break down those strongholds. Maybe you want to speak those words yourself to say, Holy Spirit, would you come?

[17 : 50] Come. God bless you, Lord. Come. Martin, let us know. Let us know.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you. Just sense as well for those that want to be freed from the crippling restriction of religion that has held you fast and has stopped you from moving on.

You got stuck. Stuck in a time war. Holy Spirit, would you come? Show us the love that you have for us today.

Lord, you knew me and you loved me before I was born.

Show me that love. And help me to show that love to you. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.