

When You Believe in God but Aren't Sure He Loves You

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 September 2018

Preacher: Rev. Jay Niblett

[0 : 00] So we're talking about love. Now, we're on this Christian Atheist series. And the question I am working with is, well, it's a statement, really.

I believe in God, but I'm not sure he loves me. I believe in God, but I'm not sure he loves me. Have a little think.

What makes us have that sort of thought? What makes us think that God doesn't love us? So I think if we're honest, we've all had that thought.

Maybe the reason we sometimes think like this is life is just not what we thought it would be. Maybe life is hard. Life is painful. Life is a daily struggle.

Wasn't the promise of the preacher that if I followed Jesus, I would have the best life? Where is it? Isn't that the way the world works?

[1 : 04] We look around and see so many beautiful people living beautiful lives on our streets, on our TVs. If you're a bit more technologically savvy, on our phones.

We think they're the ones that God loves. They're living the dream life. And I'm just trying to keep my head above the water.

Maybe for you right now, life is full of troubles and hardships. Maybe life is just not what you thought it would be. And so that question comes into your mind.

I'm not sure it loves me. If that's true, keep with me. Our passage has some good news for you.

Maybe another reason we sometimes think like this, that God does not love us, is that we know ourselves pretty well.

We know what we've done. We know how we treat others. Even if we don't act it, we know how we think about others. And even when we think that we're pretty good, there's always someone better.

[2 : 19] Maybe we are just not good enough. Just not worth it. Just not worthy of God's love. I mean, why would the God of the Bible waste his time on me?

Maybe right now, that's how you feel about yourself. Why would God waste his time on me? Why would he love me?

In our passage today, Paul writes to the Roman church, who must have been asking a similar question of themselves. In fact, if you spend any time in the epistles, Paul amongst the New Testament writers, need to regularly encourage the church under fire, reminding them that the hardships and the struggle is part of the deal.

In fact, it's a good sign that God is with you. And not that he is not. And let's just look at the church that Paul is specifically talking to here, the Roman church.

To be a Christian in first century Rome was to be rejected by the society you had to live in. It meant standing up for your faith and being persecuted for it.

[3 : 38] To follow Jesus was a rejection of Roman life, its political gods and even commerce. Going to the marketplace became a theological statement.

The church of Rome, as with the whole story of Israel and scripture, is a narrative whereby God's people rarely get the good stuff. I want to tell you, the love of God has little to do with the good life. And the idea that God only loves the worthy is a contradiction of the cross. Jesus uses a great image in Matthew 13 to highlight how God's kingdom grows amongst not isolated from challenge. Amongst the seeds of the kingdom, of the gospel of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection for the sin of the world, weeds have also grown. And one of these weeds is the lie that your status is measured, your status with God is measured by human standards of living.

That God's love and blessing comes based on your ability to be good enough. And proof is a successful life. Sometimes called the prosperity gospel.

[5 : 02] Sometimes called the curly-whirly gospel. Now, do you know what a curly-whirly is? Yes? Good, because this next story will be wasted on you.

Jesus warned us about the weeds, and yet at some point, the gospel of Jesus, truly good news for all people, has gotten confused with the gospel, the weedy gospel, of the curly-whirly.

And we are all getting tangled up in it. I want to tell you a story. Now, the disclaimer is, it's not my own story. Okay?

I'm not plagiarizing. I've got a footnote. Back at college, remembering it's really important to have your footnotes. Really important.

But let me tell you this story. There are two guys who both died. Great start to a story, right? One named John, and another named Bob.

[6 : 04] A lot of thought put into the character development here. John is down to earth, can get a bit grumpy, and has plenty of memories where his anger got the best of him. And he'd shout down the house.

But John was good to his friends. He was good to his kids. The best husband he could be. Sure, he left the seat up a lot, and if he washed up, would always forget the pots.

Mostly, someone else's story. But he more than made up for it with a weekly bottle of wine and a bar of chocolate. When John was a kid, he used to get into trouble.

Nothing more than the usual. But he had to confess to his kids once that he stole a Mars bar from the corner shop. When he got to the pearly gates, he got through by the skin of his teeth.

But he made it. Into glory he plodded. Then there was Bob. His life panned out much like John's. He too got grumpy.

[7 : 10] He knew anger. But too, John was a good friend, a good dad and husband. He too was terrible at washing up. But he knew the power of chocolate and Sauvignon Blanc.

Like John, Bob too had a fun childhood and occasionally got into mischief. He too borrowed a Mars bar on a long-term loan. But he also took a curly-whirly.

Bob approached the pearly gates just behind John. Hey, John. Hey, Bob. You coming in? I think so. And Bob began to walk in when St. Michael looked at him and said, Sorry, son.

That curly-whirly you took as a kid took the scales and you can't come in. You're not good enough. You are not the beloved. The story shows how illogical it is to measure God's love and salvation by an earthly scale.

Sure, it's easy to differentiate between Mother Teresa and Hitler and make a reasonable judgment based on their lives the way that they were probably going.

[8 : 25] But that logic doesn't work with Bob and John. It doesn't work with us. God's love is not so fickle that we could put him off. One too many sins will never tip over the cross.

The truth of the gospel is this. As Paul writes, If you believe in God, you can trust that God demonstrated his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Whether you are struggling to keep afloat, whether you are super successful, the nicest person you know, or the most, that love is a permanent reality for you.

Paul declares, Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall trouble, or hardship, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, I always wonder what that meant, or danger, or swords?

No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced, emphatic, convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither present nor future, nor any power, neither height nor depth, neither anything else in all creation, it's like, are you getting the point, church?

[9 : 52] We'll be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. God's love for you cannot be taken from you.

It is not measured by you. It is not dependent on you. It is not based on your goodness or your evil, which is a good thing because like Bob, we've all done one too many things wrong.

God's love is not something that you can lose. Nor is it something you can earn. From the beginning of time, scripture tells us, God chose to love you.

That's God's prerogative. Just look at your Bible. He chose to cover Adam and Eve even when they were the ones who sinned. An act of love.

He chose to make a nation out of Abraham's seed and from this nobody he made a people who he could love and through whom the world could see true love. That people, Israel, though regularly betrayed God and lived in and out of exile, remained the beloved of God.

[11 : 10] And finally, through Jesus and the redemptive work of the cross, we have received all the proof we will ever need that you who believe in God are loved.

And in that cross we can trust. God is the God whose love and who loves. And his love can never be stopped.

So what? We, the church, now need to live in that reality, in the reality of God's love. That's the message to the Roman church that nothing can separate them from the love of God.

That goodness, although a sign of God in their life, is not the measure of God's love to them. The same is true for us. Will we believe the lie that God only loves the worthy?

Those who seem to have it all. Or will we trust that the God we believe in truly, unconditionally loves us? And that God's love is the reality we as believers must live in.

[12 : 25] The reality where what matters is not who we are, but whose we are. In living in the love of God, the troubles of our own failures are put into perspective.

That no matter what's going on, we are the one whom God loves. And in that love, like the Roman church, we can lift our heads up and keep moving on.

because we walk in God's love and what can never stop us. Amen.