

God's Love and Our Assurance Pt 1

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[0 : 00] Well, it's sung about in songs. It's celebrated at weddings. And it's apparently what makes the world go round. It's L-O-V-E, love.

Yep, I've got about 20 people with me. Excellent. I wonder if you can call out the next word or two to these famous love songs. We'll start with a really easy one. You ready?

All you need is... Love. Yeah, okay. How about this one? Love me tender. I think it was. Okay, I was thinking that was for the older folk, but Andrew, you got it.

So, wow, okay. This one was for the young ones. All of me loves... Okay, oh, I heard the little voices at the back there.

Yeah, they got it. That's right. And of course, the Whitney Houston classic. I-E-I-E-O will... Well, it's not or, that's a donkey. I-E-I-E-I will always...

[0 : 57] Love you. Thank you. That's very kind. Love is certainly a big part of the human existence, isn't it? But it's also at the heart of what we celebrate today, Good Friday.

We heard what happened on that first Good Friday from our first Bible reading, didn't we? But it's the second one that I want to spend some time unpacking.

And one verse in particular, a verse that I want to commend to your memory. It's a verse worth remembering. A verse that's at the heart of our passage.

A verse that's on your sheets in italics or on the screen. It's verse 8. But God demonstrates his love for us in this.

While we were sinners, still sinners, Christ died for us. And there's three parts to this verse. The first is that God demonstrates his love.

[1 : 59] You see, most people know that love, real love, is not just a feeling that we can sometimes not have, depending on our mood or how annoying the other person is being, or words that can sometimes be said without meaning.

Love is also demonstrated with action. Even Wikipedia knows this. So I typed in Wikipedia, how to know if a person truly loves you.

And notice their top one response. Notice how the person acts. So if you want to know if God really loves us, then we need to ask, how does God act towards us?

How does he demonstrate his love for us? And the answer is lots of ways. But as Vijay said at the start of the service, the supreme way is by giving his son to die for us.

And that's the second part I want to unpack, although it's the last part of the verse. Christ died for us. And as we heard from that first reading, Jesus was crucified on a cross, wasn't he?

[3 : 08] That first Good Friday. It happened around nine o'clock in the morning. So not too long ago. And even though Pilate knew he was innocent.

In fact, Jesus remained largely silent. I don't know if you noticed that. Deliberately, not only to fulfill Old Testament scripture, but to ensure he stayed on the cross to die for us.

That is in our place for our sin. In our place was symbolized by Barabbas. You remember him from the reading? He was a convicted criminal.

Yet Jesus took his place while Barabbas went free. In fact, Matthew even included Barabbas's first name. Did you remember what that was?

It was also Jesus. Yeah. Just to make the substitution obvious. Jesus the Messiah for Jesus Barabbas. In our place.

[4 : 10] And for our sins was symbolized by those three hours of darkness. You remember that came over the whole land from noon to 3 p.m. in the afternoon. Because in the Old Testament, darkness symbolized judgment.

Like in the book of Amos, where God says to Amos that the time is right for his people Israel to be judged. Because of the way they were mistreating God and mistreating one another, especially the poor.

And then God likens this judgment, do you notice, to the sun going down at noon. And darkening the earth in broad daylight. And lightening it to the morning for an only sun.

On the end of a bitter day. And what happened that first Good Friday? Well, the sun went down at noon. And God mourned for his only sun.

But not because Jesus mistreated God or others. No, no. Not like Israel. But because we have. Because we've not always loved God with our whole heart, with our everything.

[5 : 20] None of us have. And we've not always loved others as ourselves. How people often look at the world and they see the suffering and evil there in it. And they say, if God existed, then why hasn't he done something about it?

But the thing is, he has. He's done two things. Firstly, he has set a day when he will judge the world. Where he'll hold everyone accountable. And the only problem with that is, everyone includes, guess who?

Me and you. But the second thing he's done, because he loves us, He first gave his son Christ to die for us.

That whoever believes in him may be forgiven and go free like Barabbas. You see, God takes sin and evil seriously.

He really does. Because the only thing that could pay for it, apart from us, is his only son. In a little while, we're going to sing a song that reminds us of how deep the Father's love for us is.

[6 : 34] And one of the lines of the song says, It was my sin that held him there. And it's why, despite the mockers calling him to come down from the cross, if you remember, he willingly stayed to pay for our sin.

And it's why, although we may feel disconnected to this event 2,000 years ago, we are actually very much connected. Because it was for your sin and mine that he was held there.

And so to help us feel this connection that we actually do have, we're going to do something a little bit different after the sermon. I know when a preacher says something different, everyone holds onto their pew.

What's he going to do? Let me explain. We're going to sing that song, How Deep the Father's Love. We're going to sing it through twice. And as soon as the music starts, there'll be some people at the back holding boxes of nails that look like this.

They're nothing compared to these. They're just the biggest that Bunnings had. But during the song, while we're all standing, so it's less obvious, you won't feel too out in the open, too rare.

[7 : 49] So while everyone's standing, why not go down the back and grab a nail from Eric or Anne or have them in the box and then walk forward and place it in this basket at the foot of the cross.

And as you walk down with the nail in your hand, let it remind you that it was your sin that held him there.

But, and this is really important, as you leave the nail at the foot of the cross and return to your seat, remember that you leave your sin there, too.

Paid for, forgiven. Knowing that Christ died for you, as the verse says, in your place for your sin.

And in case that's not enough to demonstrate God's love, then look at the middle part of the verse, which is our third part. He did this while we were still sinners.

[9 : 09] While we still ignored and rejected God. Which is actually, whether you realize it or not, like spitting in God's face.

The creator of this world. I remember walking home alone from primary school one day, I was about eight years old, and some bored older kids saw an easy target, and so they came and started harassing me, and one of them actually spat in my face.

And let me tell you, it was disgusting, it was upsetting, and it was infuriating. If I had had superpowers back then, I would have been, well, they would have been goners.

Not that I have superpowers now, mind you, but. But you see, ignoring the God who gave us life in this world is like spitting in his face.

And whether you realize it or not, it is disgusting. It is upsetting for him. It is infuriating. As our passage goes on to say in verse 10, that it makes us enemies.

[10 : 19] And yet it was while we were sinners, spitters, enemies, that Christ died for us. How much, how much would you have to love someone to do that?

In fact, it's this very idea that is highlighted here. You see, verse 8 begins with the word, but, doesn't it? And so it's drawing a contrast to the verse that came before it.

So in verse 7, we read, in verse 7, very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die.

It's saying the same thing in different ways. Rarely will someone die for a righteous or innocent or good person. Yes, there are examples of it in history.

But it's rare. Which is why when it does happen, it often makes the news, doesn't it? Like the school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in the US.

[11 : 26] Do you remember that? This year actually marks the 10th anniversary. Can you believe it? Of that shooting where a disturbed gunman, Adam Lanza, shot 20 children aged 6 and 7 dead, plus 6 teachers.

One of those teachers was Victoria Soto on the slide there, who, as the headline says, gave her life to save terrified children.

And you probably can't see it there. The subtitle down the bottom says that she did this by shielding the children, putting herself between them and the gunman.

As she loved her students and demonstrated her love by dying for them, didn't she? It's an amazing story of love and sacrifice, isn't it?

Verse 7 says it's rare, but it does happen. But, verse 8, in contrast to that love of Victoria's is God's love.

[12 : 32] That's on a whole other level. Because he didn't just give his son, and Christ didn't just willingly die while we were innocent school kids or teachers.

No, no, he did it while we were still sinners, spitters, enemies. I don't know if you've heard, but I'm sure most of you have.

It happened in February. It's done the rounds on Facebook and the like. The story of the Ukrainian man who pulled up next to a Russian tank that had run out of fuel and offered to tow the tank back to Russia.

Have you heard of this story? This is what happened. Even the Russian soldiers have a bit of a chuckle.

But how cheeky and how brave do you have to be to do that to Russian soldiers invading your country holding machine guns. But I wonder if you've also heard of the mass graves of civilians that they've found once Russia pulled out of Kiev and surrounding towns like Buzovar.

[13 : 46] There's even talk of war crimes and punishment, and rightly so. But imagine that Ukrainian man who offered to tow the tank then willingly died to take the punishment of those Russian soldiers who killed his fellow citizens.

How much would that Ukrainian man have to love his fellow man to do that? But you see, that's God's love for us.

As we'll sing, how deep the father's love for us, how vast beyond all other measure. God demonstrates his love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And so how will you respond to such love? Will you accept it or reject it?

To accept it means to trust or believe in Jesus. To believe that he really did die to pay for your sin so that you can be made right with God.

[14 : 56] Go free, free from God's judgment or wrath, which is God's anger, which he has every right to be, by the way. I mean, if someone spits in your face, you have every right to be angry, don't you?

But if we believe we can be guaranteed or assured. Of being free from God's wrath on judgment day, free to enter life eternal.

And that's what verse 9 actually goes on to talk about. He says, Since we have now been justified by his blood, that is made right with God by Christ's death, how much more certainly shall we be saved from God's wrath on judgment day through Christ?

Saved from wrath on that day to enjoy life eternal in a new creation every day. You see, God's love that gave God's son is our assurance.

It's our guarantee that we've been made right with God. And that we'll be free from his wrath on judgment day, free to enjoy life eternal in a new creation every day.

[16:07] But again, the question is, will you accept it? Will you accept God's love and believe in Jesus or will you reject it and ignore Jesus?

One gives the guarantee of freedom from wrath and life eternal and the other doesn't. Will you accept it? And for us who have, then firstly, will we reflect on it throughout our lives?

For those who were here on Sunday morning last Sunday, I said that we can become so familiar with his death that we fail to grasp the enormity of it.

And so we're to reflect on it throughout our lives that we might grasp it more deeply. That as we sung in our first hymn, that we might even cherish the old rugged cross, treasure it, love it.

Do we do that? Such that we'll joyfully, unashamedly, wholeheartedly follow Christ.

[17:14] For at the cross, we see both God's love and our assurance of salvation. In fact, the more we reflect on God's love for us, the more we'll be moved to serve Christ, even, dare I say, sacrificially.

Because that's what's starting to go missing from modern day Christianity as I talk to other ministers from other churches, the sacrificial bit.

And so firstly, will we reflect on God's love throughout our lives that we might joyfully serve Christ, even sacrificially? And lastly, will you reflect God's love to others in your life?

I was talking with someone from one of my Bible study groups who has some friends who are missionaries in Moldova, which is right next door to Russia, to Ukraine, sorry.

Actually, they're friends of Vijay and Rachel's as well. But they're missionaries over there and they've been working hard to provide shelter, food, transport and protection for all these people fleeing the Ukraine.

[18:27] Is that not a reflection of God's love for others? And in fact, they needed to buy a minibus to help transport some of these refugees. And so they put out a request, as I understand it, on Facebook, just to a couple of their link churches.

When this guy in my Bible study group was telling me, I said, oh, can we, you know, can we join in? There's people at our church who want to help. And this would be a really good way to do it through a personal contact. And he said, oh, look, I'll go and check.

And then he came back to me and said, oh, they had to close the link within hours because they were inundated with money. Is that a good problem to have? And is that not another reflection of God's love for others?

Will we reflect on it throughout our lives? And will we reflect it to others in our lives? For God demonstrates his own love for us in this. Let's pray.

Our gracious heavenly father, we do thank you for the meaning of this day. And for the reminder of your love demonstrated at the cross.

[19:40] Where while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Help us, we pray, to accept your love by believing in Jesus. And to reflect on it throughout our lives that we might continue to serve Jesus.

And that we might reflect it to others in our lives that they might come to know Jesus. We ask it all in his name. Amen.