

# God's Everlasting Love

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Preacher: Nigel Anderson

[ 0 : 00 ] You know, when I first heard these words, when I first heard these great words from Jeremiah 31, it was in a systematic theology class in the then Free Church College, and this happened some 18 years ago.

I remember the lecturer was teaching that systematic theology class. He was teaching on the love of God. And then he quoted these words from Jeremiah 31.

I still remember being absolutely staggered at what I heard, what I was hearing. It was as if thunder had broken out.

It was not any kind of threatening thunder, but it was like a thunderous joy in the knowledge that God should love me. And not just love me, that God should love sinless me.

And not just God should love me, but having loved me from all eternity. And it was a truth that I just simply couldn't take in. I was stunned, just utterly stunned in praise and stunned in, I suppose, what we might nowadays refer to as the wow factor.

[ 1 : 13 ] And particularly, you know, hearing these words at a particular time. You know, for all of us, when we hear these great words that God has loved you with an everlasting love, you know, they're so pertinent, so relevant, so important, so timely.

Particularly, for example, not particularly, but always, but especially at times when a believer may be struggling in his faith. Or maybe struggling with providential circumstances.

And God's word appears. And God's word strikes beautifully home to the heart of the believer. And these words that bring joy to a troubled soul.

Bring that utter joy to a believer who needs the ointment of God's word to solve a troubled heart.

And if these words certainly brought comfort to me two decades ago, I pray that these same words will bring comfort to you.

Comfort to you this afternoon. And that they'll remain with you. And even after the service is finished, that you'll ponder these words. That you'll meditate on the great truth of what we've read.

[ 2 : 34 ] That truth of the love of God rooted towards his people from all eternity. So let's focus on certainly the latter part of the passages that we read in Jeremiah 31.

And consider, first of all, the context in which these great words are written. Because, of course, we have to look at the wider application of the words.

But we do need to look at the context as well. And that's why we look, first of all, at God's grace in the wilderness. At that time declares the Lord, I will be the God of all the clans of Israel.

And they shall be my people. Thus says the Lord. The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness. Jeremiah the prophet, he's been given this task.

He's been given a task. Not a very pleasant task, we might say. But certainly, he's been asked to speak to people who are about to go into exile.

[ 3 : 34 ] The people of Judah have disobeyed God. They've followed after other gods. They've not fulfilled their part of the covenant of faithfulness that they've made before God. The people had broken faith with God.

They had promised to love God and no other. And yet they'd broken that promise. They'd broken that part of the covenant. God had never broken his part of the covenant.

He remained faithful to his people. But the people had broken faithfulness with God. And while God rightly will punish his people, he's going to send them into exile.

He's not going to leave them. He's not going to forsake them. The exiles are going to be sent into Babylon, but they're going to return. There's going to be a set time of exile for the people to go into Babylon.

But even in their experience there in Babylon, even in that, we might say, that wilderness experience, the people are going to find grace.

[ 4 : 36 ] They're going to know grace from the God of all grace. Their forefathers and their wandering in the desert in the time of the Exodus, they knew grace.

They found grace from God in their wilderness, their literal wilderness experience. The same God is going to show his grace to his people, even in their wilderness experience in Babylon.

And, see, as God says to the people there, as we read in the passage, God's still referring to himself as the God of all the clans of Israel, and that they shall be my people.

I mean, the people are going to suffer. They're going to suffer, as Jeremiah tells in a very poetic language, they're going to suffer the sword of the enemy because of their foolish wandering far from God.

But the sword of the enemy is not going to have the final saying. The final word is going to come from God. And that final word to the Lord's people isn't the sword of suffering.

[ 5 : 41 ] It's the God of grace. That unmerited, undeserved grace and favour from God towards all those who are his. And it's that redeeming grace, that saving grace that God lavishes on his people.

Even when I, even when you, when we are found in our wilderness times. You know, these times of wandering, these times of hardship, even these times of suffering, these times of God's chastising you because of your sin, because of my sin.

And for that sin, God, as it were, allowing you to experience that wilderness aspect of life.

So that God teaches you through that desert experience in order to restore you to himself, in order to reveal the more his great grace towards you.

Because it's that grace that saves, and it's that grace that keeps saving. It's that grace that sustains you in times of trial, in times of suffering. It's that grace that never departs from you because God's love towards you is eternal.

[ 6 : 58 ] Even when, maybe for a season, for a time, as it were, you depart from God in your faithfulness. God never departs from you.

So give thanks to the God of all grace. Yes, for these times when you've found grace in the wilderness, and you've known that grace in your desert experience. Because that really takes us on to what Jeremiah tells us next, God's everlasting presence.

Because we read further, that when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from far away. These words really have to be looked at in the context of God's everlasting love towards his people. I mean, the people there in the wilderness experience, they were desperate for that rest, that being settled. Think of the Israelites in their wilderness experience, in the exodus.

They were desperate. They were desperate to get to the promised land. And now, those who have gone ahead of them, those who are now in exile, those who are going to be sent into exile, when they're in exile, they're going to yearn for their land.

[ 8 : 18 ] They're going to yearn from the land of promise. They know they're going to be exiled because of their disobedience to God. But there will come a time when they'll come to their senses, when they realize what separated them from God.

And they're going to long to be brought back to God. They're going to long to go back to their homeland, their homeland, the land of promise. And just like the prodigal son in the parable that Jesus taught, they will come to their senses.

They will seek to return to God the Lord. And at that point, when they come to their senses, the Lord will appear to them as it were, as he says, from afar.

Because God never left his people. Even though it appeared that God was far from them in his presence. Yes, the people have been so far from God in their hearts, but at just the right time, God made his presence known to them.

He rescued them. He delivered them. He restored them. He appeared to them in grace and mercy. And he did allow his people to return to their homeland. And he did it when it appeared that God was far from them.

[ 9 : 35 ] When in fact, it was they, the people, were far from God. I pray that's a word of comfort to any one of you tonight who might feel that you're far from God or indeed that God's far from you.

You who know that, yes, you're his. You know that Jesus died for you. You know that his righteousness was imputed to you when he died on the cross. You know that you can never be lost.

You know too that you've wandered far from him. You've neglected times of prayer. You've neglected reading his word.

You've neglected communing with God. You've neglected loving God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind. You've neglected loving your neighbour as yourself.

You cry out, where are you, Lord? And he's near. Because you who are in Christ can never be outside of Christ. Even though you can so often, as I so often can, as we all can, can drift far from God.

[10:44] So in your heart, return to God. And, you know, from another part of Scripture, listen to the words that God gives of reassuring his people of returning to him.

Joel 2, 12 to 13, yet even now declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and with mourning. Rend your hearts and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster.

Remember, the steadfast love of God is from God who's eternal. God who spoke to his people through Jeremiah, who emphasised his great love, even as we're going to consider for the remainder of our thoughts this evening, this great truth of God's everlasting love.

I have loved you with an everlasting love. You know, I've been thinking of God's grace to his people in their wilderness experience. I've been thinking of God's abiding presence with his people, but remember that love, that grace, that's on the basis, basis of something so infinitely wonderful.

[12:04] God's abiding presence, God's grace towards his people is based on love, God's love, and not just love, but everlasting love, and not just everlasting love, but the Lord's everlasting love.

You know, and then when we truly do take to heart these words, these words of utter truth, it's really a staggering statement, and yet it's a statement that expresses the nature and character of God, something that we can so easily forget about, even in these days that we're living through.

You know, we can even sing Jesus loves me the sign of love, but remember that that love is rooted in eternity, because it's a love that's so deep, it's a love that's so infinite that, you know, our finite human minds can't absorb that truth, can't fully absorb it, and of course as we hear God speak to us through his word, and by faith we truly do believe that what God says is true, that I have loved you with an everlasting love.

So, what are we to make of these words? What's God saying here when he says to his people I've loved you with an everlasting love? Well, again we have to look at the context, the immediate context when God spoke these words to his people.

God was promising that he was going to restore them back from exile, and he would do that because of his everlasting love towards them. And you can extend that application to the Lord's people today, all who are his in the new Israel of God, those who are God's covenant people because what God sent through Jeremiah two and a half thousand years ago has got absolute contemporary application for each one of us.

[14:03] So, let's explore these words, these great words, let's look at them in more detail, in order that we worship God, in order that we praise him, praise him for his love, and in praising him for his love, to love him in return, and yes, love one another as we'll explore a little more in a moment.

But, God's word, I have loved you with an everlasting love. Well, I think the first thing we can say is this, the foundation of your relationship with God, you who know him as Lord and God, that relationship that you have with God is based solely on God's initiative of love.

And that initiative that's eternal. You know, there was never a time when God didn't love you. You know, even these words themselves, grasp them, grasp that truth.

There was never a time when God didn't love you. There was, and there'll never be a time when that love is removed from you. Because God is utterly consistent.

God's utterly consistent in the measure of his love. There's no other love that matches God's love. There's nothing higher, nothing deeper, nothing, nothing broader, nothing finer, nothing greater than the love that God shows to those who are his.

[15:25] You know, just take that truth in for a moment. God's initiative in love. That love that will never let you go. And that initiative was God's.

And it was God's initiative not through anything favourable in those whom God directed his love towards. God had no obligation to love any of us.

There was nothing that God that caused God to love you other than God's obligation to love. God's word, as we see in God's word elsewhere, Jacob I have loved.

Esau I have hated. There was nothing in Jacob, in other words, nothing in Israel that prompted God to love that particular people. There was nothing in any of those who were his somehow to prompt God to love them, and not another.

We all deserve God's wrath. We all deserve God's curse for our sinning against him, but God has loved his people. God has loved you who are his, who is unmerited and undeserved love.

[16:37] Then there's the reality that if God has loved you with an everlasting love, then there's true forgiveness. There's that forgiveness from God when we sin against him.

Now, of course, that doesn't mean to say that somehow because his love is eternal, then somehow you can do what you want to do, and, well, God's going to forgive me anyway. Absolutely not. But where there's true repentance of heart, where the prodigal does return to the Father, and the prodigal returns with all his heart with true repentance of sin, then, yes, we have that absolute assurance that an eternal God's going to forgive.

yes, me, you who've sinned against him because of his eternal love towards you. You just think of that grace and love. Somebody's saying God's everlasting love keeps the door constantly open for the returning prodigal.

Bear that and maintain that to heart. God's everlasting love keeps the door constantly open for the returning prodigal. Take these words out.

You who love the Lord Jesus and you hear him say to you, I have loved you with an everlasting love. I to you, that I-you relationship that the Lord has with you, that relationship that's unbreakable.

[18:04] Of course, we know from the fuller revelation of God in the New Testament, we know that that everlasting love is from God, God the Father who chose his people, even before us, we read in Ephesians 1, even before the foundation of the world.

In other words, from all eternity, that's why we read that passage in Ephesians 1. And again, when we think of the work of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in salvation, that work itself, rooted in eternity.

Of course, the salvation of any believer is made effective by the Lord Jesus and Jesus work in space and time in redeeming sinners.

But of course, that love itself of the Lord Jesus, rooted in eternity, that love that ensures the adoption of sinners, adoption into the family of God, sinners reconciled to God, rooted in eternity.

Again, when we think of, when we talk about the plan of salvation, then think of that plan, rooted in eternity, initiated from all eternity.

[19:15] Think of the work of the Holy Spirit, drawing believers, rather, drawing sinners to Christ, that work of regenerating sinners, so that sinners are gifted faith to believe.

Again, yes, happening in the life of those whom God has chosen from all eternity, yes, that drawing power of the Spirit to you at a particular moment in time, but again, that plan initiated in all eternity.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit involved in all eternity and from all eternity, the work of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit involved in your salvation.

And so let's echo these words that the apostle Paul wrote when he was truly staggered at the love and the grace of God even towards him.

He wrote in Romans 11, 33, Oh, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.

[20:27] So let's even in the quiet of our hearts, even now, praise God for his everlasting love towards you. and know that because his love is everlasting and your praise towards him is going to be everlasting because there's never going to be a time in all eternity when God is not praised.

Even when you enter the glory of eternity itself, you'll be praising God and praising him eternally because of his eternal love towards you. then finally we've been thinking of that love of God, the eternal love of God, the grace of God, his abiding presence, his eternal love.

But then there's one more thing we have to see from the passage and that's God's drawing love because as we notice in the passage, immediately after God declares his eternal love, his everlasting love to his people, he tells of his faithfulness towards them.

Verse 3, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. That faithfulness that continues, that never ends, that faithfulness that's rooted in God's covenant of love towards his people.

But when you actually start digging deeper into the passage, when you start looking at the passage in the original language, you see how the passage is written and you see how that ongoing, continuing love of God's expressed in language that really should thrill the heart of any believer because when we read of that continuing love, it's expressed in language that actually speaks of drawing or leading somebody or something towards another.

[ 22 : 19 ] That's the word that's used here for drawing. It's, well, it was used, for example, later when Jeremiah, if you remember, Jeremiah was cast into a bottle dungeon by the Babylonians, the enemies, he was in this dungeon and he was lifted up, he was literally drawn up from that dungeon by Ibud Melleth, this North African believer who drew Jeremiah up with these cords, these ropes, to help him escape from certain death.

And so when God says that he's continued in his faithfulness, he's actually saying here, he's telling of his drawing love, the love that leads, the love that, as it were, pulls you out of the pit, that love that pulls you out of the mire of sin.

Yes, we might resist that love, but God's irresistible grace that's rescued you, that's drawn you away from sin, and set you in firm ground, in solid ground.

And of course, that solid ground being the love of God. It's as Sam Forte expresses, he drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet on a rock, making my steps secure. Again, when we look at the original text, that love that's expressed in the original language, well, it uses a word here that has got many varying meanings, it's a word that's all connected with love, steadfast love, forgiving love, faithful love.

[ 24 : 03 ] So when you add up all that we see when we realise God's eternal love, God's love towards his people, and we grasp that wonder of God drawing us to him and his steadfast love, love, and again think back to that initiative in love, God's initiative, that power in his love, that drawing power, God's care towards you in love, it's that eternal love that's never going to permit you to be loosed from that love.

Of course, the full extent of that love was seen in the life and death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus because God was faithful and loved his promise to send a saviour, to send, yes, to send his son and to send him for all peoples.

Lord Jesus was sent in love and the Lord Jesus came in love. He's the saviour of love and you who are his, you can rest in that eternal promise of salvation because God has loved you with an eternal love.

So what's your response then to this great statement of eternal love, God's everlasting love towards you who are his? Well, we've mentioned praise, praise to God, absolutely crucial.

We've expressed the need for a thankful heart to express that joy in the Lord for God's loving kindness towards you. But there has to be love in return.

[ 25 : 41 ] There has to be that love for God seen and demonstrated in your obedience to his word. That delighting in God, that seeking his will, that trusting in him, trusting the one who's been faithful to you, who's drawn you to himself in faithfulness and his steadfast love.

And one more thing to say before we close. Love, if God's loved you with an everlasting love, then love has to characterize your life, loving God and loving one another.

Because the person who receives God's love must live a life of love. Love to the Father. Love to God the Father for his electing love.

And love to the Son of the Lord Jesus for Jesus' obedient love to his Father and for your sake. And of course, love to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who drew you to Jesus in love.

And if love to God, if that love to God is absolutely necessary in any who know the love of God, then there has to be also love one for another. Showing the love of God to others.

[ 26 : 59 ] Showing others that love, the love that saved you. keeps you and secures you for everlasting life. So just dwell again, just emphasize that love, dwell in that wonderful love.

Yes, contemplate that love. And as you do so, yes, be lost in wonder, love and praise to the one who's loved you from all eternity.

Let's pray. Lord, how can we grasp that truth, that you have loved your people with an everlasting love. And yet, Lord, as we hear you speak to us these words, we give you thanks, that we believe them, that we know them to be true, for you are true.

Lord, help us truly to take in what you have given to us for our understanding and for our application. May we not be those who hear your word and not put it into practice, but may we be

those who truly do show forth the love of God seen for us in the Lord Jesus, and help us to show that love one to another.  
Hear us, Lord, as we continue in worship before you now. We pray these things in Jesus' name.  
Amen. Amen.