

A Love so Amazing, so Divine

Hosea 3: 1 -5, 1 John 4: 7 – 21, John 3:16

I want to draw your attention this morning to the most important theme in the Bible – the love of God. It is my all time favourite topic.

What is it that you think of when we talk about the love of God? Is it his goodness to us in the provision of a beautiful world? Is it his promised presence, his providence, his guidance? Is it his promise of eternal life? I suspect it is this and more, much more. The love of God certainly includes the gift of his son Christ, and the death of Jesus on the cross, so that our sins might be forgiven, and that through his death we might stand righteous and holy in his sight. I know, and this has always been true, that when I think of the Cross, of Jesus dying, I end up thinking of how much God must love us to allow such a thing. God loving us, God loving me, God loving sinful me. Surely, above and beyond everything else, the Cross speaks to us of God's love. And it is I believe that when we come to understand the measure of that love, and respond to it, a transformation takes place, in us. It is allowing the love of God to get to us, to saturate our beings that causes revival, renewal, a new orientation, a healing, a wholeness, in us, and in the life of the church.

And so, it is, on the Love of God, a Love so Amazing, so Divine, that I want to focus our attention this morning, and only for a moment. Our text comes from two portions of Scripture. In 1st John, as the Apostle John summarizes everything he knows about God he writes, "God is Love". And then again from the John in his gospel, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". These verses carry

the very heart and message of the Christian gospel, and it begins with God's love. God is love. God so loved the world that he gave.

Many years ago, the great Swiss theologian, Carl Barth, was in the United States for a series of lectures. After one of his addresses someone said: "Dr. Barth, what is the greatest thought that has ever passed through your mind?" Barth paused for quite a long time, as he carefully thought about his answer. Then he raised his head and said with great grace and child like simplicity, "Jesus loves me, this I know, and the Bible tells me so". This is the truth that Christians for the last 2000 years have acknowledged, and the more that they have discovered the person of Jesus Christ in the Bible the more they have realized the love of God.

As we look at God's Word, we find that it says many things about God's love. I want to mention four.

- 1. The first thing I want to say is that the Bible tells us that God's love is a great love.** In Ephesians chapter 2, verses 4 and 5 Paul talks about God's love, saying, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love with which he loves us. Even when we were dead in sins, has made us alive together with Christ. By grace you are saved". The verse tells us that God's love is great. The greatness of God's love consists in that it is bigger or greater than our brokenness, our selfishness, our rebellion. God pours out his wrath upon us, by banishing us from his sight forever, causing a great divide to separate us and him. But his love is greater than our sin and it is his love that builds a bridge across the great divide so that we can come to him, and we can know him and have eternal fellowship with him. That bridge of course is his son

Christ, and his death on the cross. The greatness of God's love. It was through John chapter 3, verse 16, that Dwight L. Moody learned to appreciate the greatness of God's love. Moody had gone to England on a preaching mission, and met Henry Moorhouse, a young minister, who told Moody one day, that he was thinking of visiting the United States. And Moody, minister of the largest church in America at the time, said to Moorhouse, "when you are in the U.S., come to Chicago and I will give you a chance to preach in my church". A short time after arriving back home he received a Cablegram from Moorhouse, "will be in Chicago on Sunday". Moody was a little sorry that he had invited the young minister to preach in his church, because he really didn't know much about him, and it so happened that Moody was going to be away that very Sunday. After talking to the leaders of the congregation he decided to have Moorhouse preach. "Have him on Sunday," Moody said, "and if he is any good, put him back on Monday". He arrived home on Thursday and he asked his wife "How did the young preacher do"? and his wife said, "he's a better preacher than you; he is telling sinners that God loves them". "That is not right; God does not love sinners", said Moody. "Well, go and listen to him yourself. He is preaching tonight". So Moody went to hear him, and confessed afterwards, it was on that night, he got his first clear understanding of the gospel, and the greatness of the love of God.

- 2. Secondly, the Bible not only says that the love of God is great, it also says that it is infinite.** This is what Paul means when he writes in the third chapter of Ephesians that his prayer for

Christians is that they 'may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, of the love of Christ, which passes all knowledge.'

How can we understand the infinite love of God? We can come to know it, yet only in part. We have been touched by his love. We have experienced it, but never in full measure. We only scratch the surface of his love, for the breadth, length, height and depth of God's love is infinite. One hymn which expresses this kind of love was written by F.M. Lehman, but the final verse was added to the song afterwards, when it was found written on the wall of a room of an Asylum, by a man who before he died, had obviously come to know in part the immeasurable extent of God's love.

The love of God is greater far
than tongue or pen can ever tell;
it goes beyond the highest star,
and reaches to the lowest hell.

The guilty pair bowed down with care,
God gave his Son to win; his erring child he
reconciled, and rescued from his sin.

Could we with ink the ocean fill.
And were the skies of parchment made,
were every stalk on earth a quill,
and every man a scribe by trade,
to write the love of God above
would drain the ocean dry.

Nor could the scroll contain the whole
though stretched from sky to sky.

Oh, love of God how rich and pure,
how measureless and strong,
It shall forever more endure
the saints' and angel's song.

This is our song if we have come to know in part that great and infinite love of God toward us through Christ Jesus.

- 3. God's love is great. God's love is infinite. And thirdly, God's love is a giving love.** This is the heart of John 3:16. How much does God love us? God loves us so much that he gave his only begotten Son. It is common place to say today that God is love. But how do we know this is so. Not because of creation surely, for the evidence of creation is not clear. Not because of God's hand on the seasons of the year, because we do have our tornadoes, droughts, tidal waves, hurricanes, floods and ice storms, as well as the beautiful sunsets and majestic mountains. Not because we tend to value love, of many of us do not. We know God loves us because he has given his son to be crucified for us, and thereby to bring us back into fellowship with himself. We know God loves us, because he gave his best gift, his greatest gift perfectly suited to our needs; for when we deserved only is wrath, condemnation, and judgement, God gave us his son. It is in the face of the selfless, self sacrificing Jesus that we learn of God's character, and his love for us. That God loves us, is the best news you and I will ever hear. It makes all the difference in our lives. In spite of everything else, everything we are ashamed of, we can walk through life with our heads up. Jesus knows us,

the very worst about us, and he still loves us, and thinks we are precious, and that we were worth dying for. Doesn't that put a song in your heart and on your lips, and a spring in your step, as you remember the self giving love of God.

4. Finally, not only does the Bible say that God's love is great, infinite, and giving, but it also says that it is an unchanging love.

In other words, God loves us in such a way that nothing you or I have done or will ever do will alter it. This is the point made by one of the greatest stories in the Bible, the story of Hosea and his unfaithful wife Gomer. Hosea was a preacher. One day the Lord came to him, and said, "Hosea, I want you to marry a woman who is going to prove unfaithful to you. You are going to love her but she is going to turn from your love. Nevertheless, the more faithless she becomes, the more faithful and loving you will be. I want you to do this because I want to give my people an illustration of how I love them. Your marriage will be a pageant, a drama. You will play God. The woman will play the part of Israel. For I love Israel with an unchangeable love. And she has turned from me and takes other gods for lovers. Hosea did as God told him. The time came when Gomer left her husband. But Hosea continued to be faithful, even taking food to her and her live in lovers. The final act of the drama was approaching. The time came when Gomer sank so low that she was sold as a slave in the city of Jerusalem, to pay off her debts, and God told Hosea, to go and buy her. Slaves were always sold naked. When a beautiful girl was on sale the men bid freely, and the bidding went high. Here was Gomer. Her clothes were taken off. The bidding would

have started slowly. Perhaps, one man may have bid three pieces of silver. And another five, another ten, another twelve, and another thirteen. The low bidders would have dropped off when Hosea said “fifteen pieces of silver a bushel of barley and a measure of wine.” The auctioneer looked around for a higher bid. Seeing none, he declared, This slave is sold to Hosea for fifteen pieces of silver and bushel of barley and measure of wine. So Hosea took his wife whom he now owned, put her clothes on her and led her away through the crowd to his home. Does God love like that? Yes, he does. Have you ever lost faith in God, because of sickness, disappointments or so called unanswered prayer, or some other reason? Have you become cold in your relationship to him and wondered whether he even loves you at all? But do you know who allowed you to turn away, who even gave you the energy to think that God did not care? It was God. And when we say, I am where I am today because of me; I am a self made person. God had nothing to do with it. You know don't you, who it was who gave you the brains and talent and ability and opportunity to become what you are. It was God. And he has pursued you, and steps out before you, even today, and beckons you to come to him, to understand again, to marvel again, to be awed again by his love for you, his great, infinite, giving and unchanging love. How do you respond, as an unbeliever, as a believer, to that kind of love? Surely, there can be only one response: a joyful, unreserved surrender and devotion to Jesus Christ, a desire to serve him all your days; a determination to live, to an audience of one, to him who died, so that you can live. “Love so amazing so divine demands my life, my soul, my all. ”