



God is ... Love (Psalm 103:1-12; 1 John 4:7-16) Dinesh Prasad

Seven months ago, I didn't know if I was going to make it. You all know what I went through, and it is a miracle that God, through His love, has given me this opportunity and I am so grateful to the Lord.

When Becky asked us to talk on this, I thought it would be easy, but the more I looked into it, the harder it became. I had to really dig into it. It was not easy to write it out and pull it all together, but I will try my best this morning. Becky also asked us to include things from our own testimony and so I will try to do that this morning as well.

My topic this morning is 'God is Love'. How many of you have heard that for the first time this morning? We have all heard that before – God is love.

God's love gives us hope

Do you know that if it were not for the love of God, there would be no hope? Definitely, there would be no hope for me. As I look at the last 30 years of my journey with the Lord, and as I look into the light of God's Word upon my life, I see some improvement, changes in my life, that He has done. If it was not for Him and who He says He is, I don't know where I'd be today. You know the saying "I am not where I used to be, but also not where I want to be." I have my daily struggles, but His Word paves the way for me. I look at what I used to be – a sinner, a liar, a wretched man, a drunkard, and all those sorts of things. I am not ashamed to share this with you. I must admit it because then we can truly see that God is who He says He is – God is love – it is very assuring and we can trust this.

By studying the love letter from God, I built that foundation in me – that God is love and He loves me. God's love for me is not based upon my work, or my performance. God loves me because God loves me! He told the children of Israel, "I love you because I love you". You know, when there is a love letter between a boy and girl, because they love each other, they will read that letter again and again and again, and each time they read, they will search for some secret token of love. The Word of God, the more you read, the more you meditate on it, the more you will discover the secret nuggets of God and His profound love. Until you discover this, you are not living.

When you find it, it will baptise you and explode in your life. You will be changed. You will be so converted that you will live the lifestyle of Jesus. You and I have the full Bible, in many different translations. We have them in our homes and try to find time to read it. As you read it, it will bring you personal growth and development in your life, spiritual prosperity.

But there are places where people are very unfortunate, in third world countries, people who are living under persecution and tribulation. They might not even have the full Bible, just a New Testament in parts. They know some of the truth, but don't have all of it, and yet their lives are taken away. How fortunate we are to study the Word of God and manifest this love of Jesus into the world that is dying.

Paul said, "I was driven by the love of God." What Paul was saying was that he had the mindset of God. He is driven to love God and do what He wants him to do. And when he doesn't do it, it hurts him, it breaks his heart, and he repents. He truly loved God and God's people and was driven by God's love.

One of the greatest needs of human beings is to be loved. We all need love. We need to know that we are important to somebody, that somebody truly cares about us and accepts us unconditionally. The good news from God's Word is that somebody does. To know Him is to find release from the crippling effects of feeling unloved.

Love is one of the warmest words in the English language, and that God is love is one of the most sublime, uplifting and reassuring truths known to mankind. Love is His nature, He projects it. It is the essence of His being. He is always going to act towards us in love. He cannot do otherwise. Love is the way He is. It is a miracle that He loves me and you.

Nothing but love has ever reigned on the throne of creation and nothing but love will ever reign. Christ did not come to create love, He revealed the love of God. The love of God has no shallows – it is equally deep everywhere – Calvary deep. Love built heaven, love built earth, love made hell and its pains are the measure of God's love for each one of us.

God's love toward us is sacrificial

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:7-10)

The mission of Jesus Christ was the fullest proof God could give to us and that we could ever receive. It was the sacrificial love of God. Not only does God's love motivate Him to give, but it motivates Him to give when it cost Him dearly. We all love our children. I have two boys and I would not endanger the life of either one of them for any cause because I love them. God loves His Son. We see how much God loves His people if God gives His Son to die a death that no one can fully describe. It shows the worth of the soul of each one of us, the exposure to eternal death that each one faced, the greatness of His gift. Once you realise this, you want to do more for Him. You want to be more holy and more committed and you just want to follow Him even more. We hesitate to do anything for others that will cost us too much or inconvenience us too greatly. But God's love cost Him the very best that He had - His only Son.

The greatest love text in the Bible is John 3:16 - *For God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.* I memorised this as a boy, but I did not know what it really meant until I attended my father's funeral and discovered that this was one of my father's favourite verses. My father lived in Canada and I was in Fiji. We had been separated for about 10 years. I only learnt that my father was a Christian when there was a Christian funeral in Canada. After I returned to Fiji, I was very sad. But this verse kept coming to me. I knew that if this verse was true, then one day I would meet my dad again. Later on, I became a Christian. Each time I read this verse, I am reminded of my father's funeral and how it turned me to a believer.

This verse says that the world was in ruins, in a condemned state, about to perish everlastingly, without power to rescue itself. God through the impulse of this eternal love, provided salvation. God giving His Son involved more than allowing Him to leave heaven's glory and enter earth's history. It meant allowing Him to die in our place and pay the awful debt of our sins. *"But God demonstrated His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for our sins."* (Romans 5:8)

Whenever we are tempted to think that nobody loves us, we need to think of the cross. Jesus bore that shame and suffering because He loves us. He values us so highly that He was willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to secure for us eternal joy. He possessed the power to walk away from it unscathed, but he laid down that power. There was nothing for Him, but everything for us. Yet He stayed voluntarily to bear that suffering for us. There is simply no greater love. *"No one has greater love than this, that one lays down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13) Life is the most valuable object we possess and when a man is willing to lay down his life for his friends or country, it shows the utmost extent of love. Jesus died for His enemies, bitter foes, who rejected His reign, persecuted Him, reviled Him, scorned Him, and sought His life.

God's love is holy

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (1 John 4:11-16)

God's love is perfected in us. God's love is holy. We know God's love is self-giving, it's sacrificial, unconditional, eternal and infinite. Everything God does is true to the totality of His being, fullness, completeness. There is no shadow of doubt. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:4, *"For He chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love."* The word 'foundation' means the beginning of everything – before the world began. It was not a sudden choice of the Father to choose us. He made the decision at the beginning of this world. The holy lifestyle is not an option for us for one part of the day or one part of the week. Day by day, week by week, we live this life, and it is His goal that we be blameless. God will use every loving means available to encourage our obedience. He does this because He loves us. Our obedience will be our greatest happiness. He will take steps to help us obey Him. If He did not love us, He would not care about us.

How do we respond to His holy love? By bringing our lives into conformity to His Word. This provides a sense of purpose. The experience of holy love takes you out of the confines of yourself and puts you in touch with the Creator, as well as nature and others. It gives you a strong sense of your place in something bigger than yourself, providing a reason for connecting and serving others. We are his debtor. The Lamb of God who suffered deserves some reward from you.

The power of holy love releases us from the feeling of wrath and judgement that accompanies wrongdoing as well as making it easier to genuinely forgive the wrong done by others. God's holy love gives you a sense of your own profound value and worth. Culture keeps telling us we're not good enough, rich enough, young enough, beautiful enough, not good enough parents, or good enough at our careers. But when God's holy love is allowed into your heart, it brings in the knowledge that God loves you and loves you deeply. In fact,

He loves you enough to die for you. So, if God loves you that much, surely you are more than good enough for everyone else too.

It also deepens your feeling of gratitude. The knowledge of how deeply you are loved means you live your life in a different way with profound gratitude in every moment. The flow of God's holy love between you and the Divine is a powerful image of what the love in the world could look like if they followed this pattern. It has been said that we are all created with a God-shaped void that only God can fill.

Our text in Psalm 103 speaks of God's forgiveness, healing, and redemption. Our life is sadly marred by transgressions and shortcomings. We need repeated forgiveness and multiplied pardons, and God bestows them. He continues to forgive us. His divine art of healing lies in the forgiveness of the soul's iniquities. Universal healing comes in Christ, for he heals all diseases by forgiving all our sins. David knew this and this is a Psalm of praise to God about how God had redeemed him, and he had seen how God had heaped on him all the riches of His love and his heart was so full. That is how we should always look into the Word of God and see how God has loved us and so we should live a holy lifestyle.

Someone asked a theologian what he considered to be the most significant truth in the Word of God that would sum up the whole Bible. He replied, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

I want to finish with a story. There was a man who came home one day and discovered that his wife had left. He was a busy businessman and so he hired some people to go and look for his wife. When they found her, they knocked on the door and told her that her husband had been looking for her and wanted her to come home. But the wife just slammed the door on them. The people went back to the man and told them they had found his wife, but that she wouldn't come back with them. Then the man went to the address and knocked on the door and when his wife opened the door, he asked her to come home. She didn't hesitate and went with him right away. They didn't talk on the way home, but when they arrived, they sat down with a cup of coffee and the man asked his wife, "Why didn't you come when the people I hired asked you to come home but when I came, you did not hesitate and came right home. What made the difference?" She answered, "Because you came."

Friends, Jesus Christ came into our world to save us. He came for each one of us. It is a miracle that God loves us.