

God is Love
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We are in a sermon series called Knowing God. We've seen that knowing God is of utmost importance because it will determine where you live in eternity and how you live today. We saw in Daniel 11:32 that:

The people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits.

When you truly know God – you will be spiritually strong and carry out exploits. Exploits are daring adventures and heroic acts.

When I think of people like that – I think of one of my heroes – Martin Luther King, Jr. Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Day where we celebrate the life of a man dedicated to the struggle for the civil rights of African Americans.

In that struggle, Dr. King was spit on and beaten and eventually killed.

He was called every foul name in the book.

He received thousands of death threats.

His home was shot at and bombed.

His church was bombed and innocent children were killed.

He was beaten with billy clubs, hit in the head with bricks, punched in the face and stabbed in the chest.

Despite all these personal attacks, he did no harm and he never returned violence with violence. Instead, he faced that hatred and racism with peace and love.

Dr. King's rallying cry was to fight and overcome – but he did not fight with the power of violence – he fought with the power of love because hate is too great a burden to bear. I believe Dr. King was able to accomplish great exploits because He knew God's love.

I'm preaching a message today entitled God is Love. First, I want to define love. In English we are limited with only one word for love. So I can say, I love the ocean, to read, movies, chocolate, my wife. The word "love" becomes almost meaningless because my feelings for my wife and my commitment to my wife are obviously different and greater than my feelings for and commitment to candy.

Webster's dictionary defines love as:

- A deep and tender feeling of affection
- Attachment or devotion to someone or something
- A strong liking or interest in someone or something

You can see that our word love is basically limited to the feelings and attachments we have. But the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language.

The Greeks had four words for love—

- Eros- This is the physical love reserved for marriage between a husband and wife.
- Phileo- Affection – fondness - love between friends –
 Philadelphia = “brotherly love”
 This love is reciprocal – I love you because you love me
- Storge- Family love – blood is thicker than water
- Agape – God’s kind of love – a deliberate desire for the highest good of another, which reveals itself in sacrificial action towards others regardless of their condition or worth.

The first three Greek words for love are similar to our word for love. They involve affection, personal attachment, and feeling. However, agape is deeper and wider, involving the deliberate choice of the will and sacrificial actions. In other words, true love can only be known by the actions it prompts. Agape love is God’s kind of love and is giving, selfless and unconditional. I John 3:8 says:

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

God loves us with actions and truth and today we will look at 10 characteristics of God’s love. As I preach – my prayer for you is found in Ephesians 3:17-19:

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

As we’ve already seen:

1- God’s Love is Active

In the Bible, love is always active, not passive. It is a verb. We know God loves because He did something – He gave His Son.

2- God’s Love is Unconditional

It is not I’ll love you if, or I’ll love you because but, I’ll love you period.

In other words – God’s love is “in spite of” not “because of.”

God loves us in spite of who we are, not because of who we are.

God loves us in spite of what we do, not because of what we do.

Most of us do not have much experience with unconditional love. Most of what we call love is conditional. We tend to give love if we receive love, and withhold love if our needs are not met. But, agape love is much more radical than that. It is doing what is best for the other person whether they deserve it or not. Love gives and love meets needs!

3- God's Love is Giving

The nature of God's love is to give. For God so loved that He gave. What did He give? 1 John 4:9-10 tells us:

This is how God showed His love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

We experience the power of God's love when we receive the gift of salvation through His son, Jesus Christ. That's the greatest gift of all. But that's not all God gives. 1 John 4 goes on to say in verses 13-14:

We know that we live 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 Savior of the world.

Because God loves us, He sent His Son to die for us.
 Because God loves us, He sent His Spirit to live in us.
 Because God loves He gives and because God loves He forgives.

4- God's Love is Forgiving

I love Psalm 130:3-4:

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness.

Some people think that they are a little more righteous than other people and their list of sins is just a little shorter than others'. Maybe, but the Bible says if God was keeping a record of our sins, none of us could stand! Aren't you glad that when God forgives, He chooses to forget? Isaiah 43:25 says:

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more.

When God forgives, He chooses not to keep a record of our wrongs. Psalm 103:12 says:

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

To remove means to send away. How far away has God sent our sins? Well, how far is the east from the west? Why did God say, "I'll remove your sins as far as the east is from the west" rather than "I'll remove your sins as far as the north is from the south"?

Think about it - the interesting thing about the earth is that you can only go north so far before you start going south. You can travel north until you hit the north pole and if you keep going you are headed south.

However, if you head east – you will always go east without ever heading west. If you go far enough north you'll eventually hit south. But if you go east you will head east forever and never hit west. That's why God says, "When I forgive you I remove your sins as far as the east is from the west."

So far that you can't find them!
 So far that there's no trace of them!
 They are removed, erased, totally gone, completely taken away!
 They've been removed as far as the east is from the west!
 That's good news!

5- God's Love is Powerful

How do I know that love is powerful? Because it moves God! The Bible records many times when Jesus was moved with compassion. For instance - Matthew 9:36 says:

When He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.

It was compassion that moved Jesus to help people in need.
 It was compassion that moved the father to forgive the prodigal Son.
 It was compassion that led Jesus to the cross!

6- God's Love is Uncaused

By that I mean that the love of God is not influenced or affected by anyone or anything. God told the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 7:6-8:

For you are a holy people, who belong to the Lord your God. Of all the people on earth, the Lord your God has chosen you to be his own special treasure. The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you...

God does not love us because we are loveable and He does not stop loving us when we are unlovable. God does not love us because we love Him. In fact, 1 John 4:19 says:

We love Him because He first loved us.

Ephesians 2:4-5 says:

God is so rich in mercy, and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, He gave us life when He raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

7- God's love is eternal

God's love had no beginning and God's love will have no ending.
God has always loved and God will always love. In Jeremiah 31:3 God said:

I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself.

Civilizations will rise and fall – but God's love will never end.
Kingdoms will crumble and perish – but God's love is forever.
Man's love will come to an end – but God's love is eternal.

8- God's love never fails

This is so true that God even loves the unlovable. When I think about that – I think about how Jesus loved Judas. The story of Judas shows us that no matter how much you think God loves you – He loves you more than you can imagine! God loves us when we don't deserve it.

If anyone ever deserved to not be loved, it was Judas. Judas was a thief who stole from the ministry. Judas was the one who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. To my mind – Jesus had every reason not to love Judas. But He loved Him anyway!

Have you ever thought about how lovingly Jesus treated Judas throughout their time together? Jesus chose Judas as a disciple. Judas was one of the inner circle of people who were closest to Jesus. He lived with Him virtually every day of Jesus' ministry.

Jesus did not say, "Okay – everyone has power except Judas! I chose twelve, but I'm only sending out eleven with power and authority." No! He gave Judas the same power and authority He gave the others.

Judas was one of the disciples who healed the sick.
Judas was one of the disciples who helped feed the 5,000.
Judas was in the boat when Jesus walked on water and calmed the sea.
And you'll never see Jesus treating Judas any differently from the way He treated the others!
You may think Jesus did not know Judas would betray Him. WRONG! John 6:64 says:

Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray Him.

Yet Jesus treated Judas with the same compassion as the others.

Think about the Last Supper. When Jesus washed the disciples' feet – He included Judas. Jesus stooped down to wash the feet of Judas and all along He knew Judas was going to betray Him that very night.

And up until the very end, none of the others suspected Judas. Why? Because Jesus never treated Judas any differently than the other disciples. Jesus had always him just like the others. This is the unfailing love of God!

1 Corinthians 13:8 says *Love never fails*.

Lamentations 3:22-23 says:

The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is His faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning.

Aren't you glad for that! God's love never fails, never ends, never lessens, never falters, never ever can be stopped. His love never fails!

This is the same love that restored Peter after He denied Christ.

This is the same love that forgave those who crucified Jesus even while they were in the act of killing Him!

This is the same love that has forgiven you for all the wrong you've done!

You are not loved by God because of how great you are – but because of how great your Savior is! This is the unfailing love of God!

9- God's love is infinite

Everything about God is infinite – His power and wisdom and His love.

That means God's love is unlimited and immeasurable!

That means God's love cannot be increased or diminished.

You cannot do anything to make God love you anymore than He already does because He loves you infinitely.

And you can never do anything to make Him love you less!

Romans 8:38-39 says:

I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because of that love, God never gives up on you!

Even though you've made a huge mess of things, God still loves you!

Even though others forsake you, He will never leave you or forsake you!

Even though others' love is conditional, God's love is unconditional!
 Even though other people love has limits, God's love has no limits!
 God loves you at your best and loves you at your worst!
 God loves you when you're up and loves you when you're down!
 God loves you when you succeed and loves you when you fail!
 God loves you with an unfailing love!

10- God is love

1 John 4:8 says:

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

It does not say that God has love – it says that God is love.

Dr King said: We can never say that man is love. We can only say that a man loves. Love is the essential nature of God.

That means that God always acts in love.
 God never does anything for us or to us outside of love.
 God has never been unloving to you and He never will be unloving to you!

Now some people go to extremes with that. They act like love is the only attribute of God. Love is not the only attribute of God - but it's the only attribute that seems to matter to many people these days. And they define love as tolerance.

Some people believe God will tolerate any belief and any action. Wrong!
 Some people think because God is love I can do whatever I want with no consequences. Wrong!
 Some people believe that because God is love all people will be saved and no one will go to hell. Wrong!

God's love won't save you. God's love made the way to save you and that way is called faith in Jesus Christ! John 3:16 says:

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Jesus did not die in order to make God love us!
 He died because God already loved us.

The cross is the ultimate expression of God's love for us! So – if you're ever tempted to doubt God's love for you – go back to Calvary. Romans 5:8 says:

But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

If you ever feel unloved – look at the cross! Galatians 6:14 says:

As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

No matter what the enemy says you always have an answer:

- If Satan brings up past sins – you boast in the blood of Jesus.
- If Satan reminds you of your failures – you boast in Christ’s success on the cross.
- If Satan tells you you’re not good enough – you boast in Jesus because He is good enough and your faith is in Him, not in yourself!
- If Satan tells you you’ll never get it together – you tell him you’re not there yet, but He who began a good work in you will complete it!
- If Satan says God will never bless you – you boast in the fact that God has already blessed you with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
- If Satan tries to condemn you – you boast in the fact that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- If Satan tells you God does not love you, you boast that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus!
- If Satan tells you that you’re worthless, you boast that you were bought with the highest price ever paid for anything on earth: the blood of Christ!

1 John 1:9 says that if you confess your sin, God will forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. How much unrighteousness? ALL unrighteousness.

That’s worth boasting the Lord about!

Can anyone join me in boasting in the fact that God is love this morning?