

**This Is Love – Easter 2019**  
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I'm speaking today about the greatest demonstrations of love in history! The title of my sermon is This is Love. My major point is this: the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the greatest demonstrations of love in history. You can put all other love stories together and they do not equal the extent of God's love!

Easter shows us that God loves us unconditionally and beyond reason! God loves us because as 1 John 4:16 says: *God is love*. This means more than God loves or God has love. It means He is defined by love.

And 1 Corinthians 13:8 says *Love never fails*. God's love never fails, never ends, never lessens, never falters. You cannot do anything to make God love you any more than He already does because He loves you infinitely. And you can never do anything to make God love you less than totally. God's love never fails!

Here's the thing I want you to understand about God's love:

God does not love us because we are so good!  
 God does not love us because we are so worthy!  
 God does not love us because we deserve it!  
 God does not love us because we are so loveable!  
 God loves us because He is good and He is love.

1 John 4:9-10 says:

*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.*

This is how we know God loves us! He sent His Son to die on a cross for our sins so we could be forgiven and receive eternal life. Get over thinking you can earn God's love or unearn God's love. Titus 3:3-5 tells us:

*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.*

God loved us when we were foolish, disobedient, sinful and hateful! And He saves us – not because we're good enough – but because He is loving and merciful enough! He loved us even when we were His enemies. Romans 5:6-10 says:

*At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.*

*Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!*

Paul reminds of us who we were before we were reconciled to God. We should not glory in our past sins – but we should also not forget them. We don't need to be sin-conscious – but we need to remember where we came from. To be preoccupied with sin is not healthy – but to forget where we came from results in lack of gratitude and worship for what Christ did for us.

God reminds us of who we were so we realize what Jesus did for us in order to save us. If you see your sin as a little sin – you will see Jesus as a little Savior! If you see your sin as great sin – you will see Jesus as a great Savior!

When thinking of the individuals involved in the crucifixion of Jesus, who would you be tempted to consider, “not worth loving”? Which character is worth writing off?

The crowds, who taunted Jesus?

The soldiers, who crucified Jesus?

Or how about Judas, who betrayed Jesus?

From my vantage point, I could see plenty who were not worth loving! Yet, Jesus loved the whole world so much that He died for everyone.

Jesus died for Hitler.

Jesus died for those who flew planes into the World Trade Center on 9/11.

Jesus died for the person who hurt you.

Jesus died for those you can't stand.

Jesus died for you!

To me, if anyone ever deserved to not be loved by Jesus, it was Judas. But Jesus loved Him anyway! I looked at all the Bible verses on Judas and I was struck by the way Jesus treated Judas throughout their three years together. The story of Judas shows us that no matter how much you think God loves you – He loves you more than you can imagine!

Judas is the one who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. He must have possessed some business ability since he was appointed keeper of the money. But his heart could not have been clean, even from the first, because he did his job dishonestly. We know this from the story of Mary anointing Jesus with oil. John 12:3-6 says:

*Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the*

*fragrance of the perfume. But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected, "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.*

Judas was a greedy thief. And the cancer of his greed spread from the material to the spiritual. Even though Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that He would be killed, they all expected Him to overthrow the Romans and set up an earthly Messianic Kingdom. When it became obvious that this was not going to happen, Judas became very disillusioned with Jesus. And that's when he betrayed Jesus. But the amazing thing to me is that in spite of this, Jesus always showed unfailing love to Judas!

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 Jesus virtually every day of His 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. As Peter said in Acts 1:16-17:

*Concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus— he was one of our number and shared in this ministry.*

Judas shared the ministry with the other disciples.  
 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! In John 6:70-71 Jesus replied, *"Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!" (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray Him.)*

Jesus knew from the beginning that Judas would betray Him. John 6:64 says:

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

Yet He allowed Judas to be the keeper of His money. He gave him a trusted position. 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.

None of the other disciples knew what was going on. Up until the very end, none of the others suspected Judas. Why? Because Jesus never treated Judas any differently from the others. Jesus had always loved him just like the others.

What does this mean for us? It means that if Jesus loved Judas, the very one who betrayed him – no one is beyond His love. If Jesus loved Judas, surely He loves us! We must not believe that we've gone too far! We've not done too much wrong! We are loved by God unconditionally and forever!

Accepting the fact that God accepts us means that we must accept ourselves! Accepting yourself isn't based on who you are, it's based on whose you are - You are a child of the most High God! You are not accepted because of how great you are – but because of how great your Savior is!

And when you become secure in the love of God – everything changes!  
 Then we can reduce our focus on ourselves and focus on Christ.  
 Then, we can build the Kingdom of God rather than the Kingdom of self.  
 Then, we can bless those who curse us!  
 Then, we can give to those who take from us!  
 Then, because we know how much we've been forgiven - we can forgive those who hurt us!  
 Then – because we know how much we are loved - we can love others!

Now – don't make the mistake some people make about the love of God. Some people are relying on the love of God in the wrong way. They mistakenly believe God's love is the way of salvation. In other words, since God loves me, I am saved. Wrong! God's love alone does not save you. It is true God loves you. In fact, He loves you so much that He made a way for you to be saved and have eternal life. That way is Jesus. 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.*

It does not say that God loved the world so much that everyone has everlasting life. It says that God so loved the world that He sent His Son to die for us! That love is the most powerful force in the world!

This is the same love that did not condemn the woman caught in adultery.  
 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!

And nothing can separate us from His love! Romans 8:38-39 says:

*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!

How do we know all this is true? Because of the resurrection! The resurrection would have been impossible without the cross. But the cross would be meaningless without the resurrection. What do I mean by that? Why would the cross be meaningless without the resurrection? Rome executed thousands of people by crucifixion, but only one of those is the Savior of the world because only one rose from the dead! The resurrection proves that Christianity is true!

At the cross, Jesus died in our place for our sins. And because Jesus didn't stay in the grave, we see that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is God in His love freeing us from sin . . . God in His love overcoming death . . . God in His love announcing that one day a new creation will come.

Because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see the love of God. When we look at Jesus, we can say, "*This is love.*"

All of us make messes in life. Asking for help to resolve a mess we've made means admitting we're at fault. And we don't want to admit guilt. Guilt is an uncomfortable feeling, and "sorry" is an uncomfortable word.

We'd rather deny it, ignore it, or even justify our actions. But admitting it is painful. And yet . . . it won't go away. The feeling that we've fallen short, that we've failed, eats away at us.

And we will continue to feel that way until we deal with the real issue: sin. Sin is the sense of missing the mark, or failing to be who God created us to be. Sin is falling short of the original calling to be God's image-bearers who reflect God's wisdom and love and rule into the world.

Sin is also a rebellion, a turning away from God, a decision to move against Him or independent of Him. Sin is a transgression, a crossing of lines and boundaries. And there is a price for sin.

Romans 6:23 says: *The wages of sin is death.* Because of sin, we all die. But thank God that verse doesn't end there!

*The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Because of the resurrection, our sins can be forgiven! Think of it: Our sins—our missing the mark, our falling short, our transgressing and crossing of lines—are forgiven because Jesus died and rose again.

And the power of sin that kept us bound, that paralyzed us, that held us in the same patterns of failure, is now *broken*. To be *forgiven* is to be *free*. Free from guilt, free from shame, free from the power that enslaved us.

God's love for us resulted in Jesus dying on a cross for us. But He came back from the dead! This is love. And it can change everything.

What does the resurrection mean to you today? You might think – “Big deal – a lot of religious leaders have made a lot of claims throughout history. What's so different about Jesus?” It's true that many religious leaders have made claims through the centuries. And they all have this in common: they died and you can visit their tombs.

Mohammed claimed to be the last messenger of God. He taught that good works will lead you to paradise. When he died in 632 AD his body was buried in the Mosque of the Prophet in the city of Medina in Saudi Arabia. Mohammed's tomb is still occupied.

Confucius claimed that ethical living, education and self-improvement would lead to social order, political stability and world peace. When he died in 479 BC, he was buried in his hometown in China. His grave is still occupied.

Buddha taught that we can find peace within ourselves and when we die we are reincarnated. When he died in 483 BC - he was cremated and his bones were placed in various tombs around the world. For instance, the Temple of the Tooth in Sri Lanka is where you can find a tooth of Buddha. Those tombs of Buddha are all occupied – occupied – occupied!

Jesus Christ claimed to be the Son of God who died for the sins of the world. He claimed to give eternal life to all who believed in Him. After He was crucified, He was buried in a borrowed tomb in Jerusalem. I've been there and guess what? The tomb of Jesus is empty!

You won't find the bones of the Son of God anywhere!

He lives and He reigns for all eternity!

Jesus Christ is the only one who defeated death and the grave.

He's the One who said in John 11:25-26

*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?*

That empty tomb shows that the claims of Easter are not empty.  
The empty tomb shows the extent of God's love for you!

Many of you are desperate to make a change in your life.  
Some of you can't let go of your past failures and mistakes.  
Some of you feel powerless over the challenges you are facing right now. Some of you feel hopeless about your future!  
The resurrection means that no situation is too hopeless!  
No problem is too big for Jesus!

Friends, your life can change today. Maybe you've thought that you've hit a dead end because of a mistake you've made, or a destructive habit you're caught in.

I've got good news for you: It's not over. Just as it wasn't over when Jesus died on the cross and was buried, it's not over for you.  
Jesus Christ offers you forgiveness today.  
He promises to cancel your sins and wipe them off your record.  
He offers you a chance to start over!  
This is love!

Because Jesus took our sins upon Himself on the cross—because God raised Jesus from the dead in victory over sin and death—it is not over.

God is still in the resurrection business and He can change your life!