

The Blessing of Love

Jude 2

The great challenge this afternoon is focus, for so much could be said. Remember, as we have studied this book of Jude, that our author begins with a benediction. Not just a personal introduction. Not just a theological encouragement and reminder about the nature of their salvation, but a blessing.

v.2 “May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you.”

As I preach today, that is my message to you. May the mercy of God be multiplied to you, that mercy by which the goodness of God is shown to you in all the misery of your life. May the peace of God be multiplied to you, that peace by which you are now reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus. Such a blessing it is. Mercy and peace. And today, the climax. May God’s love be multiplied to you.

Let me emphasize that this is not a philosophical discussion nor is it an empty exercise of religious tradition. I’m certainly not just going through the motions. This blessing is as real and as powerful as it could possibly be. We need mercy, because our lives in this age are so often filled with misery, and never in my life has that reality been impressed upon me as personally as it has been in the past few months with Sharon’s illness. We also need peace, for all of us have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God. And all of us need this blessing of love, God’s love.

I can think of no greater subject that I would wish to preach upon today. The blessing of God’s love to God’s people. Dear friends, may God’s love be multiplied to you! That’s my sermon. And I would be better off to quit right now and end this sermon right at this point, than to fail to make that blessing clear to you in however many more minutes I preach

So what does that mean, the blessing of God’s love? What does it mean for you, today, in whatever circumstances of your life you are facing today. What is the blessing of God’s love? We will look at three separate passages, cross references really for this subject of love. Nothing new in content, I expect, for you, but I pray that it may be new for you today in its freshness. In the reality of this truth, in the receiving of this blessing.

I’ll begin with the activity of God’s love. And in a very real sense, love is an activity. Love is an action, love is what you do much more than it is what you say or feel. So what did God do? What is the activity of God that shows forth his love? I can answer that question with what is probably the most familiar verse in the whole Bible,

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”

God so loved, that he gave.

Rom. 5:8 “...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

That’s where I want to begin today. Christ died for us. That’s God’s love. And, of course, that’s the gospel. That’s where the gospel begins. That’s where the gospel is grounded and where it is focused. Christ died for us.

I. THE ACTIVITY OF GOD’S LOVE IS SHOWN BY JESUS’ DEATH.

Let me draw your attention to a couple things from that verse, so you can grasp a bit more fully this love with which God blesses us. Notice the phrase, “while we were still sinners.” Now think about that. Jesus died for us, “while we still sinners.” By nature,

we were children of his wrath.

Paul gives a fuller description of us all in,

Rom. 3:10 "...as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

The point is this, that,

A. In love, God does not treat us as we deserve.

This is a stumbling block for some people, because they cherish the thought of their own goodness. They preserve the idea that they are good, that they have done good, and if they do good enough, that God will grant them an entrance into heaven. In that case, the cross is a stumbling block, for the cross compels you to confess that you are a sinner. The gospel compels you to humble yourself before God, confessing your sin.

That also becomes a stumbling block for others because they do not understand that love for themselves. They do not believe, or feel, that God would, indeed, love them. They fear, instead, that God will treat them as their sins deserve.

So here is the blessing of the gospel. Here is the blessing for you who believe in Jesus. God's love is the willingness, the commitment, not to treat you as you deserve, according to your sins.

Ps. 103:10 "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. 11 For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; 12 As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us."

That's love, when your child sins against you, and you do not repay them according to their iniquities. That's love, when what you deserve is anger and wrath, you receive mercy. That's love, when you deserve justice, the just penalty for your offense, and you are granted clemency.

Micah 7:18 "Who is a God like You, Pardoning iniquity And passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, Because He delights in mercy. 19 He will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities."

Just imagine, for a moment, if God did treat you as your sins deserve. Just think for a moment what you actually deserve. That's such a good starting point for understanding the gospel, because it enables you to rightly understand God. None of us deserve God's kindness. That's the very definition of grace. It's a gift. God's love is a gift. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

So it is good to consider your own sins, because you will never understand the fullness of God's love until you come to terms with the fullness of your own sinfulness. And you will never understand the fullness of this blessing, unless you first confess that, "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Now, a more full explanation. More positively, what is God's response to your sin, you who trust and believe in Jesus? Again, his love. What is the activity of God's love all about? The simple answer is, forgiveness. God's love doesn't leave you simply confessing your sins. God's love doesn't leave you in your sins.

B. In love, God grants to us the forgiveness of our sins.

Romans 5 continues. Look at the phrase in, v.9 "...having now been justified by his blood."

Blood, of course, has reference to death. Jesus' blood has reference to Jesus' death. The fuller image is that of the shedding of blood, the pouring out of blood. Unto death. It's not a pretty picture, and if any of you know of someone dear or close to you who bled to death, you would more quickly recognize the dread horror of this all-too-familiar expression. The shedding blood unto death is a terrible, terrible ordeal.

But "we have been justified by his blood." Let me unpack that expression just a little bit. The central idea is the focal point of the whole Old Testament sacrificial system. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." That's what the animal sacrifices all represented, and they all pointed to the shedding of Jesus' blood. For this purpose, forgiveness. Remission of sins. Casting away of sin, "into the depths of the sea."

So justification means forgiveness. Justification means the removal of our sin. Justification means that God treats us as innocent. It is a legal term, a legal concept, and a blessed one at that. We are declared "not guilty." A courtroom is the place where guilt or innocence is established. A courtroom is the place where a verdict is declared, "guilty" or "not guilty." And forgiveness is the judgment of the court that you are "not guilty." It is a legal declaration that frees you from the guilt of sin. Your record is clear. Your offense is removed. Your crime is eliminated.

Beloved, in his love, God grants you that blessing, that judgment, that acquittal. It is yours, to be received by faith. You don't deserve it and you can never earn it. It is yours because Jesus shed his blood to satisfy the demands of justice. You know, in actuality, that you are guilty. And yet this judgment of "not guilty" is declared to you because of the blood of Jesus. The penalty has been paid, but one who substituted for you, in your place. Jesus stood in the courtroom of God, and when he shed

his blood upon the cross, when he bled to death, he took upon himself the curse that your sins deserved. He took upon himself the sentence of guilt that you and I deserved. "We have now been justified by his blood."

And then, to make all of this so perfectly clear,

C. In love, God removes from us his wrath.

Romans 5:9 continues, "... Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him."

Many people today try to deal with the wrath of God by denying that it exists. They deny that God could ever be characterized as a God of wrath. They deny the penalty of God's wrath, namely the eternal condemnation of hell. Love wins, they say. Always, in every circumstance. Without any reference to wrath.

But that is not the God who has revealed himself to us through the pages of Holy Scripture. For God is righteous and holy, and God's wrath is poured out against sin. That's his nature and his glory. God's anger is his righteous response to sin. But God removes that wrath from us. That's what the gospel is all about! That's what the blessing of God's love is all about. That's what the activity of God's love shown to us in Christ is all about.

Let's move on to the motive. Not just what God did, but why! What was his motive?

Eph. 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His

will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.”

Notice there that we are told God’s eternal motive, what he determined before the foundation of the world itself. “In love he predestined us.” He chose us, ahead of time. In love. That’s the motive. That’s the impulse. That’s the blessing, and don’t forget this passage is all about the heavenly blessings God gives to us.

II. THE ETERNAL MOTIVE OF GOD’S LOVE IS SHOWN BY HIS OWN SOVEREIGN CHOICE.

In fact, it is,

A. The love of his predestination.

That’s what sovereign choice means. The basis of the choice is entirely in God, in his sovereignty. There is no other reason, no other cause. Why did God predestine? Why did God choose those who would be saved? The Bible says so clearly that he did, and Christians all too often argue over this doctrine as if the most important thing was to win the argument. Yet the very existence of the argument misses the point, because predestination is all about the motive of God. The question is, “Why?” And the answer is clear. Love. “In love he predestined us...” In love he chose us. In love we have redemption. In love we have an inheritance.

Love is the motive. Love is the moving cause. And that love should leave you speechless in praise before God. “Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”

Blessed be God for his love! That’s where your heart should be this morning. And blessed are we as the recipients of that love! For you should realize that it is,

B. The love of his fatherly intentions.

Look again at,

v.5

“Having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself.” He chose us to be adopted. He chose us to be his children. He chose us so that he would be our father. There are many things that a father must be for his children, but this one is so prominent, he must love them. No human parent loves perfectly, but the love of a father for his children never stops, no matter what they do. Even when they sin. A father’s love never stops. And God is our heavenly father, who loved us before the foundation of the world, by choosing us to be his children.

That’s the blessing of love which I proclaim to you today, the blessing of the gospel. You who love and believe in God, you who trust in Jesus, this is the blessing you have, that God loved you in Christ and chose you to be his son or his daughter. And because his love is motivated entirely within himself, not in your performance, there is nothing you could ever do to cause him to stop loving you. After all, it is,

C. The love of his free grace.

v.6

That’s what all of this is all about, “the praise of the glory of his grace.”

Grace is free. Grace is unmerited, undeserved. Grace is not something you work for. That’s the point, isn’t it? Grace is the gift of God and the blessing of God. And God’s grace has everything to do with God’s love. And God’s love has everything to do with his own eternal purpose.

So you and I are left simply to sing his praise! We who have received this blessing of mercy, peace and love, we are those who become his true worshipers.

Let me encourage you this afternoon to consider God's love in this context, the context of your sin. The context of God's own eternal purpose, the context of his grace. So look at your sin. Look at every awful, terrible aspect of that sin. Look at every sinful act, every sinful word, every sinful desire, motive thought. And then think about this blessing.

Jude 1:2 "May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you."

That's why we worship God today. That's why we offer him the sacrifices of our worship. We love him because he first love us. With one final thought about God's love, one final verse, one final encouragement about the nature of God's love, and that is this,

III. THE ESSENCE OF GOD'S LOVE IS HIS OWN SELF-SACRIFICE.

I've already mentioned this, but let me reemphasize it here at the end.

A. Love is a sacrifice.

Ephesians 5:2 "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

Love is a sacrifice. Love is not so much what you feel. Love is not so much what you gain or what you experience. But love is the giving up of your own life, in every way. And the point here in Ephesians 5 is that such a love is demonstrated by God himself. Our love is to be an imitation of his.

v.1

My point today is to focus upon that example. "Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us." That's what love is, in its essence. A sacrifice. That certainly applies to marriage, though few people are willing to look at marriage in that context. A wife gives up everything when she marries, her life as it then existed, her name, her own individual identity. And a man does too, called by God to give up his life for his wife, to die for her. For all the blessings attached and the intended happiness of marriage, the foundation of that love is still a sacrifice. I use that example because the Bible uses that example. In this very chapter.

Eph. 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."

Love is a sacrifice. And surely, this is the maturity of understanding the true nature of love, God's love. Love is "giving yourself up." And what Jesus did, above all else, was to sacrifice himself, he gave up himself.

Please don't let any of this become mere spiritual jargon. Don't ever let that gospel reality become routine or ordinary, a lifeless doctrine that fails to transform the way that you look at your life and your faith. This is the very heart of everything we do together as a church, even as we celebrate in the Lord's Supper in a few minutes. Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice. That's love.

And one more very edifying thought in that regard. That sacrifice was an act of worship.

Ephesians 5:2 "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma."

That's Old Testament language. A fragrant offering, a sacrifice that was pleasing to God. That's what love is all about, even for

Jesus.

B. Love is an offering of worship.

What we are doing here is also a sacrifice, a sacrifice of our own lives, seeking to be pleasing to God. What we do here, in the simplicity of the ordinary means of grace, the word, prayer and the sacraments, what we do here is a sacrifice of our worship to God, and when you do that, you are imitating Jesus!

When you eat the bread of the Lord's Supper, and drink the cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death. You are proclaiming his sacrifice, his love. And as you do that, please, I urge, please, consider this great blessing of God's love.

What we do together as a church is empty, if it is mere ritual or routine. It is empty, if it is but an outward show of pretended spirituality. It is empty, if it is but a tradition. But God gives meaning to that very good tradition. Here before you this afternoon is a declaration of the love of God that is shown to you in Jesus Christ. Here before you is a sign and a seal of the sacrifice of Jesus, the sacrifice of his love. And the result of that sacrifice for you who believe, for you who trust in Jesus, the result of that sacrifice is that God will not treat you as your sins deserve. He will forgive you your sins, removing them from you as far as the east is from the west. And even more, he will cleanse you from unrighteousness.

That's the blessing. Whatever the circumstances of your life this day, whatever the particular trials or struggles might be, whatever the misery, whatever the pain or sorrow,

Jude 2 "May mercy, peace, and love be multiplied to you."