

The Love of God in Christ

Romans 8:38g

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've been talking, loved ones, about the love of God in Christ Jesus. That's the phrase, it's about the last nine words of Romans Chapter 8 and that's it exactly; "the love of God in Christ Jesus." And that's the only place you can experience the love of God -- in Christ Jesus -- really. I would say almost every one of us here admire and observe the strength of God as we look at great rivers, and lakes, and mountains. Probably there isn't one of us here, unless perhaps there is some ideological atheist who refuses to accept the reality of a supreme being, but probably most of us here observe and admire the strength of the Creator in the rivers and the mountains. And probably every one of us here is grateful for the kindness of the Creator in these bodies that he's given us and these minds.

But you can admire the strength of Jimmy Carter [former U.S. President] and you could be grateful for the compassion that seems to be in his character and still not have any love relationship with him, because you simply have no personal relationship with him at this moment. I think it's the same with many of us; we admire our Creator, and we believe in him, and we admire his might and his power, and we are very grateful for all the things he has given us, but it's a bit like our relationship with Carter -- we don't know Carter, we have never met him personally. We've seen him on television, we've heard the kind of person he is but we couldn't say that we experience his personal love for us. In fact, we would say he probably doesn't even know us, and so he certainly can't have a personal love for us and as a result we don't particularly feel any personal love coming to us from him.

And I would say that there are many of us that are here this morning that feel the same way about the Creator -- you haven't really experienced the personal love that your Father Creator has for you. You listen to me saying he loves you and you try to believe it, but you don't really experience it yourself. And loved ones, there's only one reason you don't, honestly. That's because you're not in the right place. There's only one place where you will experience the personal love of the Creator for you and that's in Christ Jesus.

Now I'm not saying you don't believe that God loves you. I know we are all brain-washed and we say, "Yeah, yeah, God loves me. That's the right answer to the catechism and the right answer if Pastor ever asks you." But I'm not asking you that, loved ones. I know we're all too bright and clever to answer any other way. But I'm saying that you, personally, don't experience any sense of God's love for you unless you're in Christ Jesus -- really. And how do you enter into Christ Jesus? Well, would you look, loved ones, at a verse that tells you. It's 1 John 3:24.

Now don't turn off when you read it, please. "All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them." Now that's it -- if you want to enter into Christ Jesus and experience the love that his Father has for him, you keep his commandments. Now, what is the heart of his commandments? You'll find it if you turn back to 1 John 2:15. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him." That's the heart of Jesus' commandments.

Now it doesn't mean you're not to appreciate the world, or you're not to use the world, but it means

that unless you adopt the same attitude to the world that Jesus has, you will not experience God's love in Jesus because you will not be in Jesus. To be in Jesus means to identify yourself completely with him -- to adopt the same attitude to people and to things and to experiences that he himself has. When you do that, loved ones, then you will begin to experience God loving you. Now the only way to express Jesus' attitude to the world is in that clause that we have repeated continuously for six months. There's no doubt, I mean, even historical fact proves it, he died to the world. That was it -- he died to the protection the world could give him. He died to any recognition the world could give him. He died to depending on the world for the things he needed to keep body and soul together. He died to that -- that was his attitude.

Now loved ones, the only way to enter into Jesus is to adopt that same attitude even to all of us here. I mean, by all means be nice to us, by all means love us in the sense of wanting to do things for us and give us things, but unless you die to your need for all of us here, unless you die to the things that the world gives you, you will not experience God's love, because God is a jealous God and he will only give his full love to someone who gives their full love to him. He will only give his complete support to anyone who depends on him completely -- but for anyone who has some other kind of crutch he will let them carry on. So part of the reason some of you maybe have never experienced God's love for you is you really don't need it. At least you're pretending you don't need it because you're depending on all kinds of other things. And of course, none of them will ever make up for God's love.

That's why many of us here this morning feel there's something missing in our lives. Because it doesn't matter -- no job security will make up for God's love -- it won't. No peer approval will make up for the lack of God's love. It really won't. No happy experiences of excitement will ever make up for God's love. Really dear ones, all of us here were made to live in the full blaze of the love of a Creator who owns the whole universe. Haven't you a feeling at times, inside of yourselves, that you were made for something greater? Haven't you? I mean, all of us have a wee feeling that we were made for some eternal reason -- why we were made. And indeed, we often do feel that we were made for somebody to notice us and love us more than we seem to be noticed and loved.

The fact is you were made for your Creator's love. But what most of us have done is we've tried to make the vacations and the excitements, make the cars and the houses, and make the recognition of our friends and our relatives a substitute for the Creator's love. And loved ones, as long as you do that, you'll never experience the Father's love, you really won't. So if you're sitting there and saying, "Well, I want to live in the full blaze of God's love but I've never really experienced it", it's because you haven't entered into Christ in his identification with this death to everybody else. That's true, it really is. Loved ones honestly, God is only able to begin to give you his love if you die to your need of all other loves, really. It's just a fact that while you're still depending on the recognition of your peers, while you're still depending on how you manipulate the bank account for your material security, you'll never experience God's love.

I'll give you an instance of it. When have you sensed most that the Father really did love you and was concerned about you? And there isn't one of us here that won't answer the same way, "When I discovered I had an incurable disease" or, "When my finances completely fell apart" or, "When my mother died" or, "When I failed that vital examination." All of us will answer the same way -- it's when all other supports seem to have gone that we suddenly became aware that there is something coming from outer space that seems to be love and care, and seems to give us a sense of worth.

How many of us have picked ourselves up from nothing? How many of you have been an absolute

disaster and there's been a strength and a power that came to you that enabled you to get going again? And most of us, when we got going, were stupid enough to trade in that love for all the things that we could again get our hands on and control ourselves. And so loved ones, really, you'll never experience God's love unless it's in Christ Jesus. And you can't enter into Christ Jesus unless you obey his commandments. And one of his commandments is – “do not love the world. Depend on me only for your approval, your recognition, your material support, your happiness.” And when you do that it's a deep, deep thing inside, honestly. It's not just something you rattle off -- it's a deep, deep attitude inside -- and you'll begin to experience God's love for you.

Now I think some of us here have come to that place. I think some of you have come to a place where you identified yourself with Jesus in his death to people and circumstances and events for your happiness and your love and you've taken a position where you depend only on God for the love that you need. Yet some of us in that situation have found ourselves separated from that love, and we don't quite know what to make of that. Because the verse that we've been studying in Romans 8:38 says that nothing can separate you from that love. That's what it says plainly. Your mother's love will end, your girlfriend's love will end, your husband's love will end, the love of your colleagues and your peers will end, but this love in Romans 8:38, it will never end; “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

And yet I think some of us probably will say, “We entered into that, but we have found that we've been separated, at times at least, from our awareness of God's love.” In other words, some of us have wakened up in the morning with an incredibly overwhelming sense of depression. We've wakened up as if there was a huge darkness over our whole lives. I'm sure some of you have experienced that -- you've wakened up in the morning and there's just been a depression lying on top of you. You've tried to glance forward to the day ahead and there has been a tremendous sense of the pointlessness of even getting up. And the whole futility of the day seems to bear in upon you and at that moment you would say, “Well, I know God loves me but I have no sense of his love at this moment.”

Now loved ones, why is that? Well, I'd like to share with you the reason, and I honestly think it will help a lot of you, if you once begin to deal with this. It's in John 13:2, “And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him.” I'd just ask you to look at the words carefully, “And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot.” The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot. Now loved ones, there are powers of evil in our world. God has allowed a whole kingdom of evil for purposes, part of which we can understand, and part of which we can't. He has allowed a whole kingdom of evil to continue to exist free in our world, and that kingdom has many powers in it. The Greek word for them is “dunamis” the same word as is used for the power of the Holy Spirit. “Dunamis” -- and from it we get our word “dynamite”.

Those powers of evil are able to do what Satan did with Judas; they're able to put things into your heart, or into your mind or emotions -- they can do that. They're the same powers that produced the Manson family [serial killers]. They're the same powers that lay behind fortune telling or the Ouija boards. They're the same powers that inspire spiritualists. They're the same powers that enflame anger and hatred in war time. They're the same powers that work in séances. They are powers of evil and you are just dumb and throwing yourself open to all kinds of dangers if you are prepared to believe Jesus until it comes to this point, and then you say, “No, that's too much to believe.”

Loved ones, there are Satan churches in California that are very sure of the existence of these powers, and they spend their whole lives worshiping them and placating them. Now these are the powers that are able to put thoughts and feelings into your minds and emotions. Loved ones, the truth that we're reading in Romans 8:38 is, "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers," will be able to separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.

And God's promise there is that even those powers of evil cannot, in that morning of momentary depression and futility, separate you from the love of God. Perhaps you say, "Okay, why is it so then -- why do I experience it?" And I'd point out to you that every promise of God is dependent on a condition which you have to fulfill for the promise to be made real. For instance, we said that death will not separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus, if you've stopped depending on all the things that death takes from you. We said that principalities cannot separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus, if you refuse to believe the lies that those principalities feed you.

The last two Sundays we said that the things to come will not separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus if you see that, despite the spirit of antichrist, God is still in control. Now, it's so with these powers; these powers of evil cannot separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus if you understand what they're doing, and you know how to deal with what they're doing. There's a twilight moment between unconsciousness and consciousness when your will has the lightest possible hold on your mind. That's the time when you're either getting up, or you're going to sleep. It's a twilight moment just between consciousness and unconsciousness when your will has the lightest possible hold on your mind.

Now at that moment, powers of evil are able to actually put into your mind a thought of depression, and that's truth. That's the proof that comes from John 13:2; Judas didn't think of the thing at all himself -- he acquiesced in something that was fed to him. Now these powers are able to actually insert a thought into your mind, or a feeling into your emotions, which does not belong to you yourself and has not come from you. And so the first step, loved ones, is for you to start identifying that as coming from outside. And you know what? Half of you do -- you waken up and the depression is there and you're dumb -- you just go after the bait like anything. You say, "Oh, why am I depressed?" And immediately you say that you take it to yourself and that's exactly what these powers of evil try to do -- they try to insert the thought into your mind, hoping that you will think that it's yours -- that it's come from you.

Or they insert into your emotions a feeling hoping that you will think, "Oh I'm feeling this way." And you'll begin to ask, "Why am I feeling this way?" And immediately you own that thought or that feeling as your own, you're beginning to behave as if you were not a child of the Father who is looking down upon you planning your day and looking for all the opportunities that he has to express his life through you. Immediately you adopt that feeling or that thought or admit that this is your own, then you're beginning to live in sin because you're beginning to live like an ordinary person who has only their own puny abilities to face the day with instead of like a person whose dear Father is in charge of the whole universe and is looking down upon you and is planning magnificent things for you that day.

Now loved ones, that's the trick of these powers -- their whole strategy is to insert a feeling or a thought into your mind or emotions and to get you to accept it as your own, and then to go into introspection: "Oh, why am I feeling depressed?" And then you start looking into yourself to see

why you're feeling depressed. Then you start accusing yourself, "I shouldn't feel depressed -- I'm a child of God." And before you know it, you have yourself tied in mental and emotional knots -- and then you have something to be depressed about.

Loved ones, do you see that the answer is very simple? If you really have begun to live as a child of your Father, and you really have started to identify yourself with Jesus and his dying to what people say about you, or what they think of you, or dying to your material possessions to give you security -- if you've started to live that way, you're a child of the Father. Every day you waken up you've a dear Father that looks over at you and that shines his son down upon you and is thinking, "What am I going to have Jean do today? What am I going to have Peter do today?"

Loved ones, that's the way God is. Do you think he's wakening up all the little birds and he isn't giving you more attention? Of course he is -- the Father loves you and has a plan for your day. He's looking down upon you to begin to feed his thoughts to you. And it is these powers of evil, these "dunamis" powers that try to insert a thought of depression that is utterly inappropriate for a child of God -- hoping that you will identify it as your own. Loved ones, all you have to do is dead simple, if you look at the verse; it's James 4:7, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

If you'd really grasp that -- that all you have to do is resist the thought, instead of accepting it as your own for one second, then Satan would flee from you. Really -- he has to because, in fact, Jesus destroyed him on Calvary. That's what Colossians says -- that Jesus destroyed the powers of evil on Calvary. And actually, those powers do not have the ability to keep you in depression. They don't, really they don't. It's you that keeps yourself in depression by thinking that the depressing thought comes from you. So loved ones, it's dead simple, honestly; in the morning or in the evenings, or when you're sitting on your own, or you're sitting at the traffic lights in the car and suddenly that old depression hits or that sense of futility hits, immediately resist that.

First of all, whatever you are, whether you're a child of God or not, resist it first. Don't accept the sickness into yourself, but resist it first. Then look up to God and replace that thought with the realization that he loves you -- that he's your Father -- he's looking down on you and planning things for you and preparing the way ahead. You do not need to understand every detail, but that he is preparing the rest of the day for you. In other words, take some verse like "this is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it" and say that to yourself. And for any of you that say that's the "power of positive thinking" I say fiddlesticks. It's not anything like the power of positive thinking which believes that the very positive thought itself brings the happiness. This is ridiculous because the positive thought then could bring you a happiness that has no basis in reality at all.

But loved ones, this is not the power of positive thinking. This is choosing to believe reality instead of accepting unreality. And the unreality is that any loved one here in this service this morning has to be depressed or sense futility at all. We had plenty of reason to do it, loved ones, when Satan alone ruled the world, but ever since Jesus came, and ever since we knew that our Father's heart is loving and that he cares for each one of us, there's no reason for any of us to believe otherwise.

Now the last thing I'd share with you is that you can only experience that love by identifying with Jesus. You'll only be playing the power of positive thinking game unless you identify yourself with Jesus. That's right. There's only one place to actually experience God's love and that is in

Jesus. That means identifying yourself with his attitude to the world and to people. So I'd ask you -- any of you who have trouble with these things -- I'd ask you first, are you depending on the person in the office for your approval, or your worth, or your value? Are you depending on your relatives for what they think of you to give you a sense of worth? If you are, will you die to that as Jesus died to it? He didn't care if even his mother thought that he was useless or hopeless. He trusted only the love that his Father in heaven gave him.

So examine yourself first -- make sure you aren't depending on any other love than that of God. And then if you're not, you'll begin to experience God's love coming into your own heart. Truly you will, really. I wish I could get each of you and spend half an hour with you and say -- you can actually experience God loving you. It is far better than any other love and it is a love that never ends, loved ones. It is a love that does not depend on how loveable you are. It's a love that just keeps coming, because God really does love you. And honestly, those of you who don't really receive this -- you're going to be lost at the end of this life -- but you're going to feel such a pain and grief when you see how much this dear Creator loved you and how indifferent to that you were, and how you spent all your time going around after other substitutes. You really are -- you're just going to feel worse than you can believe. And then, loved ones, it will be too late.

So I would encourage you to start believing that the reason he's given you all these presents like little birds, and little dogs, and these bodies is because he really does love you. And he wants you to start depending on that love instead of trying to soak it up from everybody else. So I pray for those of you that get into those depression things -- reject it and look up to God. Let us pray.