

## **Love Affirmed Jeremiah 31:3-4**

**1-25-15**

I want to take as our subject today, the Love of God. A revelation of God's love is foundational to everything. It is even foundation to who God is, for "God is Love."<sup>1</sup> God exists in an active state of love. The relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is an eternal fact that defines who God is and explains what God is doing in His work of redemption. The Father loves the Son and the Holy Spirit as does the Holy Spirit, the Father and the Son. And the Son has this same love for the other two persons of the Trinity. The offer of salvation is an invitation into this perfect circle of love. Invitations to parties at the White House have very specific, limited guest lists. People are highly honored when invited into that circle. But the most elite mortal circle is nothing compared to the divine circle of the Trinity. Ponder for a moment the magnitude of the invitation you have received through the gospel call, an invitation to join God Himself in an eternal fellowship of love.

It is essential that you and I see to the fullest extent possible the love God has for us as His children. Our ability to trust Him through life's experiences depends on that revelation. Our ability to receive correction from Heavenly Father depends on how established we are in the love of God.

That's why Paul prayed for Christians in Eph. 3:17 that we would be "...rooted and grounded in love" and that we would "...be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height -- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge." Notice he didn't pray they would get a new car. He didn't pray they would get a better education.

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<sup>1</sup> 1John 4:16. All Scripture references are in the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

That's all fine & good, but in the grand scheme of things relatively unimportant. Paul prayed for the thing they needed most: to know the love of God: not just head knowledge, but experiential knowledge that comes out of personal interaction with God.

That knowledge lays the foundation for your walk with God. (1) It Shapes your Concept of God,<sup>2</sup> so that you come to Him in time of need. Instead of drawing back in fear,<sup>3</sup> you run to Him for help. "God is Love"; Love is fundamental to who God is. He lives in love. He delights in expressing that love. Love is expressed by giving. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...."<sup>4</sup> You know person loves you by the sacrifices that person is willing to make for your wellbeing. "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live thru him" (1 John 4:9 NIV).

To understand any subject we need sound definitions of terms. 1Cor. 13 paints a wonderful picture what love looks like; but it does not give a definition of love. Jesus' life demonstrates love perfectly; in Him we see the love of God flawlessly manifested. It's when we take full revelation of Scripture that begin to grasp what love really is. Love is more than a feeling, although feelings may be invoked. It goes beyond good intentions, although good intentions are essential. Love is Action. Love sacrifices. Love gives. The best definition of love, the one that has helped me most in applying love to real life experiences, is one I got from Charles Finney, a theologian and evangelist who lived in the 1800's. Love is Seeking the Highest Good of God and the Universe (which of course includes all people).<sup>5</sup> Because people

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<sup>2</sup> And whether we realize it or not, our concept of God influences our perceptions of life, its purpose and our interpretation of events in life.

<sup>3</sup> Heb. 10:39; Heb. 4:16

<sup>4</sup> John 3:16

<sup>5</sup> Finney explains this in his book, *The Benevolence of God*, which seems to be out of print. His insights on the love of God are particularly need to be re-visited in our

don't understand God's love as revealed in Scripture, they think it is simply overlooking destructive behavior. No, love calls us out of destructive behavior, so we can have life and have it abundantly.<sup>6</sup> In addition to shaping our concept of God, our revelation of love also (2) Shapes our Concept of Ourselves. It grounds us in our Identity in Christ—that as Christians we are accepted in the Beloved (Jesus) and already pleasing to the Father--because of the gift of Christ's righteousness. Knowing God's love for us and knowing who we are in Christ is essential for spiritual growth and maturity. First and foremost, we must know that God love us with an unwavering love. We must understand that the experiences He leads us through are working together for our good (Rms 8:28). We need to be soundly rooted and grounded in that love so that we can hear and receive correction without freaking out. As a pastor, I have learned that people have a hard time with biblical passages that warn and correct, if they are not established in a revelation of God's love for them. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). We are to proclaim the whole counsel of God, including the hard sayings if we would become balances, steadfast people.<sup>7</sup> -- If a Christian is not grounded in his or her acceptance and identity in Christ, if he does not know the everlasting nature of God's love toward him, when he is challenged to change his behavior or warned of the consequences of disobedience, his fear of God rejecting him tends to cause him to lose his footing. Because thinks God's parental love depends upon his performance, when he performs well he thinks all is well between him and God and when he falters he thinks God rejects him. That instability and emotional upheaval robs him of reaching his full growth potential.

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generation where some groups impose their unbiblical concept of God's love as a basis for justifying all kinds of ungodliness.

<sup>6</sup> John 10:10

<sup>7</sup> Acts 20:27; Heb. 5:11-14.

I want to bring into focus a message from God to His people found in Jeremiah 31:3: “The LORD has appeared of old to me, saying: ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’”

This was a word that came to Israel during a severe time of testing. They had been taken captive by Babylon. They had suffered disappointments and defeats. They were probably wondering and stressing out about what the future might hold for them. It is in that context that this powerful word of assurance came to God’s people. There is in this verse (1) a Reminder of Past Experiences with God (2) a Revelation of God’s Heart toward us (3) a Clarification of God’s Work in our Lives.

The text begins with a Reminder of Past Experiences: “The LORD has appeared of old to me saying....” The revelation that follows in verse 3 was not something new for Jeremiah. God had spoken this to him in the past. Yet he was human enough to need the reminder. God had called Jeremiah in his youth and had spoken to him many years earlier. Jeremiah had responded to the call. But life had not been easy for him. He is known as the “weeping prophet.” He was ridiculed, discredited, resisted, and rejected. He was thrown into prison by the king and almost died there. Yes, God had appeared to Jeremiah earlier in life and assured him of His love toward him—but Jeremiah needed a reminder. And I suspect there are people here that could also use a reminder.

“The LORD has appeared of old to me saying....” Notice how personal this is. God didn’t just send a note saying this. He didn’t send the word through a messenger. He himself appeared to Jeremiah. I want you to take a moment and recall times in the past when God met with you. Was there a time when God came to you and revealed His love toward you? I find strength in thinking back on the day He first called me to Himself. At the tender age of fourteen God tugged on my heart and drew me to

Him. O happy when Jesus washed my sins away. O happy day when He let me know I was forgiven and loved. O happy day when His Spirit bore witness with my spirit<sup>8</sup> that I was His forevermore. I'm so glad God can speak directly to our hearts. There is a communion in the Holy Spirit that is available to every child of God. All we have to do is open our hearts to Him and listen. He is speaking. He is a speaking God. But the exhortation in Scripture is "Let him who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying...."<sup>9</sup>

God has given us means for remembering. We have one another to encourage the remembrance of God's love, as we worship together we remember, as we look into His word there are reminders for us, and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper is a concrete, visible reminder of the sacrificial love of God toward us.

For most of you, what I will share this morning is not entirely new. For the Lord has spoken it to you in the past. Today is a reminder of His unfailing love toward you. Today is a celebration of that fact. Today if you will hear His voice, God says again, "I have loved you with an everlasting love...."

In those words is a Revelation of God's Heart toward us. I know my wife loves me. She shows it to me many ways every day by the sacrifices she makes for me. But I also enjoy hearing her say the words to me, "I love you." And I enjoy saying those words to her. Life is better because we love one another. Someone is in my corner. Someone cares for me. We are made for love. We need love from one another. But ultimately there is only one source of real love: God is love. Love originates with Him. Love motivated the creation and more profoundly love

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 8:16

<sup>9</sup> Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22

motivated redemption. Love is the most profound principle in the universe and according to 1 Cor. 13 the most enduring.

God's word for you today is this, "I have loved you with an everlasting love...." God loved you before you were ever born. He loved you before you ever did one thing right. He loved you even when you were living in opposition to Him. Eph. 2:4 "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."

God's love is not a response to our good performance. It is an expression of who God is. Listen to Eph. 1:3-4 "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." You were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world—way back then, God set His love on you. That is something worth meditating on. If you have been down-hearted, if you have felt despondent or unworthy—think about His love. Consider the fact that He loved you before the foundation of the world.

Love is the atmosphere of security—and we all need that security. Heaven will be heaven because the love of God will totally fill the atmosphere: no more selfish ambition, no more injustices, no more abuse, no more tears, no more sorrow, no fears or anxiety—just waves and waves of love. 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear...." The devil bombards us with fears, anxieties, and accusation. He bombards our emotions with feelings of rejection and inadequacy. He comes to steal, kill, and destroy our happiness and rob us of our joy. But Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life and have it to the full." The life God gives is more than just biological life. God's life has a premium quality to it. It is characterized by love, joy, peace, and righteousness. Jesus told

the disciples, “As the Father has loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.”

The key to a satisfying, productive life is to abide in His love. What does that mean? It means to live in the environment of God’s love internally and in your interaction with one another. It means drawing upon the love-life of God by staying in communion with Him, praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20-21). “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8). The thought-life you choose to live in has a profound effect on your happiness. You can dwell on injustices and hurts and hardships and make yourself miserable or you can dwell on the truth of God’s love and intentions for you and get happy in Him. Nobody can do that for you. Sometimes we’re our own worst enemy because of the way we think about life. “Rejoice in the Lord, always. Again I say rejoice!” We can’t always rejoice in our circumstances;<sup>10</sup> but we can always rejoice in our God. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. And regardless of what we be going through today—His word stands true and is of profound comfort: “I have loved you with an everlasting love....” Everlasting means it’s there today in the present and it continues to be there in the future. This is a declaration of God’s unwavering commitment to us. This is covenantal love. In Romans 8:35-39 Paul explores the depth of God’s love for us with a series of rhetorical questions. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor

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<sup>10</sup> If we understood how God is working those circumstances together for our good, there would be rejoicing in our hearts. The end of a matter is better than the beginning.

principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul is persuaded. Are you persuaded that nothing can separate you from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? Are you persuaded that His love toward you is everlasting? Listen to the passion in His heart toward you in our text: “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love....”

If the Lord loves me with an everlasting love, what is money compared to that? If the Lord loves me with an everlasting love, what is popularity compared to that? People all around us are striving for things that in the end will not even matter. They lie, cheat, and steal so they can be dressed in the latest fashion—but one day you will be dressed in a glorified body like our Lord. They wear themselves out laying up treasures on earth; but you have treasures in heaven. Yet the greatest treasure of all is this: the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent God has set His love on you and says to you, “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love....” He has demonstrated that love by sending His own Son to give His life as a ransom for your eternal salvation. How can a people so loved be downcast? I don’t care if you’re rich or poor by this world’s standards, if God says to you, “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love,” then you are rich and have every reason to rejoice in Him today.

The world does not understand the love of God. They think God’s love is a license to sin. They think love frees them to live in iniquity and get a free pass to heaven. But that is not the nature of God’s love. God’s love actually frees us from the tyranny of sin. God’s love frees us from the demands of our flesh, because a greater influence has come into our lives. The



Holy Spirit has shed God's love abroad in our hearts<sup>11</sup>—so that we have more affection toward the kingdom above than we have toward the kingdoms of this world. Anyone who thinks God's love liberates people to live in sin does not understand God's nature or the nature of His love. Jesus tied love with obedience to the Father. John 15:9-10 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." So how did Jesus abide in the Father's love during the incarnation? "...I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love." How do we dwell in the environment of God's love? "...If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love." That's where I want to abide, amen? We all have to deal with the desires of our flesh. Even Paul said, "But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified" (1 Cor 9:27). That's a battle we all fight. But it is also one we can win by the grace of God.

III. Look with me at the Clarification of God's work in our lives. In Jerm. 31:3 God follows up the revelation of His everlasting love with these words to us, "Therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you." God's eternal motivation toward you is His love. That causes Him to draw you. Why does God want relationship with us? Why does God draw us to Himself? Is it because we're such great people? No, we stumble and flounder around even in our best efforts. God has patiently sought us and drawn us to Himself simply because He unselfishly loves us and wants to lavish us with His favor. "Therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you."

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 5:5. Rom 8:2 says "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The principle, the influence, of the Holy Spirit shedding His love abroad in our hearts causes us to love God more than the pleasures of this world and thereby empowers us through that motivation to live holy lives.

How has God drawn us to Himself?

(1) By positioning you with opportunity to know Him. Some of us were born into Christian homes. At a young age, Mom and Dad told you about a God who loves you. They took you to Sunday School. You were born in a country where the gospel is freely preached. All that opportunity did not come to you by chance. God orchestrated that for you. Long before you were saved, God was at work drawing you with His lovingkindness and preparing you for the decision. How has God drawn us to Himself?

(2) By bringing the Good News to you and impressing the message upon your heart. No one comes to Christ unless the Father draws him (John 6:44). You did not and could not have found the Lord by your own willpower or intellectual pursuit. There may be considerations that a person goes through in preparation of the heart, but by human knowledge alone no one can know God<sup>12</sup>; it takes the gracious conviction of the Holy Spirit and supernatural revelation for that to happen. Faith comes by hearing the message<sup>13</sup> and somehow God mercifully brought the message to you and me.

(3) By expressing His goodness to you even when you were ignoring it. Romans 2:4 talks about the goodness of God that leads people to repentance; the NIV says that "...God's kindness leads you to repentance." Theologians use the term "common grace" to describe the good things God does for all of humanity. He gives us the air we breathe and the food we drink. His rain falls on the just and the unjust. He allows even ungodly people to enjoy family and friends, a morning sunrise, and a beautiful rainbow in the sky. All of creation declares the presence of a creator who is good and merciful. All of that should prepare the heart for salvation, although Romans 2 makes it clear that even with all that goodness many reject

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:21

<sup>13</sup> Romans 10:17

Christ. How has God drawn us to Himself?

(4) By circumstance that box us in and turn our attention toward Him for help. Monday night I heard a powerful testimony of how God got a man in a corner where death or life in prison looked like the only two options. In the heat of that circumstance, all alone in a little motel room, he prayed to God. He only knew one prayer so he prayed that prayer: “Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, if I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” That moment, he was born again. You see the exactness of the ritual or the precision of the prayer is not the deciding factor. God is looking upon the heart. His eyes are running to and fro through the earth—searching for people who will turn toward Him and call on the name of Jesus. And He is orchestrating circumstances that cause them to look to Him for help. How has God drawn us with His lovingkindness?

(5) By leading us into places that keep us aware of our dependence on Him. This is particularly in play for our text. God had brought correction upon the nation of Israel. Their enemies had defeated them. They had been carried away into foreign land as slaves. Life had not been easy and had not gone the way they wanted it to go. And with all the hardship, they were tempted to wonder whether God loved them and was working in their behalf. But God says, “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love....” I didn’t just love you when there was money in the bank and a full harvest in the field. My love is everlasting; it continues even when the money is gone and harvest fails. In fact, those very circumstances that tempt you to question my love are in reality expressions of my love. It is the lovingkindness of the Lord that leads us back to the right path when we stray.<sup>14</sup> It is the lovingkindness of the Lord that orders our lives in such a way that we feel our need for Him. Someday

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<sup>14</sup> Psalm 107:43. See my message entitled “God Will Fix It For You” preached October 26, 2014.

you and I will thank God for some of our unanswered prayers. Someday we will like the Psalmist realize, I was good for me that I was afflicted. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word"(Ps 119:67). "...Therefore, with lovingkindness I have drawn you."

The lovingkindness of God toward Israel may have not always felt so good, but God's ultimate purpose was to bless them. Notice what He says in Jerm. 31:4 "Again I will build you, and you shall be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, And go forth in the dances of those who rejoice." The verses that follow expound on the blessing God has for them. God wanted them to understand His plans for them are good. Yes, He had corrected them and they had experienced some hard times. But that correction was not intended for their destruction; it was ultimately designed to bring them into their destiny. The same is true for you and me. Our Heavenly Father may walk us through some experiences that we would not have chosen to go through. But He is working all things for our good. He is ordering our steps in love. His plans for us are good and not evil, to give us a hope and a future (Jerm. 29:11).

Get it in your head this morning. God loves you with an everlasting love. Let that truth soak into your heart. Meditate on Jerm. 31:3; roll those words over and over in your mind: "I have loved you with an everlasting love." Years ago we had horses and with those horses saddles and other leather products. The leather would tend to dry out and become stiff and rigid. We took care of that by rubbing oil into the leather. Those treatments kept the leather flexible and useful. We need to learn how to bask in God's love. We need the oil of the Holy Spirit rubbed into our souls. Soak up His love for you. Take time to wait upon God and let Him speak again and again to your soul: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I

have drawn you.” You will be amazed how much brighter the world around you becomes.

Pray