

Love Unquenchable
Song of Solomon 8:7

Richard Tow 10-18-15

I take as my theme these words from Song of Solomon 8:7 “*Many waters cannot quench love, Nor can the floods drown it....*”¹

On November 5, 1982 a precious gift from God was laid in my arms. Jeanie and I named her Kathy Jean because Kathy means “pure” and Jean means “God’s gracious gift.” That’s exactly what Katie was to us. She was our baby girl, full of life and vitality.

Her picture on the screen is one of my favorites. Of course, all of her childhood, Jeanie and I were pastors. Sometimes after a service, she would gather the kids in front of the pulpit and preach her own sermon to them. After Bible College she went to Uganda as a missionary. I did not know that she would be thrown in a distant village by herself. I did not know that she would be contending with the local witchdoctor. I did not know that she would return from Uganda with a lot of pain. I just knew how glad we were to have her back.

Today Katie lives an ungodly lifestyle. She is a regular at church. It’s a church that tells her all is fine. It’s a church that prides itself on accepting people’s lifestyles and being non-judgmental. It’s a church where love is pretty much equated with tolerance. It’s a church where people are made as comfortable as possible in their sin.

But I don’t want my baby girl comfortable in her sin. I want her delivered from her sin. I want her free from the destructive power of sin. “*Therefore if the Son makes you, free, you shall be free indeed.*”² God’s salvation is not an abstract doctrine. It doesn’t leave us in the mire of iniquity and simply say, “That’s ok; I understand.” God’s grace is something much more powerful than just a pass on the penalty of sin. It is the power of God unto salvation! In Matt. 1:21 an angel told Joseph, “...*you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins.*” Don’t miss the exact nature of Jesus’ mission: “...*He will save His people from their sins*”—not in their sins—not just from the penalty of their sins—but the salvation Jesus brings is to deliver us from our sins. Rom 6:14 “*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*” Biblical grace does not leave us under the dominion of sin; it liberates us and empowers us.

I would gladly lay down my life this morning to see Katie totally right with God, fulfilling God’s call on her life. There is nothing that would ever make me stop loving my Katie.

Sometimes we get a little taste of God’s love through a wayward child. Sometimes we learn how strong, unwavering, and unquenchable our Father’s love is. “*Many waters cannot quench love, Nor can the floods drown it....*”

Nobody has to tell me to be pray for Katie. I can’t help but pray for someone I love like that. I pray for her during a red light; I pray for her during the night; sometimes it’s all I can do to not break out into tears over her. If you see me gazing out into the air, my heart is probably occupied. I am probably begging God to deliver her. Love turns duty into a lifestyle. Paul said,

¹ All Scripture quotes are from New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² John 8:36

“*The love of Christ constrains us...*”³ As long as Christianity is just a list of duties, we have not yet touched the heart of the matter. Love compels us to in behalf of others.

I want to talk with you about God’s love toward us and then through us.

God’s love toward us is clearly demonstrated in Christ.

What caused the Son of God to step out of heaven into this sin-sick world? Why would the eternal God leave all the comforts and joys of heaven and come into the mess we have here on planet earth? There is only one adequate answer: Love.

During WWI two soldiers developed a deep love for one another while fighting for their country. Month after month, during the European stalemate, they lived together in the mud and misery of trench warfare. From time to time the troops would rise up out of the trenches and go out against the opposing forces; then they would fall back into the trenches and bury their dead. That process went on over and over again; and as it did the bond between the soldiers grew deeper and deeper. Two soldiers, Jim and Bill, became particularly close to one another. On one of those fruitless charges out of the trenches, Jim fell wounded on the battlefield. Bill made it safely back to the trenches. During the night Jim lay out in the open wounded and alone. Of course, the shelling from both sides continued and it was extremely dangerous to leave the trenches. But Bill wanted to go out and help find his friend. His commanding officer refused to let him go. When the officer wasn’t looking, Bill came up out of the trenches and miraculously made his way to Jim. Sometime later Bill managed to pull Jim back into the trenches. But it was too late. When he got there Jim was dead. Seeing the dead body, the commanding officer said to Bill, “Now, was that worth it; He’s dead anyway.” Bills response was, “Yes, Sir, it was worth it. My friend’s last words made it more than worth it. He looked up at me and said, “I knew you’d come.”⁴

What is love? Love is seeking the well-being of another. .” It’s not just a warm feeling in the heart. It’s getting out of the comfort and safety of the trenches and going after those in need. It’s overlooking the faults and aggravations. It’s denying yourself so that life is a little better for someone near you. In John 13:34-35 Jesus said, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*” Evangelism depends on us walking in love with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The world is not impressed with church people who behave just like they do. The world is turned off by Christians who talk the talk, but don’t walk the walk.

The Apostle John wrote, “*If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? 21 And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also*” (1 John 4:20-21). The test of our love seldom comes with the people across town. It usually comes with the people closest to us, the people we interact with on a daily basis. Loving them as we love ourselves is the evidence of the kingdom of God in us.

Come with me to the upper room, the night of Jesus’ arrest. He is with His disciples and He knows that Judas is betraying Him. He knows that Peter will deny him. He knows that they all will forsake Him in His darkest hour. Yet His attention is on their well-being. John writes, “*...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end*” (John 13:1). Jesus

³ 2Cor. 5:14.

⁴ *Stories for the Heart, compiled by Alice Gray* (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Publishers, Inc., 1996) p. 130.

girded himself a towel and began to wash the disciples' feet. Yes, He is teaching them the importance of humility and servanthood. But He is cherishing them; He is expressing His utter love for them. They will all fail Him; but that does not quench His love toward them. Peter will deny Him; but Jesus prays for Peter that his faith does not fail.⁵ Judas is going to betray him; but Jesus washes His feet as well. Love stoops down and washes people's feet, even those who will fail us, even those who will mistreat us.

I'm afraid there is far more talk about love in the Body of Christ than there is true demonstration of it. People choose a church so that they can enjoy fellowship with others who uplift them. They avoid situations where they will be with people who drain them and place demand on their strength. Yes, we need to be with some people who encourage and strengthen us. But ministry also means giving ourselves to those who need us. If I'm just picking and choosing what feels good to me, I'm probably not doing very much real ministry. I don't think Mother Theresa went to the lepers in Calcutta for the food and fellowship. I don't think Paul endured stonings and shipwreck because it was fun. People think they're doing God a big favor by going to church and enjoying some fellowship with friends. Guess what, sinners do the same thing with their crowd. It's all about what I want and what feels good to me.

Jesus girded Himself with a towel and washed the feet of his betrayer. He bowed down and cleaned Peter's feet and John's feet and Bartholomew's feet. Then He said in John 13:14 "*If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.*"

Everything Jesus did, everything Jesus endured, was voluntary. He could have called ten thousand angels to His rescue had He chosen to do so. His defenses were limitless. Yet He endured ridicule, He endured beatings, He endured the cross because love compelled Him to do it. He didn't do it because it was His duty to do it; the love welling up in His heart caused Him to do it.

Years ago a mother was crossing a prairie with her baby in her arms. She saw in the distance a cloud of smoke. It was approaching rapidly and was surrounding her. There was nothing she could do to escape it. So she quickly dug a hole in the ground as deep as possible given the situation. She laid the baby in the hole and laid herself over her baby. In a flash the whole thing was over. When rescuers found her charred body over the spot, underneath they found the baby alive and unharmed.⁶

What is love? Love is unselfishness. The opposite of love is not hate; the opposite of love is selfishness. That mother laid down her life for that child. Love caused her to sacrifice her own well-being for the well-being of her baby. 1 Cor. 13:5 says, love "...does not seek its own..." verse 6 "*does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.*" Everything is tolerated in our society in the name of love. Even the Supreme Court majority justices on June 26th used the term love to justify their decision. Tolerance of sin is not love. Why would I tolerate a venomous snake in my baby's crib? That's what sin is: it's a poisonous, deadly viper that destroys the souls of men. It's not ok, because I love the people it's destroying. "*The wages of sin is death*" (Rom. 6:23). Sin is not a neutral thing; it's a deadly thing. That's why we oppose it. We do not want people destroyed by it. Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice to put away sin. Love is not tolerance of sin; love is helping people break free from sin.

⁵ Luke 22:32

⁶ I do not remember my source for this story.

Hear the words of Christ as He hung on the cross. The first thing He said was, “*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*” His first priority was to gain mercy for the very people who had abused Him. Instead of resenting Pilate and Herod and Caiaphas and the soldiers who beat him and crowd that demanded His crucifixion, Jesus asked for their salvation. Of course, that prayer rings down through the centuries for every one of us. Without that prayer none of us would be saved.

God’s love is to be expressed through us as well. Seeing the love of God operating in Christ, helps us receive His instruction for our own lives. His kingdom is a kingdom of love and peace. His kingdom is not of this world. If we are still thinking like the ungodly world around us, we are not operating in His kingdom. We see the nature of Christ’s kingdom as He washes His betrayer’s feet. We see His kingdom in operation as He prays for the forgiveness of His murders. James and John wanted to call down fire on those who opposed them. Jesus said to them, “*You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. 56 For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them*” (Luke 9:55-56). Peter cut off the ear of the High Priest’s servant. Jesus healed the ear to correct Peter’s error.⁷ We must understand and we must be continually reminded of the way God’s kingdom functions. Otherwise, we will be thinking we’re doing God a service when in reality we’re operating in contradiction to who He is. Paul did exactly that before his conversion.⁸

In the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain⁹ recorded in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus set forth the nature of His kingdom. Follow as we read Luke 6:27-36.

"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. 29 To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. 30 Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back. 31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

Love your enemies. Who are your enemies? Anyone who is antagonistic toward you; anyone who is in opposition to you.¹⁰

What does it mean to love my enemies? How am I to do that? Jesus gives us the answer in this passage.

(1) “*...do good to those who hate you.*” Notice this is a call for action. It’s not enough to just have a good attitude toward them. I’m to be more proactive than that. I’m to take the initiative to do something good for the person. My Aunt Vera was a good example of this. If someone got out of sorts with Aunt Vera she would bake them a pie or make them a dollie. I think she understood the value of that on two levels. First, requiring myself to do something like that addresses the attitudes of my own heart. It confronts the tendency to hold a grudge. Second, it gives a signal to the other person that you want a positive relationship. You might just win that person over with kindness: action rather than reaction; action rather than simple restraint. Do something good to the other party.

What does it mean to love my enemies? How am I to do that?

(2) Luke 6:28 “*bless those who curse you.*”

⁷ Matthew 26:51-54; Luke 22:49-51.

⁸ Acts 9:1-4; 1Timothy 1:13.

⁹ Matthew 5-7 was given from a mountain (Matt, 5:1); but the message in Luke was given on a plain (Luke 6:17).

¹⁰ Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 10 ed. (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1993) p. 383.

How do I talk about the person behind his or her back? Do I speak blessing? Do I wish that person well? Do I say something positive about the person to others? Or am I venting negative feelings about that person? Am I complaining about the person to others? Am I secretly wishing ill toward the person.

(3) also in verse 28 “... *and pray for those who spitefully use you.*”

Do you feel unfairly treated by anyone? Do you feel used? Of course, “spitefully” implies more than just stupidly or ignorantly using you. Even if there is malicious intent, I am to pray for that person. Notice again, there is action here. I usually think I’m doing well if I just don’t retaliate. But Jesus calls us to higher ground than that. Pray for that person. Don’t pray against the person. That can be likened to cursing. Pray for the person’s highest good. Maybe there does need to be some conviction and repentance. But be very careful about the condition of your own heart. Make sure you’re sincerely pursuing good for the other party.

How do I love my enemies?

(4) Verse 29 “*To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either.*”

The idea here is to not retaliate—not get into a fight with the person. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus contrasted this standard with the one found in the Law of Moses. Matt. 5: 38, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’*” The Law of Moses imposed a limit on the retaliation. It was designed to keep people from excessive response. One eye for one eye; not both eyes. One tooth for one tooth. But Jesus said don’t retaliate at all. There are times we need to remove ourselves from further harm. Jesus did that when He slipped away in the crowd from the Jewish leaders.¹¹ Paul did that one more than one occasion.¹² David hid himself from King Saul.¹³ When we look at Scripture as a whole we understand that Jesus is addressing a basic response: don’t avenge yourself. Leave all vengeance in the hands of the Lord.¹⁴ If someone is violating you in financial matters, the same principle applies. We shouldn’t be using our energy to fight with other people. Seek peace and pursue it. Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, especially with other believer.¹⁵ God has not called us to a tug-of-war with fellow Christians.

(5) verse 30 “*Give to everyone who asks of you. And from him who takes away your goods do not ask them back.*” God is generous. Faith says, “God can restore this loss to me if I’ll trust Him for it.” Joseph’s brothers robbed him of his place in the family. But God made it up to him. God’s got your back if you do the right thing and leave the end result with him. Otherwise you may be on your own. Don’t get caught up in contention over some material thing. It’s not worth it.

How do I love my enemies?

(6) Follow this simple rule of thumb. It’s known as the Golden Rule.

31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.”

Put yourself in the other person’s place; ask yourself what you would like done to you. Do that!

¹¹ John 5:13

¹² 2Cor. 11:33

¹³ 1Samuel 21:10; 22:1.

¹⁴ Romans 12:17-21.

¹⁵ Eph. 4:3; Heb. 12:14; 1Peter 3:10-11.

Now in the verses that follow Jesus shared some reasoning that is behind all this.

Luke 6:32 "But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. 36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."

What is He saying here? Jesus is saying, we've got a higher standard here than Moses had. We've got a higher standard that the world around us has. If all I am able to do is be nice to people who are nice to me, I haven't done anything more than what a rank sinner out there would do. Mafia Godfathers were good in many ways to their families. If you cross them, they would have your legs broken or even have you killed. But they had their own code of ethics they lived by. If you just love people that are loving toward you, you haven't demonstrated the kingdom of God. You've demonstrated a natural response to the natural order of things.

So we have from the word of God a reminder of the nature of God's kingdom; how it should be expressing itself through us;¹⁶ and how we should be responding in our relationships with other people. Do you have a strained relationship that you need to apply these principles to?

Pray

¹⁶ This is only possible as God's love is shed abroad in our hearts (Rom. 5:5) by the Holy Spirit. Love is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) rather than a product of our self-will. So it is important to keep ourselves in the influence of God's love by praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20-21).