

14th February 2021 10 am The Love of God Compared to Other Loves

Service led by Kim Matthews, Reading by Hannah Matthews, Talk by Jenny Matthews, Andrew Attwood interviews Matthew King about God at Work, Intercessions by Karen Mills
This transcript is only of the readings and the talk.

1st Reading: Romans 8:35-39

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

‘For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 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.

2nd Reading: 1 John 4:7-11

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 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. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Talk: The Love of God, Compared to Other Loves

[Kim:] Thank you, Hannah. Just going to pray for Jenny now before she brings us the talk.

Dear Lord, we pray that You would anoint Jenny now by Your Spirit, that you would touch her lips, that the words that she speaks would be of You. And give us hearts to receive, ears to hear. May we hear what You want each of us to hear. And may what is not from You just fall away, Lord. We pray that we would hear Your voice through what Jenny is going to give us now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Jenny:] It's a privilege to be here to speak to you today on the topic of God's love. When I first went through today's passages several months ago, I felt that, "Wow! What incredible passages to be speaking on," for they are really amazing passages (one of them has a sticky note attached to it in my Bible, so that for years I could find it easily). Then came that really daunting feeling: what can I say about these passages that will bring fresh insight? I hope and pray that God may use me today, to bring His words to life in you. It might be that what I say today, you already fully know, or maybe it will be a reminder of the truths that we know, yet we haven't dwelt upon recently. The official title for today is *The Love of God, Compared to Other Loves*. What a lot that encompasses! I'm going to focus on just two aspects:

- the redeeming sacrificial love of God and
- His faithful love.

Of course there's so much more in these passages. This morning I was listening to the 8 o'clock service on Radio 4, and they read the same passage in 1 John. And there they took the focus on how we love one another. And there were lots of practical stories around this country and in this world. And it was really encouraging, and it's well worth listening to. But today, my focus was going to be on the redeeming sacrificial love of God and His faithful love.

Today being St. Valentine's Day, many people may be sending cards, giving chocolates or flowers, and telling someone how much they love them. We, as Christians, have the greatest love story that the world has ever known and will never know, for it is the greatest love story for all time, and it includes ordinary people, you and me. The greatest love story is that of our Father God and His beloved Son Jesus, through whom we are redeemed by His sacrificial love, that is His death on the Cross, and His Resurrection.

May I have the first slide, please. When children are small, the phrase, "I do it myself," is frequently heard as they try to learn and do things all by themselves. It's an important part of growing, learning to feed and dress ourselves. Learning to do these things can be a messy process, and we have to learn to say, "Please help me." We cannot do it all by ourselves. We need help. "Every day I try my best but somehow I end up in a mess," is the message that's on that bib, and it's true for us adults too. Even as an adult, we may feel that we are stubbornly independent, and can manage everything in our own strength, as the world around us tells us, and yet we have problems.



May I have the second slide, please. The next slide is an arbour that Bethany and I started to build one weekend at the bottom of our garden. We did this when Kimberley and Hannah were away. We managed to transport all the pieces in the car from the garden centre to home, something that only worked because there were just the two of us in the car, allowing space for the big box to fit in. We started to work together, holding pieces together as we followed instructions and began the assembly, and it definitely needed two people. Then came a problem, when we both physically lacked the strength to get a screw fully into the correct hole. It was almost in, but it just would not budge that final few millimetres. However much Bethany or I tried, we could not do it. When Kimberley came home, and we asked him to help, it was easy peasy for him - really frustrating for us, but easy for him. And within a minute the problem screw was fully in place.



So you might be thinking, "Why am I telling you this story about our DIY efforts?" I wanted to illustrate that however independent we think we are, we are in need of a saviour. The Bible tells us that we are all sinners. In Proverbs 20, it says,

9 Who can say, 'I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin'?

Romans chapter 3:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

[Also] in Romans chapter 3:

11 ... 'There is no one righteous, not even one'

In 1 John chapter 1,

8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

In Romans 6,

23 For the wages of sin is death...

Is there any hope for any of us? We are all sinners, and we are all condemned. Romans 6 verse 23 goes on further:

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There is a way out, through God's gift to us in Jesus.

Sin has been there from the very beginning. In Genesis chapter 3 in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are tempted by the serpent, and eat fruit from the forbidden tree. Their eyes are opened to their nakedness, and they try to hide from God. By their disobedience to God, they became ashamed and wanted to hide from God. The relationship they'd had with God had become broken and tarnished. Both Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, and yet God still provided for them, in a different way. Verse 21 says,

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

The skin used for making garments came from the sacrifice of an animal. One life is given up, so that another may have life.

The Old Testament is full of stories of how God's people sin and need redemption. All of the heroes, from Abraham to David, from Joseph to Moses, made mistakes, and were failures in different ways. The Bible makes no secret of where they go wrong. Yet they turn to God in repentance, to seek forgiveness. They understand their need for being forgiven and saved.

The Psalms are full of honesty about life, admitting deep down real needs, the need of a saviour, for redemption, the rescuer, the Messiah. Psalm 44 says¹,

26 Rise up and help us; REDEEM US because of your UNFAILING LOVE.

Psalm 130 says,

7 Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is UNFAILING LOVE
and with him is FULL REDEMPTION.

8 He himself will REDEEM Israel
from all their sins.

Isaiah chapter 43 verse 1 begins²,

...

Fear not, for I have REDEEMED you;
I have called you by name; you are mine.

In the Old Testament, we read how the Israelites looked forward to the coming of Messiah who would rescue them, redeem them. There are hundreds of Old Testament prophecies which Jesus fulfils: prophecies of Jesus's birth, His life and ministry, and His death. I recommend reading through Psalm 22, which prophesies Jesus' death. When Jesus was crucified, He cried out³,

46 ... 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

That is the starting verse of Psalm 22. Back at the start of Advent, Val Whiteman spoke to us so clearly and explained about typology, stories in the Old Testament which foretell Jesus. The more I read and know the Bible, the more I can see how Jesus is in the Old Testament, and how stories in the New Testament mirror events in the Old Testament. The Old Testament and the New Testament are woven together through God's redemption through His one and only Son, Jesus.

In the story of Abraham, Abraham gives his only son Isaac freely to God. And God provides a ram as a substitution for Isaac. In the New Testament, God freely gives His only Son Jesus as a substitution for us.

1 [NIVUK 1984] Jennifer's capitals

2 [NIVUK 1984] Jennifer's capitals

3 Matthew 27:46

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

That's John chapter 3 verses 16 and 17. "For I have come that they may have life and life in all its fullness," declares Jesus.⁴

One of the things I have more recently noticed when reading the Gospels, is how often Jesus faced death. When Jesus started His ministry, He read in the synagogue in Nazareth, from the words of Isaiah.

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

And declared

21 ... "This scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

In Luke chapter 4⁵. The reaction was one of fury.

28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, ***in order to throw him off the cliff***. 30 *But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*

When Jesus was speaking with the Jews, there were many whom He upset, to the point that they wanted to kill Him. In John chapter 8, it says,

59 At this, ***they picked up stones to stone him***, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

In John chapter 10,

31 Again ***the Jews picked up stones to stone him***,...

In John chapter 10 later on:

39 Again ***they tried to seize him***, but he escaped their grasp.

Jesus knew that He was going to have to die, and many times He told His disciples, but they were slow to understand or to accept what Jesus was telling them. A few weeks ago Andrew Attwood was speaking on grace, and how about Barabbas was unexpectedly set free from His condemnation to death through the substitution of Jesus. Jesus' name in Hebrew is Yeshua, derived from the same root as Joshua, meaning 'He saves' or 'to rescue', or 'to deliver'. So in the name of God's only Son, Jesus, we have a pointer to why He came and His mission to rescue us, to be our Saviour.

I work in a little Church of England primary school, and usually in the last week of Spring term, the year 6 children re-enact the Easter story around the church, for the rest the school to follow and watch. For those of us who have been Christians for a while, we read the Gospel accounts of Jesus's death, knowing the ending. One year, as the Year 6 children were doing their acting, we noticed that one of the reception children had floods of tears pouring down her face. This was the point in the garden of Gethsemane when the soldiers were taking Jesus away. "It is such a sad story," was her comment. She had fully engaged with the story, and it had touched her heart. As Lent starts this week, it's a good time for us to re-engage with Jesus and the story of His journey towards the Cross. Being in lockdown, I'm missing our communion services, and their regular reminder to focus on Jesus's death and His Resurrection. Just like the child in tears, so we need to turn to the foot of the Cross with Jesus and be with Him.

4 John 10:10, [see GNT]

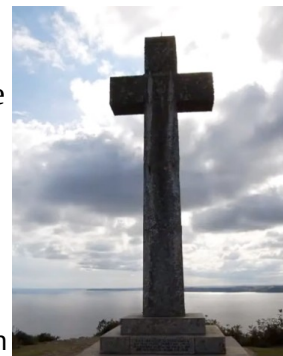
5 [NIVUK 1984] Jennifer's capitals and italics in the next passages

Next slide, please.

16 ... So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha).

18 Here they crucified him, and with him two others – one on each side and Jesus in the middle.

It can be hard to understand why Jesus had to die. We're not accustomed to the blood and goriness in the Old Testament sacrificial system which is necessary for the forgiveness of sins. It's an alien culture to us. In the times of Moses, when the Israelites were enslaved to the Egyptians, it was the blood of a lamb on the doorsteps of the Israelites' home that kept the last plague, the death of all the firstborn, from the homes of the Israelites. If we delve into the Old Testament, then we realise that the sacrifice of unblemished animals was necessary to pay the price of sin, in order to be able to be forgiven.



So how does this relate to me today? Why have I spent this time talking about sin, and the need for redemption? Today's theme is supposed to be God's Love. As 1 John chapter 4 verse 10 says,

10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

God is fully aware of what we are like. He knows our sins, our faults, our annoying habits. Despite all of this, He still loves us, and loves us with a far greater love than we deserve. He still seeks us. The first thing God asked Adam and Eve after they had eaten the forbidden fruit was, "Where are you?" God hadn't given up on them. God doesn't give up on us either. Jesus told parables about God being our Father and seeking the lost, the Good Shepherd looking for the lost sheep, the father of the prodigal son, looking out for the return of his son. Philip Yancey put it this way⁶:

Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more... And grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us less... Grace means that God already loves us as much as an infinite God can possibly love.

There is no love on Earth that compares to this love. This really is the greatest love story, and it's here in our Bibles, waiting for us to discover and share.

When I was growing up, I moved to Exeter when I was eight. This was at the point where my parents' marriage had ended, and we were starting fresh again in a new place. Within a week or two of moving, my Mum took myself and my sister to church each week. This was a completely new experience. We'd never been to a church before. I don't really know what prompted my Mum to start going. But through the church she found a loving community that supported her in so many different practical ways and continues to do so, a whole loving community that helped to raise myself and my sister. Over the following years, I learned stories about Jesus, His miracles, His healings, His death and resurrection, stories from the Old Testament, stories of Christians in times gone by, stories of Christians in other countries. I went through secondary school being teased for many things, including my faith. Yet it wasn't until I was 16, and at Sixth Form college when I joined the Christian Union, that I realised that I was missing such an important thing in my faith. The young Christians I was meeting were different, and I wasn't sure why. Michelle mentioned last week that she'd missed knowing that the 12 tribes of Israel came from the twelve sons of Jacob. For me, the thing I had missed was more crucial. I had missed seeing that Jesus

6 Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* ISBN 978-0310245650

is my Saviour, and that I was in a sinner in need of a Saviour. It seems such a basic truth, and yet I'd missed it.

May I have the next slide, please. This is my dear friend, Ruth-Abigail. We became friends the first day I went to school in Exeter when I was eight, and she is still my friend now, a very close friend. She comes from a family of committed evangelical Christians, and her family has been an amazing witness. At the Christian Union in the Sixth Form college, Ruth-Abigail suggested that I came along to one of their youth meetings at their church. The meeting I went to had over 200 teenagers present, and an elderly gentleman (well, he was elderly in my eyes, whether he was elderly or not, I'm not sure), he spoke about how he first met Jesus, and how meeting Jesus had changed his life and saved him. He spoke with such warmth about Jesus, about his best friend, how Jesus had influenced his life. This was a revelation to me. That was the evening I gave my life to Jesus. It wasn't the start of my faith, but it was such a significant milestone or turning place, to know that I needed a Saviour, and that Jesus was there for me.



9 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. ⁷

On that first occasion of giving my life to Jesus, I felt such a deep-down sense of peace, of homecoming. Jesus said,

10 "... I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

(John chapter 10 verse 10). It is through Jesus that I live. Have you experienced that redeeming love that God has for you?

Now my need of a Saviour is not a one-off event that happened when I was 17. I have a daily need of a Saviour! I have a collection of lots of sayings and prayers, etc., on bits of scraps of paper which will come readily tumbling out of my Bible! There are loads of them. One of the bits that I've lost went along the lines of this:

Dear Lord, so far today, I've not been grumpy, not upset anybody, got annoyed with anybody, been cross or shouted or lost my temper, but please help me, Lord, as I'm now about to get up out of bed!

At the school this week, one of the spontaneous discussions that we had around our snack table was on the subject of being naughty. One of the four-year-old children said to me, "It's hard to be good all day and every week!" We're all in need been forgiven for the wrong we do.

Each day we face challenges in our walk with Jesus. The Bible tells us so clearly to love other people, yet that's hard. Other people can be annoying. They say the wrong things. they do the wrong things, they wind us up. They're so difficult to love... To others, we are those other people that are so hard to love. When we open our Bible, we're entering into the greatest love story that has ever been, and ever will be, a story of our Father who loves every one of us in a way we can only begin to understand. For God knows and loves each and every one of us. His love is unfailing and never gives up. There's absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God that God has for us. Romans 8 lists all sorts of problems, troubles, hardships and dangers, different difficulties that we may face at different times of life, and declares that nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Isn't that wonderful and incredible?

7 1 John 4:9

Of course that doesn't mean we won't go through difficult times, times of trial and times of temptation, times when we can't see the way forward, times when we may feel overwhelmed by anxiety, times when we may feel overrun by guilt, times when we are filled with sorrow. May I have the next slide, please. Earlier on I quoted from Isaiah chapter 43 verse 1. It begins,

1 ... Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

Then it continues,

- 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.
- 3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.



One of the things that I do enjoy is seeing the sea, walking along by the waves, listening to the sound of the sea. More often than not, and I'm by the sea, I find myself picking up a pebble and holding it in my hand. The sea has made it rounded and smooth. To get to that point it would have been broken off a cliff, been knocked about and battered by stormy seas, felt the push and pull of tides swelling over it, been knocked about, and through these difficulties, been made into something beautiful and smooth. Our lives are a bit like that. We will have travelled through storms, challenging circumstances, and through these experiences, God is always there with us, transforming and changing us. When I look around our congregation at St. John's, there are so many examples of people walking by faith through the hardest of times, and yet their faces shine with love for God and declare how Jesus is their Saviour.

May I have the last slide now please. Some of you may be familiar with a poem called Footprints, where in the hardest of times there is just one set of footprints rather than two sets. Let me read it to you now.⁸

A slide with text on the left and a beach scene on the right. The text on the left is a poem titled 'Footprints'. The beach scene on the right shows a rocky coastline with a small boat in the water. A Zoom video call inset is visible in the top right corner of the slide, showing a person's face. The Zoom logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide.

One night I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord.
Scenes from my life flashed across the sky.
In each, I noted footprints in the sand.

8 Authorship of the poem is disputed. According to Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Footprints_\(poem\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Footprints_(poem))) at least a dozen people have claimed credit for it.

Sometimes there were two sets of footprints;
others, there were only one.

During my lowest times, I could only see one set of footprints,
so I said, "Lord, You promised me that You would walk with me always.
Why, when I have needed you most, would you leave me?"

The Lord replied, "My precious child, I love you, I would never leave you.
The times when you've only seen one set of footprints,
it was then that I carried you."

Yes, Jesus does carry us. Isaiah 40 verse 11 declares,

He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.

God has promised,

'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'

(Hebrews chapter 13, verse five.) Isn't that a wonderful promise to grasp hold of? "Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you." We have all experienced being let down by other people. And probably in turn have let others down too. Yet God's love doesn't let us down. His is a faithful love. At the end of Matthew's gospel, with the Great Commission, Jesus promised⁹,

20 '... I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'

My hope and prayer is that you will discover for yourself the redeeming love of God and His faithfulness through His one and only Son Jesus. A love unlike any other. Amen.

[Kim:] Thank you, Jenny. I'm going to let you all into a secret. Less than two weeks ago Jenny said, "I have nothing to say"! 😊 Well, that was really good. Thank you.

Pause for Reflection

Let's pause for a moment and reflect on what Jenny's just brought to us.

If you've not yet experienced this love yourself, remember it's God's free gift by His grace. And if you want to talk to someone afterwards, there will be a contact at the bottom of the screen or talk to someone you know at St. John's. But it's never the wrong time, never too soon, nor too late to ask Jesus into your life and to give your life to Him. So if you'd like to do that you could do that now in the quiet. If you know Him, and would like others to know Him, or know more of His love in some way, then take the piece of paper that you had earlier, or the heart that you may have cut out, and just write the names of those that you would like to pray for, as a reminder in the coming week to pray for them. And maybe pop it in your Bible or on the fridge door or by the side of the bed, wherever it's going to remind you to pray for people. And perhaps just ask God for opportunities to share God's love with those people. It might be a simple gift, a text, a letter, a phone call or something. If no one else comes to mind, perhaps write your own name as a reminder to pray for God, to soften your own heart, and to lay on it the names of those that He would have you pray for or show His love to in some practical way.

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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Note: in at least one of the passages above, where the 1984 version says “the Jews”, the 2011 version is more specific: “his Jewish opponents”, although the Greek simply states *οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι* (*hoi Joudaioi*, the Jews)

[GNT] Scripture taken from the Good News Translation in Today’s English Version- Second Edition Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. [Used by Permission](#).