

His Great Love

Reading: Ephesians 2:4-5.

The source of all things

Back of all things in the created universe there is a *heart* — not just a will, a mind, a design, a fiat or a power — but a heart. The nearer we get to the centre of the thoughts and counsels of God, the more we become aware that at the core of all things there is a heart, not an explanation to satisfy reason, not a demonstration of power, but a heart.

Rightly used, this word means love, so that back of all things there is love, and all the dealings and ways of God with His own people will have a twofold result:

(a) *A deepening exercise to understand and know Him.*

Such are God's dealings with us that there come times when everything — our very life and all that matters over and above our earthly life — depends upon our discovering and knowing the Lord in a new way.

(b) *The resultant knowledge of Him.*

This will not, in the first place, be a knowledge of His mind, an explanation for our reason, the satisfaction of our enquiries, the solution to our problems, but a knowledge of *His heart*. We only reach wisdom and understanding of God along the path of the love of God. The heart of God is the pivot of the universe.

Love is the key that unlocks the whole of the Scriptures, for the Bible is one continuous, growing revelation of the basic fact that love is the motive of all things. It is the motive in creation and in man as the centre of creation, and all the rest of the Bible is an unfolding of God's love for man. There is a great mystery about that love which deepens as we go on, for God, with all His foreknowledge, in-knowledge, perfect knowledge, knowing the end from the beginning, set His hand to make man for His own heart.

ADAM. With the very first man there was a tragedy in the realm of divine love, for the drama of the Garden can only be explained as a love matter between God and man. From then onward, right to the end, the enemy's activity has been and is concentrated on cheating God of that upon which His heart is set, on taking away the object of God's love.

THE SEED. After the Fall, God moved in sovereign love, choosing the Seed, fixing upon certain ones. Of such is Abraham. God fastened upon Abram and brought him into a relationship of love with Himself, taking him by progressive stages right to the last step: "*Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac ...*", when, on the last stage of his spiritual journey, by one step of faith, Abraham entered into the very heart of God. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" At the end of his journey, Abraham became the friend of God, expressing a particular kind of heart relationship with God. God's object is to have a race of friends, as the expression of mutual love.

THE NATION. From the Seed individually, we come to the Nation, and here the mystery deepens, as to why God chose Israel, the seed of Jacob, of which Nation He speaks as: His child, His Son, His wife, His daughter. Through Hosea God's love for Israel is expressed in terms of yearning and heartbrokenness; at a time when they had reached the climax of idolatry and wickedness, He cries through the prophet: "*How shall I give thee up ...*".

THE SON. In the New Testament the heart of the universe is now embodied and

revealed in One who gathers up into Himself and far transcends all the past. It is not only Israel that is in God's heart now, but the whole world, and a world in the state described in Romans 1. The Lord Jesus takes up all that was in the Old Testament of God's love for man and in His relationship to the Father, He reveals God in terms of love: "My Father", "My beloved Son". His love for the Father and His devotion to the Father's will went down so deep that triumphant love settled the conflict even unto death

THE CHURCH. As we move on in the New Testament we find that the word 'beloved' used by the Father of the Son is now carried over to the church. "*Accepted in the Beloved One*": God is giving Himself to us in the same way as He gave Himself to His Son, Deity apart. He not only chose us "*in Him*", but "*in the Beloved*", so that the very existence of the church in her relationship to God, is a love-relationship, that is, that of Christ's relationship to the Father. The mystery of such love is great and the whole doctrine of grace is bound up with it. But this union of the church with God in Christ is a living, organic union, the throbbing life of love-union, the love from which nothing can separate us without destroying an organism.

The consummation of all things

Revelation 1-3.

In the book of the Revelation we come to the consummation of all things in the Word of God, a gathering up of all at the end to final settlement. There is much to show that we are now in the days of the consummation of the ages. If that is true, then it is of supreme importance that we know and recognize what is of primary and ultimate consequence with the Lord.

It would seem that the master-key to the whole Bible is love, and we find ourselves here in the consummation of divine love. The key to this whole book, which begins and ends with the church, is "*unto Him that loves us ...*" (Rev. 1:5-6) Alongside of that statement we are presented with the risen, glorified Lord, as Son of man, the title of the kinsman-redeemer, and the sum total of this matchless presentation is love.

The Lord then goes on to deal with the seven churches on the basis of this presentation and each message takes up some feature of the presentation as presented of Christ in Revelation 1. If this presentation is the comprehensive embodiment of love, then the Lord is dealing with all the churches on that basis. There is Ephesus at the one end and Laodicea at the other, as embracing and encircling all the other churches, and in both of these the root of the trouble is defective love. The whole bound of these messages to the churches is therefore love.

Ephesus — Inclusive love

Ephesus is at the beginning of everything and the Lord's reproach is that first love has been lost. First love is all-inclusive and comprehensive in nature, it includes all the characteristics and features of love, it is selfless, self-forgetting, uncalculating, fierce, fiery, hot, strong, faithful. That is the basis on which the Lord begins in relation to the ultimate situation. At the end He must bring His church back to the basis of its beginning. The Lord will be satisfied with nothing less than all-inclusive first love.

Smyrna — Suffering love

First love is suffering love, testing us out daily as to what we will endure in our love for the Lord, without a revengeful spirit.

Pergamum — Discerning love

There was mixture, contamination, compromise in Pergamum, because they had not discriminated between the things that differ, they had compromised by reason of defective spiritual sight, they lacked discerning love. True love sees everything, but transcends everything. The Christians who are needed at the end, are those who have a burning love for God and who are therefore quick to scent what is doubtful and questionable, who have spiritual discernment. They are not suspicious, nor critical, but enlightened.

Thyatira — Uncompromising love

Spiritual tragedy had overtaken the church here, there was seduction and corruption and the first love to be recovered needed to be of an utterly uncompromising nature.

Sardis — Distinguishing love

Sardis was characterised by indefiniteness, but in the end time the Lord demands a church that is characterised by distinctiveness of life, by distinguishing love that marks it out clearly and unmistakably for the Lord.

Philadelphia — Patient love

First love is patient, steadfast love, the love of Christ who loved to the uttermost, with an everlasting love.

Laodicea — Fervent love

There was mediocrity here, nothing positive, nothing outstanding, but first love is fervent, white-hot love.

The Issues of First Love

While the Lord is seeking to get this kind of love in His people at the end, there are tremendous issues bound up with it. In every case a promise is made "*to him that overcomes*".

Ephesus — The issue of life

All-inclusive love has an all-inclusive issue. With love after this kind is bound up the whole question of life in its fulness. Everything of the creation, of man and of divine purpose was centred in the tree of life in the midst of the garden. When man came short of the divine intention, he failed in the matter of love to God, and God then made it impossible for him to have that other kind of life which was represented in the tree. Man lost that life on the ground of failure in love, but in the fulness of time God sent the Son of His love, who was the embodiment of a new creation, in whom is that life which Adam missed, that other, different, divine life. He, who possesses that life which no man had ever before possessed, is the answer to God's heart. "*This is My beloved Son*". Until the transfiguration, He appeared no different from other men, but then the life in Him blazed out and was divulged and seen to be what it is, transfiguring Him. The nature of the life in Him was given the opportunity for expression and He was aglow with divine glory. That is the kind of life which we have received in Jesus Christ, on the basis of love. Christ's love for the Father was such that He went all the way, even unto the death of the cross, and then the glory filled Him.

Love is always linked with life, and vice-versa, and with that kind of life. We are called to His eternal glory, to the place where everything of death is destroyed, and that unique

life of glory manifests its quality. We may not know much of the glory of life in the body now, but we do know the life and death issue in our spirits and in our souls, and it is all based on love. If we touch anything other than love — hate, jealousy, un-love — we touch death, but when we touch love in another child of God, what possibilities arise! Love and life go together. That is the issue which bounds all.

Smyrna — Immunity from the second death

Love triumphant, suffering love, may cost our earthly life, but it will never be touched by the ultimate despair of final separation from God. Suffering love cheats death, undermines its power and destroys its touch.

Pergamum — Secret knowledge of God

Discerning love brings with it a mysterious fellowship with God and an inner secret knowledge of God which is not the common lot. "A *white stone with a new name*" distinguishes those who have known the Lord in an unusual way, who have come through suffering love to discerning love. Those with the deepest knowledge of God are those who have suffered most. The mystery of a love relationship with the Lord issues in a knowledge which is not common.

Thyatira — Authority over the nations

When love triumphs over compromise, mixture, confusion, and comes out in uncompromising victory, we are in a position of ascendancy and power to govern. The church is going to rule in the heavenlies in the ages to come, but in the letter to the Ephesians, where the revelation of the church is presented, it is love which is the triumphant factor. (Eph. 3:17-19).

Sardis — Distinction

Distinguishing love marks out and leads to distinction. If we have this kind of love, all heaven will be interested, the Father and the holy angels will take note and we shall be marked out by heaven and honoured in heaven.

Philadelphia — Spiritual significance

Steadfast love involves carrying responsibility in the very House of God. It gives a man the franchise of the heavenly Jerusalem, it makes him a man of importance, (not self-important, but important from heaven's standpoint) and God commits Himself to that man. If we desire to signify in the things of God, we shall be broken and shattered, until we get to the place of pure, selfless love for His own sake, and then we shall have attained a place of spiritual significance — through love.

Laodicea — Throne union

The issue of fervent love is throne union, with the reigning Lord. Something tremendous is bound up with the victory over mediocrity, for fervent, full, strong love will come to the place of uppermost ascendancy.

The way of love

John 13:1-17. Love to the uttermost in the spirit of abject service.
Romans 5:5; 1 John 4:11-19. Love for the brethren, the test of love for God.
Jeremiah 31:3. God's everlasting love in spite of all that we are.

The challenge of love (John 21)

Here the whole of the eternal question of divine love at the end becomes a personal challenge to us on the matter of requiting His love. "*Lovest thou Me?*"

The issue of everything turns upon our personal love for the Lord. Do we really, with all the intensity of our being, with all the content of our life, and with all our heart, *love* the Lord Jesus? When He has a people in view who are going to count for Him, the Lord tests them out with the object of getting them on to a basis which will make it possible for Him to use them. We will never be used unless we can stand on our feet in the dark, under adversity and trial, when the Lord hides Himself and seems far away and all seems to have come to an end. The whole question of future usefulness to the Lord is based on a personal love for the Lord, which does not give up and say, "*I go a fishing*".

The proof of love

"*Feed My lambs ... Tend My sheep ... Feed My sheep*". The emphasis here is on *My*. This is not a love for the ministry, or even for tending or feeding, but a love because they are *His* and ours is a love for *Him*, and anything that is His becomes the object of our love. Do we love what is dear to the Lord, because it is His? Are we prepared to pour ourselves out and to break our hearts over it, because of a genuine love for our Lord? The proof of love is our concern for what is His, just because it is His and for no other reason.

The mastery of love

Love is going to make us do things we don't like; we have come under another mastery. In spiritual infancy people do as they want, choose their own way, but in maturity, it is no longer what they want, but the way the other Master chooses, who is love. The Lord really needs men and women to serve His ends in the ministry of feeding and tending His own, preaching the gospel, teaching His people and so forth. The need is very great in all phases and directions, but the fact that the Lord needs us does not mean that we can do it or that He can call us and open the way for us, because we might come in on other ground. When we get to the place of broken-heartedness and travail of soul over the whole of the present situation, out of heart-love for the Lord and what is His, then He will begin to do something. The need is apparent, there is work to be done, His people are hungry, His sheep need tending, feeding, counselling, instructing, the Lord needs under-shepherds and if He is keeping us waiting, it is not because there is no need, but because He must have us on this love-basis, in the place where we are love-mastered.