

Our Love: The Love of God for the Lowly

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[0:00] Hey, my name is Daniel, and I am one of the community group leaders here at Christ Family, and I'm honored to be given the pleasure to preach to you this morning on the subject of Advent love.

Our goal in celebrating Advent is to adore Jesus and to think on the themes of Advent together. And those themes are hope, joy, and peace. And today we're going over love.

This morning we are looking at the theme of love and how it is expressed in Advent. And particularly what I mean by that is that we are going to examine the love of God for the lowly. Because the truth is that we're all lowly, whether or not we're willing to admit to that or we've come to grips with that, whether we believe that to be true of ourselves.

Yet we all have nothing to offer God for Him to find lovely or acceptable in us. Yet God has said, as He says to us this morning, as He once said to Mary, greetings, O favored ones.

[1:06] So, I'm excited to preach on this subject this morning. My hope is that we would ask the question together, why does God find favor in me, a sinner? And then my hope is that we would marvel together at God and His great love for us.

But first, I need to pray for our morning. I need to ask you to pray for me. And as we're going through this, I pray that you pray for your hearts. I pray that the words that would come out of my mouth would be edifying and they would be clear.

So, just join me in a moment of prayer for this morning. God, I am a sinner and in need of your grace and to be reminded of your love for us.

God, thank you that you give us the privilege of knowing you. God, thank you that you invite us into your love. And God, it's my prayer that our hearts would be more captivated by your love after this morning, that you would use me, such a great sinner, to deliver such a great message.

God, I pray that you would pierce our hearts, that you would maybe shake off some of the staleness and the coldness that we have acquired through the years.

[2:22] And God, I pray that this message would pierce the hearts of some here. God, we love you. And I just pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart would be acceptable and pleasing in your sight.

We love you and we ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Okay. So, many of you are aware that we're in this series of Advent. It's a topical series and not a text. I mean that we don't just go through one book of the Bible or one chapter of the Bible.

And so, for some of you, that can be a little anxious because you're wondering, where do I turn my Bible? You're talking. Just tell me where to go. Give me a home. And so, our main text that we're going to be going through is Luke 1 through 2.

And the main part that I'm going to concentrate on is the prayer of Mary. So, if you want to turn your Bibles, that's where you can turn this morning. It is in the prayer of Mary that we will get a closer glimpse of God who is the lover of the lowly.

But I think that it would be helpful to define the word love when we say it in the context of God. How is love any different than all these other emotions that we've, or these themes that we've talked about so far?

[3:37] How is it different than hope or peace or joy? Aren't they all emotions? Don't they evoke, or don't they all evoke similar emotions? Don't they seem to be all connected?

And if you had to, my question is, if you had to define love to someone, someone asked you, okay, you say that word love, God loves you, how would you define it? You had to describe it to someone. How would you say, this is what love is? Okay, then how would you define divine love? Or as the Greeks called that, agape love. They had a separate word for the divine love.

They had love for so many different categories, but then they had a separate category for divine love. And there are so many Christians out there who have differing opinions of what love is. If you asked probably ten different Christians how to define love, they would probably give you ten different definitions, right?

So, we say those words, God loves you, to all sorts of people. And we know the verse in John 3.16, that for God so loved the world. So we're very familiar with these verses, but isn't it important to have a very similar definition of love?

[4 : 43] And the answer is yes. Because having a proper and right understanding of the love of God affects so much of our lives. It affects the way that we view ourselves.

It affects the way that we view others. It affects the way that we go throughout our daily lives. J.I. Packer, the author of the book Knowing God, said this about trying, about this understanding the love of God.

And it's, I'm going to read you a quote, and it's kind of lengthy and wordy, and I'm just asking you to just concentrate and hear what he's trying to say. And then I'll paraphrase it in a second. Okay, so he says, Revival means the work of God restoring to a more abundant church in a manner out of the ordinary, those standards of Christian life and experience which the New Testament sets forth as being entirely ordinary.

And a right-minded concern for revival will express itself not in hankering after tongues. Ultimately, it is of no importance whether we speak in tongues or not, but rather in a longing the Spirit may shed God's love abroad in our hearts with greater power.

For it is with this to which the deep exercise of soul about sin is often preliminary, that personal revival begins. And by this, that revival in the church, once begun, is sustained.

[6 : 03] So let me just paraphrase that if you missed some of those words that he was saying there. So what J.I. Packer is saying is he's saying extraordinary revival that God brings to a dead or dying church in a similar fashion to what he did in the early church in Acts will not look like an obsession with metaphysical workings, tongues, healings, raising the dead, etc.

No, that will not be our aim and goal. But instead, it will be a longing for the Spirit to make our hearts obsessed with the love of God with greater power.

Now, of course, this comes with a greater understanding of our sin and our need for God. Yes, but Packer is saying that this is where personal, you, us, or church-wide revival, it begins.

He's saying that we need to have our hearts obsessed with the love of God. That's where personal and church-wide revival begins. So for the sake of our time together this morning, I want us to come together on one definition of what love is.

And where I'm getting that is from 1 John 4.10, which Wes kind of quoted this morning a little bit. 1 John 4.10, it reads, So, from that verse, here's how I'm defining love for our time together.

[7 : 31] Don't write this down, because it's wordy, but just listen, just concentrate on what I'm saying for how we're going to define love, because I want you to hear it. Okay, so what we're saying for the definition for love is God's love is an exercise of His goodness towards individual sinners, whom He has given His Son to be their Savior, and now brings them to know and enjoy Him in covenant relation.

Did you catch that? I'll say it one more time. God's love is an exercise of His goodness towards individual sinners, whom He has given His Son to be their Savior, and now brings them to know and enjoy Him in covenant relation.

That's a lot to work with, and we could spend so much time unpacking that truth this morning, but for the sake of brevity, let's move on towards our text, and let's talk about how God loves the lowly and how that's manifested in the text.

And we're super close at the text that we're going to be going through. So, we're really close to Mary's prayer, but first I want to move on to the main characters of our setup this morning, of our text.

So, turn, if you're already there, Luke 1. I believe that God wants us to look at His Word and see how in the birth story of Jesus, God loves the lowly.

[8 : 52] Namely, the main characters, Zechariah and Mary, and later on, the shepherds, the magi, Simeon and Anna. And as much as I'd like to read through all of Luke 1 and 2, we won't have time to read all of it, but we will read some of it.

We'll read a couple of verses from it. So, I'm going to assume that you know the story. If you don't, go back and look at it later on, but that's kind of where I'm going to be working from. So, looking at Luke chapter 1 with the story of Zechariah, and we're going to be kind of starting in verse 13.

Background, the angel, he comes to visit Zechariah when Zechariah is offering sacrifices in the temple. And picking up in verse 13, But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear a son.

And you shall call his name John, and you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great before the Lord, and he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb.

And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of their fathers to the children and the disobedient, to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.

[10:26] And Zechariah said to the angel, How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years. And the angel answered him, I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God.

I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. For behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which were fulfilled in their time, which will be fulfilled in their time.

And so, okay, so what happens there is, you know, he gets this vision. Zechariah tells him this news. It's this really big news. I mean, think about the context of this.

They have not heard a word from God, from a prophet or an angel in over 400 years. So there's been this silence in Israel, and they're kind of wondering what is going on. And so the angel appears to him.

And Gabriel says, he basically says, hey, you're going to have a son. He will go before the long-awaited Messiah, and he will prepare the way for him. He will turn the hearts of Israel back to God.

[11:25] Now, if you're a parent in this room, you know probably what it's like to pray for the salvation of your children daily, because you know that really you don't have any control of whether or not their hearts turn to God.

So can you imagine being told this news before you even have a child that your son is going, not only are you going to have a son, but he's going to be righteous. This is huge news.

This is like, this is Gabriel saying, hey, you're going to have a son. He's going to go before the Messiah. And I can just imagine the elation on Gabriel's face, like him appearing before Zechariah and him telling this news, hey, not only are your prayers answered and you're going to have a son, but he's going to be significant.

He's going to be important. He's going to prepare the way for the Messiah who you've all been fasting and praying for. And it's like, I imagine just him being so excited and delivering this message and just being like, this is what's going on.

And then like Zechariah's response is like, hmm, prove it. And like, I can just imagine like at that point, like the cosmic universe joins as one as like face slap.

[12:30] Like, no, you missed it. Like you're so close, but you missed it. Um, how could that be? And so he, he misses it.

He asked for a sign and Gabriel responds. I mean, look at his response. What he says is, how will I know this? And it seems, if you know the story, it seems very similar to Mary's response, which is how is this going to be? But what Zechariah is doing is he's asking for a sign in this moment.

Um, and is that, is he, is he punished? Is he silenced for asking a question? He's not. Gabriel reveals to him why he's silenced. Look at verse 20.

For behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place.

Because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time. So what Gabriel is saying to Zechariah is that his issue is not questioning, but his issue is a heart issue, that he does not believe.

God loves Zechariah. And so he gives him this great news, but Zechariah does not believe in his heart. And God disciplines in that way by silencing him.

[13:42] So, but we see a very similar story happen with Mary, right? Um, in a similar way, Gabriel visits Mary and announces this great news to her. Just pick it up in verse 28.

And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give to him the throne of his father, David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom there will be no end.

And Mary said to the angel, How will this be since I am a virgin? And the angel answered her, The Lord, the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

[14:45] Therefore, the child to be born will be called Holy, the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and in this the sixth month with her who is called barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God. And Mary said, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be according to your word. And the angel departed from her. So Gabriel comes to her and he says, Hey, you found favor with God.

You will give birth to a son, and he will be great, and he will be called the Son of God. And he will inherit the throne of David and will reign forever. And Mary gives a very similar response to Zechariah and says, How will this be?

But Gabriel's response is much, much different. Instead of judgment, Gabriel answers graciously. What is the difference between Mary's response and Zechariah's response?

There's a couple things that you could hone in on and say, Okay, well, maybe this is what's different in that. And those things are true. But the main things that I want you to see is that Mary's response is one of lowliness and belief, where Zechariah's response is one of pride and unbelief.

[15:52] We know that Mary believes from the exchange that we read from Mary and Elizabeth in verses 42 through 45.

I'm going to pick it up in verse 39. In those days, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leapt in her womb.

And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

For behold, when the sound of your greeting came into my ears, the baby in my womb leapt for joy. And the baby in the womb, and blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

So Elizabeth points out, hey, Mary believes. We kind of get that insight from that part, but isn't it funny to think that as Mary entered the home of Elizabeth, it's likely that Zechariah is also there.

[17:02] And after Elizabeth calls Mary blessed, she points out that when the angel of the Lord visited Mary, she believed his message. Unlike her husband, who is likely in the same room, but is mute, so he can't say anything to defend himself.

But then we get this clear picture of how Mary expresses her humility. Let's look at verse 46. This is our main text that we're going from. And Mary said, My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

For he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on, all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name, and his mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty.

He has filled his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever. What is the content of Mary's prayer?

[18:24] She says that she magnifies the Lord, and what she means by that is, Lord, I see you for who you really are. I see you for how powerful you are. She says that God has looked upon her.

She calls herself a servant. She says that God shows mercy to those who are in awe of him, to those who fear him. She says that God rejects the proud and the mighty and those who trust in their own strength and their power and their ability to get things done.

She says that God sends away those empty, those who think they can sustain themselves. And she declares how God has remembered his covenant to his people.

Wow. What an incredible prayer for Mary. I just really want to marvel at the faith and the response of Mary's prayer. Just for a minute. We can often see the problem in other people's theology that is so far to the left or to the right that makes an idol out of Mary.

And in response, we can kind of swing too far to the left or to the right on the other side. And we miss this great truth that God is saying and trying to teach us. God uses Mary, who's this seemingly insignificant woman, but she believes and trusts God, even though she doesn't understand and probably was misunderstood by other people and was even slandered for being pregnant before she was married to Joseph.

[19 : 46] But wow, like her response is really, really incredible. Now, I do want to say that Zechariah, he later on does repent. And you can see that as evidence by his response to when John is actually born.

And he names him John. And then after that, he declares the Lord's glory. So we see Zechariah repent later on and believe, and he does show humility. And God shows love to Mary and Zechariah, but then he goes to show his love to these minor characters, the shepherds, the magi, Simeon, and Anna.

And they're seemingly, again, insignificant characters, but God loves them by revealing to them his son. He knows that when Jesus grows up, or we know that when Jesus grows up to be a man and he begins his ministry, who are the people that Jesus associates with?

He associates with the lowly, the lowly in heart. We see that Jesus' disciples are composed of mostly humble fishermen. And those who are drawn to him are sinners who are aware of their lowly state and are aware that they have nothing to bring to the table of Jesus, but their need for his healing, for his touch.

You see, God shows his love to all types of people in the story, regardless of what they bring to the table. Their age doesn't matter. Their sex doesn't matter. What stage of life they're in.

[21 : 07] It doesn't seem to matter. Their financial status, whether it's rich or poor, it doesn't matter. The shepherds are poor, the magi are rich, but they're both lowly and humble in heart, and they believe in God.

You see, God shows his love to all those types of people, and God loves them and shows their grace to them, regardless of what their response is going to be. And case in point, it's Zechariah, right?

He doesn't have the right response, but God still shows love to him. He still showers them with grace. He still blesses them with a son who is going to be great and righteous.

And I want to hone in on this, that it's not that these characters were lowly and they had great faith, and that's why God chooses to love them. This is a huge thing to get. It has nothing to do with, that's the response to when God does show his love and his grace to them.

They respond out of humility and lowliness and belief, but that's not why God chooses to love them. It's not that they had something to offer God.

[22 : 14] God loves them first, and then they rightly respond with lowliness and belief. God loves them regardless of their actions, whether it's good or bad. And so it is with you and me according to God's word.

Lord, you and I are loved right now and right here in this moment with no conditions. I've struggled with the ability to kick habitual sins, and I've had days where I know the truth, but I still decide to rebel against my Savior and my friend.

And I know that he has given himself for me, but time and time again, I turn my back on him. I know that I'm no longer a slave to sin, but I still rebel against my Savior.

And I look at myself in the mirror sometimes, disgusted, and I wonder how anyone could love me or call me a friend. And especially after I have chosen to slap Christ in his face with my sin time and time again, and while my sin is still a very serious thing and it's not to be downplayed or ignored, I am loved by God.

You are loved by God. We can see from this text that God loves these people regardless of what they have to offer or bring to the table.

[23 : 35] He has sent his Son for us in full knowledge of who we are and what we did yesterday and what we will do tomorrow and how we will turn our back on him. He's fully aware of that.

So if you are in Christ, if you believe in Christ, if you are accepted in Christ, it has nothing to do with our actions. It has nothing to do with what we bring to the table.

You see, our joy, our peace, our hope, our righteousness does not come from our performance or what we can do for God today, but instead it comes from the finished work of Christ. If you are accepted in Christ, you are dearly loved.

Yes, regardless of your performance of your sin yesterday or this morning or later on today, you are loved by God, and this is not a cheap emotional love. No, this is a deep love from God who remembers his covenant.

Look at the prayer of Mary. He says, or Mary says that after all these things that she praises God for, what is the one thing that she says at the very, very end there?

[24 : 46] Or at the very beginning, I'm sorry. That God has helped Israel in remembrance of his mercy as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever.

So God has remembered his covenant, and that is the thing that Mary is praising God for. Again, this is not a cheap emotional love that God is loving Mary with that instead is a deep love that flows from his covenant to us.

So, and I'm thinking more about the idea of covenants lately, especially as I'm engaged to be married soon. And I'm learning about how marriage is a covenant, or at least it's supposed to be. But we live in a society that can kind of take marriage to be a consumer contract instead of a covenant. And so what I mean by that is that each member, that the contract is based off of each member upholding their end of the contract.

And knowing what they get out of it. So, you know what I mean by, okay, so this is my end of the contract. I will love you. I will listen to you. I will fulfill your needs as best as I can.

[26 : 11] But if you don't uphold your end of the contract, if you don't love me, if you don't accept me, if you don't listen to me, if you don't fulfill my needs for friendship, if you don't fulfill my need for financial stability, my sexual needs, then I'm done with this.

And I don't mean to say that lightly because I know that divorce is not an easy thing for anyone to walk through. I don't mean to downplay that. By no means am I saying this is an easy thing or that it's to be taken lightly.

I know that there's heartbreak there. I know I can only imagine how difficult that is. And it's very understandable, especially as I go into marriage.

I can see that. I can see, oh my gosh, this is a difficult thing to self-sacrificially love someone and to put my needs aside for the needs of someone else.

But that's exactly what a covenant is. And that's what I'm learning that a covenant is. And God's idea of a covenant is based off of the covenant that he's made with us, his people.

[27 : 16] And so we find this covenant that God has made with us in Jeremiah 31. So turn there real quickly. Okay.

So looking at verse 31, this is the new covenant that God has made with his people, that he has made with us. Jeremiah 31, starting in verse 31.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, know the Lord. For they shall all know me from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

[28 : 48] So, this is the sacrificial commitment that he has made to us regardless of our fluctuating feelings, regardless of our circumstances, regardless of how we're feeling in the moment. And whether we're feeling like loving God this morning or this week or whether we are beaten down by sin, this is his sacrificial commitment to us.

This is God saying to us, regardless of how you uphold your side of this, I'm still committed to you. I am still going to be sacrificial towards you.

Regardless of your apathy to read my word or to bend your knee to pray, I love you. And you and I are loved because he loved us first.

That's what 1 John 4 says. I'm turning there real quickly. Okay. Okay.

Okay. Starting in verse 10. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us and has sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

[30 : 30] No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this, we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit.

We have seen and testified that the father has sent his son to be the savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the son of God, God abides in him and he in God.

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him. By this, love perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment because as he is, so also are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. So, this has nothing to do with the ability that we love God first.

He loved us first before we could do anything to prove our love even back to him. He loved us before we had the chance to tell him how hard we were going to work and how much we were going to get done for the kingdom.

[31 : 47] And so, I want our response to this message. I want our response to seeing and beholding the love of God for us regardless of what our response is to him to be one of awe.

I want your response, I want my response to be one of lowliness and belief much like Mary's prayer. I want to have a response that's like the prayer of Mary.

I pray that you would marvel at the love that God has for you this morning. Not as an individual, not as a concept, not just as a verse in the Bible, but know that where you are this morning, where you are seeding.

God loves you. That you are dearly loved by God. He has sent his son to be our savior and he invites us to know him and enjoy him.

Remind yourself of that truth. Meditate on that truth. Store it up in your mind. Go forth, love, and be loved. Let's pray.