

The power of love

Part 1

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Note: This text is a computer generated transcript of the sermon. In some cases it may contain errors.

[00:00:00] In another hymn I'd like to read to you some verses. There are quite a number of them. I'm always reminded when reading more than two or three verses of a statement my late father-in-law once made. He said he'd observed in his lifetime that people who read a lot of scriptures never spoke about them. Now it won't be like that this evening. We're going to read eight small portions of scripture and every one of them will be referred to. The first is found in the Gospel of John chapter 13. John chapter 13. The Gospel of John chapter 13 verse 23. John 13 verse 23. Now [00:01:07] there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast said unto him, Lord who is it? Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop he gave it to Judas Iscariot the son of Simon. The next chapter, chapter 14 and verse 30. John 14 verse 30. Hereafter I will not talk much with you for the prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in me. But that the world may [00:02:02] know that I love the Father and as the Father gave me commandment even so I do. Arise let us go hence. Now the second epistle to Corinthians chapter 5. 2 Corinthians 5. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 13. 2 Corinthians 5 verse 13. For whether we be beside ourselves it is to God or whether we be sober it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge that if one died for all then were all dead. And that he died for all that they which live should not henceforth [00:03:06] live unto themselves but unto him who died for them and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh. Yea though we have known Christ after the flesh yet now henceforth know we him no more. The epistle to the Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians chapter 5 verse 25.

Ephesians 5 verse 25. Husbands love your wives even as Christ also loved the church and gave himself for it that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word that he [00:04:05] might present it to himself a glorious church not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish. The first epistle to the Thessalonians chapter 1. 1 Thessalonians 1. 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 2. 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 2. We give thanks to God always for you all making mention of you in our prayers remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father knowing brethren [00:05:04] beloved your election of God. Then the second epistle of Timothy chapter 3. 2 Timothy 3 verse 1. 2 Timothy 3 verse 1. This know also that in the last days perilous times shall come for men shall be lovers of their own selves covetous boasters proud blasphemers disobedient to parents unthankful unholy without natural affection truce breakers false accusers incontinent fierce despisers of those that are good traitors heady high-minded lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God [00:06:03] having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof from such turn away. And then lastly in the last book of the New Testament the book of the Revelation chapter 2

and verse 1. Revelation 2 verse 1. Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write these things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience and how thou canst not bear them who are evil and thou hast tried [00:07:03] them who say they are apostles and are not and has found them liars and has borne and has patience and for my name's sake has labored and has not fainted nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love remember therefore from whence thou art fallen and repent and do the first works or else I will come unto thee quickly and will remove thy candlestick out of his place except thou repent and chapter 3 verse 19 chapter 3 verse 19 as many as I love I rebuke and chasten be zealous therefore and repent behold I stand at the door [00:08:02] and knock if any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in to him and will sit with him and he with me I want to speak this evening about the power of love the power of love I don't know whether anybody's ever attempted to put together a definition of love it's not an easy thing at all I'm pretty sure that what I'm about to say to you wouldn't command much respect in the world today but it seems to me that it's not very far short of what scripture itself has to say about love it's not mine it's putting together some comments that I found over the [00:09:06] years in various places but the end result works out something like this love is a commitment to another for the latter's benefit irrespective of their condition or response I think those that's not taken from any one verse of scripture of course but I think in the scriptures that we read tonight you'll find many of the strands in that emerging from the scriptures as we look at them and consider them now just for the sake of order what I want to speak about firstly is the love of Christ the power of love in Christ the power of love in a Christian assembly the power of love in the individual the lack of the power of love in a Christian assembly and misapplied [00:10:07] love and lastly the love that never fails there are some very lovely expressions in the Old Testament and very often we read them in the context without thinking of the wider application of them and there's a very lovely expression that occurs roundabout Genesis 29 it's talking about Jacob you remember when Jacob fled for fear of his brother having stolen his birthright in a twisting manner and being advised by his mother to go to her relatives he turns up in the house of Laban and he loves one of Laban's daughters and he serves Laban for seven years and at the [00:11:01] end of seven years Laban deceives him life is sowing and reaping it was the beginning of the reaping of a lot of the sowing that Jacob had done in earlier life but Laban said he wouldn't withhold his second daughter from her and this is what the scripture says it's a lovely expression it says the years seven years the years were a single days because he loved her now I think that's a lovely expression the years were a single days because he loved her the power of love was so operative in Jacob that the years and there were no easy years that he spent when you read about the thing that happened when eventually he left and Laban pursued him and Jacob talked about the character of the years that he'd spent there it's quite obvious they were not easy easy years there were years that had to be hewn out of life but there were single days in his eyes [00:12:05] because of the power of love now it's right that we should start in scripture in looking at a love which never changes not a love that like human love at its best knows ebbing and flowing and love that has sprung from the heart of God for all eternity someone some years ago have said to me it's a very good exercise in scripture to look at the occasions upon which it speaks of before time in the New Testament I commend it to you it's a very lovely study one of them I particularly direct your attention to at the moment it's in John 17 the night in which the Lord was betrayed was about to move towards its final stages and the Lord Jesus in the last moments that he spent between the upper room and the garden was speaking to his father and in John 24 he uses these words [00:13:06] it's glimpse into eternity that's gone by now and he makes a prayer so far as I know it's the only occasion in the New Testament upon which the Lord Jesus expresses a wish of his own in our English it's so easy to pass it over because we make such great use of auxiliary verbs that you're not aware almost that in fact the Lord is expressing a desire John 17 verse 24 reads like this father I will that they whom thou hast

given me be with me where I am that they may behold my glory for thou lovest me before the foundation of the world that's one of those precious glimpses into eternity and what we're told there is that before ever time began to roll the father's love for the towards the Son and was reciprocated love flowed and reciprocated within the Godhead we [00:14:07] don't know anything much more like that and it was exactly that love which was seen in time in the Lord Jesus in this world to a greater or lesser degree before and since people have pursued their own wills the world is in such a mess because people pursue their own wills but there was one who pursued the will of another because he loved him and I read to you the words at the end of John 14 because it's against the darkest background that you read of the power of love in a way that it's never expressed elsewhere in Scripture if you think of the circumstances which were attendant then the Lord Jesus already knew that Judas had gone out to betray him he knew that [00:15:01] but within the passage of few hours the Apostles in the heat and the pressure of that night would forsake him he knew that his people Israel would deliver him up into the Roman power to be crucified he knew that at the end of it all there would be untold sorrows and the Lord would suffer utterly alone on the cross and it's against that background that the Lord Jesus utters these words that we read together he says that the world might know that I love the father and as the father hath given me commandment even so I do I remember someone quite recently saying when we get into crises what is found in us comes out and sometimes what emerges in crises is not at all complementary to us but it wasn't like that with the Son of God the darker the crises the different the deeper the [00:16:04] difficulties the brighter he shone and the dark background and the clouds of Calvary were found in John 14 and the Lord Jesus says that the world might know that I love the father and dearer to him than life was obedience to his father and the power of love operated in a way that it's never been seen before and so he says as the father gave me commandment even so I do arise let us go hence and he moves out to Calvary most of our fears are never realized most of us get very upset over things that never really happen at all we fear things and when eventually we come to meet them instead of being the mountains that we thought they would be they're little more than there in all their reality but the power of love was at work in a way that it was never seen before and [00:17:05] so with the same kind of unswerving devotion that had marked him early on in his path he pursues the same kind of devotion right to the end as another part of the scripture says he was obedient to death even the death of the cross if you want to find out what the power of love is in all its perfection read prayerfully and quietly the 13th to the 17th chapters of John's gospel and you'll read about a love which knows no change no ebbing and flowing the power of love in Christ personally himself but I read to you also the words in the fifth chapter of the epistle to the Ephesians the same love but seen expressed in another way often feel challenged as a husband raises the love of a [00:18:03] husband to an immeasurably high plane here isn't it husbands love your wives even also as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it the power of the love of Christ was seen operative when he gave himself on the cross also in respect of the church that he loved when I was a boy brought up in the Anglican Church I can remember the vicar of the small Anglican Church in Cheshire where we at that time speaking about the parables in Matthew 13 speaking about the parable of the one beautiful pearl of great price that the businessman sought and for which he sold all that he had that he might buy it and I remember the construction that he put upon it not at all what I'm about to say to you in a moment and I remember when at last God opened my eyes to his [00:19:04] grace and I was saved quite early on in my Christian experience listening to someone else talking about Matthew 13 and talking about the pearl of great price and applying it in a different a completely different and what I believe to be a right way not the preparedness of us to sacrifice but rather the preparedness of Christ to sacrifice to the extent that he gave all that he had and when he had nothing else left to give he gave himself and the power of that love that in John 14 against the darkest background took him out of the upper room towards the garden and from the garden eventually to the cross is seen also in the giving of himself for the

church. Now you may not sort of follow this through but it's worth following it through. We speak of the love of [00:20:02] Christ the power of love in the past but Ephesians 5 also speaks of the present exercise of that love it speaks about cleansing it and washing it by the water of the word so that today on the other side of death living and glorified the same power of love is at work and it's extended to you and to me and everyone that forms that church for which he gave himself the power of love in Christ perfect matchless unchangeable eternal never knowing any ebbing and flowing. One Thessalonians 1 speaks about the power of that love effective in a Christian assembly. There's a very important expression I want to draw your attention to it it's found in verse 3 of 1 Thessalonians 1 1 [00:21:01] Thessalonians 3 three things are spoken about Paul says that when he prayed he remembered their work of faith their labor of love and their patience or endurance of hope the power that enabled them to go straight through but I'm particularly concerned with the middle one of those he speaks about their labor of love. The power of love was operative in the assembly at Corinth and you might have said it was an assembly of long-standing which had matured no it wasn't wasn't anything like that at all if we're to take account of the 17th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles it's likely that Paul only spent about three Sabbath days there he probably was there for about a fortnight and the amazing power of the Word of God was seen in the formation of the [00:22:07] Corinthian of the Thessalonian assembly and when he writes to them just a short time after he writes of an assembly that was functioning under the power of love he speaks about their labor of love and it's the remarkable things that flow out from this that I want very briefly to occupy your attention with for a moment where the power of love was at work certain things are spoken about verse 7 he says so that ye were and samples to all those that believe in Macedonia and Achaia.

Someone in the last century used to say about a company of Christians high truth and low practice now there is no shadow of doubt that in the scriptures it's intended that what is taught [00:23:04] Christian teaching Christian doctrine is not intended just to occupy and to instruct our divinely renewed minds that's of all importance if the Word of God the truth of scripture doesn't get into our minds it's not likely to affect the way in which we live but the intention of getting the truth the Word of God into our minds is that it governs the kind of lives that we live David Psalm 51 says thou a desirous truth in the inward parts and it's a good guideline for life and the Thessalonian Christians were like that Paul says of them they were examples and samples our authorize says to all those in Macedonia and Achaia the truth that they received governed the kind of lives that way that they lived but not only that verse 8 it says that from you sounded [00:24:02] out the word of the Lord I'm sure there's great instruction in that that it was a Christian assembly where the power of love was operated that firstly was marked by lives consistent with what they had received and they taught and secondly it gave impetus to the Word of God sounding out from them I have a very deep conviction that where there is weakness in respect of Christian living there will be weakness in the character of the gospel that is preached the Word of God that sounds out from us the third thing is in verse 9 where it says they turn to God from idols to serve the living and the true God it's a very interesting thing that the language in which it pleased God to put the New Testament is one that's much much richer than English and [00:25:01] it usually has several words for only one word that we have in English we have the word to serve in English there are at least four separate words are used in the original language in which the New Testament was put and it's interesting that the word which is used here for serve is the service of a slave I don't know where I've picked this up over the years but I seem to remember someone saying it and committing it to memory some years ago someone wrote I may not work my soul to save for that my Lord has done but I will work like any slave for love of God's dear Son and that's exactly what marked the Thessalonians they were marked by the service of a slave they held all that they had and were for the service of the Lord Jesus in this world they turn to God from [00:26:02] idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from heaven whom he raised

from the dead Jesus our Deliverer from wrath to come the power of love in a Christian assembly 2 Corinthians 5 speaks about the power of love in an individual Paul says 2 Corinthians 5 verse 17 he says verse 14 rather the love of Christ constraineth us because we thus judge that if one died for all then all have died and in that he died they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him that died and rose again for them on the Damascus Road when Paul was arrested in such a remarkable fashion in that disclosure of Christ and his glory from heaven in that very [00:27:06] moment he went through the kind of things that take years for the rest of us to reach he said on the Damascus Road Lord what wilt thou have me to do he said effectively Lord here are my hands use them here are my eyes use them here's my tongue use it here are my ears use them and it's quite remarkable as you go through the Acts of the Apostle how the various parts of the body of the Apostle are spoken of you trace what it says in the Acts of the Apostle for example about the hand of the Apostle Paul chapter 11 he goes from Antioch with Barnabas carrying money for the relief of the poor saints who were in Jerusalem scripture says they sent it by the hand of Barnabas and Paul [00:28:02] chapter 20 when he gathers the Ephesus the Ephesian elders at Miletus and he tells them about his service at the end of it amongst other things he says this these hands have ministered to my wants and to those that were with me so that he wouldn't be a burden to those at Ephesus he had worked at his trade of sail making so that he had the wherewithal not only to look after himself but to supply others the man in 2 Corinthians 5 knew the power of the love of Christ in his own life and he says the power that the love of Christ constrains us and we thus judge that if one died for all all have died and in that he died that they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto him who died for them and rose again and Paul exemplified in it [00:29:01] his life what he was what he had was held for the service and glory of the Lord Jesus the power of love in an individual the same is true and for this reason I read to you those two verses in John 13 the first occasion in John's gospel upon which it speaks of the disciple whom Jesus loved there was leaning on his bosom a disciple whom Jesus loved I have no shadow of doubt that when it speaks about the disciple whom Jesus loved and it speaks of him in that way it was because the constraining power of the love of Christ acts as such charm over his soul that he could do no other than love in response the reason I read that particular one to you is there he was in a moment of crisis leaning in Jesus bosom the word bosom is not used very often in the New Testament from [00:30:05] memory I think it's only used about three times in the New Testament but what is very interesting about it is one of the occasions that it is used is in Acts 27 the story of the ship to Rome on which Paul was going and the breakup of the ship and one of the bays where they once tried to land is exactly the same word that is used here in John 13 and in John 1 verse 18 about the bosom John 1 verse 18 the father's bosom here the Lord's bosom it seems to me a very apt picture a shelter in the time of storm there was a hurricane blowing the boat sought shelter in a bay there was a crisis approaching and in the crisis the power of love in that disciple brought him to the only true place where you can find rest and peace he leaned he reclined in the bosom of the Lord Jesus I'm not [00:31:06] going to refer to any more but if you look through the five mentions that occur after that the four men after that in John's gospel you'll find on every occasion the disciple whom Jesus loved is doing the right thing for example when at the call of someone they didn't really know they they dropped their net on the right side of the boat when the catch was enclosed the first words that John the disciple whom Jesus loved spoke he says it's the Lord he recognized him power of love soon brings intelligence with it the power of love in the individual Revelation chapter 2 is a warning about the waning of love the loss of the power of love I don't think there's any doubt that if we [00:32:02] had looked at the assembly at Ephesus and particularly in the light of the words that are spoken in the early part of chapter 2 of the Revelation I guess not much more than 20 years after the words that we read of Paul to the assembly at Ephesus we would have said it looks like the model assembly there was plenty of activity they didn't accept things on it's fit on their face value they tested them Paul the Lord says to them and thou hast tried

those who say they are apostles and are not and they put up with opposition and they've carried on when it speaks about patience it's not our normal word of patience it's the word for endurance the thing that goes on against opposition I think we would have said there was so much there to commend the [00:33:01] assembly at Ephesus we would have said it's a model assembly but the eye of the one who looks beyond the surface look down into the very heart of the Ephesian assembly and he speaks these words I have against thee thou didst leave thy first love thou hast left thy first love it's a bit of a shame that our authorized translators have added the words somewhat it's in italics which means it has no manuscript authority by putting it in it's tended to lessen the impact of it leave it out and you get the impact of it as the Lord intended it I have against thee thou hast left thy first love it wasn't a small thing that had happened the waning of the power of love was an amazingly important thing it was the door that opened the road that ultimately led in the Lord speaking [00:34:03] the words that we read in Revelation chapter 3 in Laodicea behold I stand at the door and knock we've got so used to hearing those words being used in the preaching of the gospel that the real setting of them sometimes escapes us the Lord who gave himself for the assembly was unvalued he was outside and they didn't even know it had he not said to them behold I stand at the door and knock they would not even have known that he had gone out of their midst little wonder the Lord says to them in Ephesus remember therefore from whence thou art fallen he invites them to take a look back in their earlier lives as believers when the power of love was operating and when the kind of response was seen that produced the condition that made it so easy for [00:35:01] Paul to open out everything which was found in his heart God's richest and best is unfolded in the Ephesian epistle the passage of 20 years the power of love was waning and all those things seemed all right on the surface like the mainspring of a clock beginning to go the very thing that gives everything character and power before God beginning to go everything ultimately would lose its power before him love was beginning to wane it's not so obvious in our authorized version that misapplied love is a very prominent thing in 2 Corinthians 3 when you read the words this know that in the last times perilous times should come if you didn't know that it was in the circle of Christian profession you would think it was the kind of thing that marked the heathen world you [00:36:04] compare afterwards what is written in Romans chapter 1 with 2 Corinthians 3 and with a bit of a change they're largely the same the same kind of gross immorality that marked the heathen world sadly marks Christian profession today I have a friend he's an Anglican he's a member of the Anglican Synod he was one of the eight who recently voted in the Anglican Synod 510 I think I'm not sure of the numbers against eight on a simple matter of right and wrong they cannot even distinguish what is morally right and wrong because of the repercussions of it 2 Timothy 3 is not something which is speaking of a future day it's speaking of the day in which we live I read it because not so obvious in our authorized version but you can verify this very easily love [00:37:05] is spoken of in five ways it says men are lovers of pleasures lovers of themselves lovers of money and then negatively not lovers of God and not lovers of good you can you can sort those out for yourself but if you have a look you'll find that's exactly right it's possible for a believer to love pleasure to love money to love himself how how contrasting to the kind of thing which is depicted in Scripture for the believer normally who loves the Lord Jesus who loves his service who loves his people loving self loving money loving pleasures not the characteristic of [00:38:01] the Christian but characteristic of the Christian profession in 2 Timothy 3 misapplied love I read to you some marvelous words in Revelation chapter 3 we come back to the love that never fails the Lord Jesus says even to Laodicea who didn't value him and who had no place for him in their scheme of things and who apart from being told by him would never have recognized that he was outside he doesn't speak of a love that waned in Ephesus he speaks of a love that never wanes that never knows any ebbing and flowing he says as many as I love I rebuke and discipline be zealous therefore and repent now I'm not insensitive enough to say that the seeds of the spirit of Laodicea might be very near to every one of us whether we like it or not Laodicea is all round about us and the

[00:39:07] degree to which it's invaded our own hearts God alone knows but against the saddest and darkest background of the churches an assembly that had no place for the Lord in as much as he was outside and did not value him and did not even know it he speaks of a love that knows no ebbing and flowing it's rather instructive as well he uses a word for love that is only used about five or six times in the New Testament it is not the commonest word for love it's a word that you could almost translate in fact I seem to remember W Kelly in his translation of John 16 where the wording occurs once again actually uses this word I rather the Lord would say I as many as I dearly love I rebuke [00:40:03] and discipline it's an intense word it's not that he just loves he dearly loves and because of that he does not allow to settle down in a condition of things which is foreign to him foreign to the purpose of God and foreign to our calling and he says behold I stand at the door and knock if any man hear my voice and open the door I will come in and sup with him and he with me for many years I used to think that that was a duplication sup with him and he with me I thought those were needless words but a while ago it suddenly occurred to me what the Lord was saying was if any man opens the door he would come in and he would enter into our circumstances of things with a view to lifting us to his circumstances of bliss and glory but it's the words as many as I dearly love a love that [00:41:05] knows no ebbing and flowing the power of love seen in Christ never changes and will not be satisfied until we are with them and like him now a lot of challenging things that we've taken up very briefly tonight the kind of thing that was seen in Paul and that was seen in John is not seen in them as Apostles it's seen in them as patterned Saints it's seen in them as in men of like passions it's intended that the same power of love is effective in you and me and the same source that affected them the peerless love of Christ remains and to the degree that we're engaged with that the same power of love that gives one to say the love of Christ constrains me and thus devotes his life for his service and glory in this world is the same kind of love which will exercise its [00:42:04] constraining power over you and me now can we close in singing hymn four five four Lord Jesus we love thee and joyfully pour the praises of worshipping hearts at thy feet Lord Jesus we thee we love and adore the name that to God and to us is so sweet