



Sermon

For the week of January 17

GOD'S LOVE IS BIG!

- I. This is a contested position.
- II. This is Christ's purpose.
- III. This is my personal conviction.

based on Ephesians 3:14-19

I've seen some really big things. If you drive West a few states, you'll run into a hole in the ground called the Grand Canyon. It's big. Keep going and you'll see a big pile of rock called Mt. Rainier looming over the horizon. Travel further and you'll end up looking out over the vast waters of the big Pacific Ocean. But you don't really have to go that far to find something big. A week ago our family was flying east on I-94 toward the Lakefront. As I pointed out Miller Park to the girls, they said, "Woah, that's huge!" (The sense of scale is even more impressive when you walk into the stadium for the first time.) Even a Hardee's Thickburger can make you say, "Wow, check out the dimensions on this thing!"

To this list of big things, the Apostle and Missionary Paul would like us to add the love that God has for us. In a letter he wrote from Rome to a Christian church in Ephesus, he makes the point: "**God's Love is Big!**"

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. [Ephesians 3:14-19]

I. "God's love is big!" This is a contested position.

If you were to imagine Paul as he was saying these words, he wouldn't just be stretching his arms out and saying, "God loves you thiiiiis much." He would be on his knees, praying. Paul's prayer from Rome was necessary because many claim God **does not care**.

It's not hard to find claims that God does not care, that his love is too small. It seems anyone might come to that conclusion just by looking around. For every Christian claiming God is love, there are multiple

critics who claim the opposite. Sometimes it doesn't even seem hard to criticize the size of God's concern. I bet even you could do it.

I might say, "God's love is big! Just look at the yummy food he made." You might say, "God's love is not big! Just look at food poisoning." I might say, "God's love is big! Just look at cute little babies!" You might say, "God's love is not big! Just look at baby-sized coffins." I might say, "God's love is big! Just look at Hawaii's natural beauty!" You might say, "God's love is not big. Just look at Haiti's natural disaster."

Can it really be that a simple game of devil's advocate can turn God's love into God's curse?

The Apostle Paul was aware that not everyone can see the bigness of God's love. In fact, he knew it takes miraculous power to really give someone the unshakeable conviction that God really is loving from start to finish. Paul knew that there's something wrong not just in this *world*, but within *people* that makes humans naturally regard the Creator as a Curser. That is why he is praying. He knows that the Spirit's enlightenment is necessary in order for us to grasp the bigness of God's love. Enlightenment means "to turn on a light within you, to enable you to see." Sometimes we need help seeing God's love. That's why God sent Jesus. The purpose of Jesus was to show a skeptical world, "I care about you."

II. "God's love is big!" This is Christ's purpose.

The key to knowing the bigness of God's love, Paul says, is to have a change take place "In your inner being." You might think of it is a change of perspective. If I'm standing in the north parking lot of Miller Park, looking north, my eyes wouldn't be impressed by much of anything. I'd have to be in the north parking lot looking south to appreciate the size of the ballpark.

Humans need to be looking in the right direction with the right perspective. We have to understand that God's love acts within the contexts of holiness and eternity. This means his love is a perfect love, completely set apart from anything selfish or tainted. This means he has the big picture in mind. He doesn't want to give us just one little week of wellbeing, or just one little lifetime of wellbeing. He wants the best for us both now and in eternity. Because of this, God's love is going to be most evident in the things he does to care for your soul. God's love is going to be most evident in the things he does through his beloved Son, Jesus. God caused his love to become personified in the person of Christ.

If you don't see God's love it's because you are looking in the wrong place. Look to the man who was so dedicated to your wellbeing that he'd face death in your place. Look to the man who was so freaked out by this that the stress caused his forehead to sweat blood. Look to Christ, whose personal suffering satisfied the Angry Judge. As a common Christian relates, "God says, 'I love you this much, then he stretched out his arms....and died.'" While Christ was on the cross, you were on his mind."

But God's love for you in Christ isn't stuck in the ancient events of world. history. Christ's love on the cross is pulled through the years, stretched through the centuries, and finally connected to you through Christian baptism. Christian baptism introduces us to the Loving Father. "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have been clothed with Christ." In a

surprising way, you can say that with Jesus' goodness covering up all your bad parts, sin is irrelevant to you. God has no reason to be angry with you. You are perfectly forgiven, perfectly loved.

III. "God's love is big!" This is my personal conviction.

Like Paul, I want you to know this. I don't just want you to know about this, but I want you to know it. In here [put hand on heart] and in here [put hand on head]. I want God's love to be your personal conviction. I would like you feel, every day, that you are free. I would like you feel, every day, that you are safe. I'd like you to have the high of spiritual joy, every morning. I'd like a little smile to be a reflexive reaction whenever the name of God is mentioned. [Honestly, I guess I'd also like that for myself, because it seems pretty easy for me to lost my spiritual joy.] How do we take the love of God that sometimes seems locked in the Bible and put it in here? [put hand on heart] and in here? [put hand on head]

Paul indicate the secret to knowing God's love in your heart is to have Christ in your heart. He says, *"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."* God's love is known personally wherever Jesus is known personally.

The trick to grasping God's love in this sin-smeared world it is to stay close to Christ. Just look into the past. In both Bible history and secular history, people have discovered how big God's love is, even when things were going terribly in their lives. **Suffering saints in the past often spoke of divine love amidst personal tragedy.** As Stephen the martyr was being stoned to death, his eyes looked up and saw only Jesus. As a criminal was dying of crucifixion and broken knees, his eyes looked across and saw only Jesus. As Thomas cowered in a locked room, his eyes looked down and saw only Jesus hands and feet.

Hebrews 11 tells us other believers, the saints of the past were *"tortured [...] they faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."*

Historians tell of a man named Polycarp, a student of Jesus' disciple John. In the year 156, As the Roman government set fire to the pile of logs he was tied to, his executioner commanded him to deny Christ. His response, *"Eighty and six years have I now served Christ, and he has never done me the least wrong: How then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"*

An article in the New York Times, written by a man who for 20 hours hiked the earthquake-rubbed streets of Port-au-Prince, describes Christian "preachers standing atop boxes, giving impromptu sermons, reassuring their listeners in the dark, "The good Lord is hiding, but he's here. He's always here."

We look at the suffering saints of the past and present, and we share their inner conviction that God is good, that his love is big, because like them, we know Jesus too.

Conclusion

The 2010 Haiti Earthquake was a [catastrophic magnitude 7.0 M_w earthquake](#) centred approximately 25 kilometres (16 mi) west of [Port-au-Prince](#), the capital of [Haiti](#), striking at 16:53:09 local time (21:53:09 UTC) on Tuesday, 12 January 2010. The earthquake occurred at a depth of 13 kilometres (8.1 mi). The [United States Geological Survey](#) recorded a series of [aftershocks](#), fourteen of them between magnitudes 5.0 and 5.9. The [International Red Cross](#) estimated that about three million people were affected by the quake. The Haitian Interior Minister believes that up to 200,000 could be dead, exceeding earlier Red Cross estimates of 45,000–50,000 people killed. [Source: Wikipedia]

Many people that were alive are now dead. Earthquakes tear cities apart. They always have and until world history reaches its conclusion, they will continue to do so.

But there is another story, a bigger story worth noting. 2000 years before the quake in Haiti, an earthquake struck the ancient city Jerusalem. It's epicenter was just outside the city, a place called Calvary. The time of the quake coincided with the exact moment when a man called Jesus of Nazareth bowed his head on a cross and committed his spirit to his Heavenly Father. This earthquake broke open coffins, graveyard, cemeteries. Many people that were dead became alive again.

There was also an aftershock. Three days later on Easter morning, another small quake shook a garden owned by Joseph of Arimathea. The epicenter of this quake was a small rock tomb where Jesus of Nazareth had previously been buried. The tomb was now empty.

An earthquake can tear cities apart. "Easterquakes" tore death apart. Jesus opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. That's how we know God's love is big.

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