

## **Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

### **The Love of God, Part 2**

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-78

It's at this time of the year that we are very much aware of the great truth of John 3:16 that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. The real story of Christmas is the story of a loving God. The Bible says God is love. It is consistent with God's nature to love.

And that wonderful truth is unique to Christianity. The reason it is unique to Christianity is because Christianity is the only true religion in the world therefore it is the only religion that reflects the true God. And the author of all other religions in the world is Satan who has no comprehension of love, no capacity to love and so that which he spawns by way of religion is void of love. The false gods of the world's religions are not known for their love. They are fearsome, angry, selfish, threatening deities who must be constantly appeased or their temperamental character will motivate them to inflict pain, torture and even death on their subjects. When Christians say God is love, they are announcing something that is unique to their faith. And never is God's love more evident than in the gift of Jesus Christ. And so we have at this season been talking about the love of God.

To grasp the character of God's love in some manageable ways and to begin to understand it, I have offered to you three propositions. We have talked about the first, we will talk about the second and then the third. These are three key propositions that will help us to understand the love of God.

First of all, God's love is unlimited in extent...God's love is unlimited in extent. Secondly, God's love is limited in degree. And thirdly, God's love is ultimately directed at His own glory.

Now the last time we discussed this we considered the principle or the precept that God's love is unlimited in extent. And we saw that because it says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world." Titus 3:4 talks about God's love for mankind. We find in 1 John 2:2 that He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world, because as John 4:42 and 1 John 4:14 say, Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world. And so we talked about the fact that there is a sense in which God's love is unlimited. And God has demonstrated that unlimited love by sending His Son to be the Savior of the world.

That universal love, that unlimited love is demonstrated in four ways. First of all, in common grace, that is to say that it rains on everybody and everybody enjoys sunlight and blue sky and fresh air and flowers and affection and families and all the good things of life. God demonstrates His love in His kindness toward all.

Secondly, that universal, unconditional, unlimited love of God is revealed in compassion. God has pity. God were He a human would cry and when He became one, He did. There is compassion and pity with God toward all the distresses of all men.

Thirdly, God's universal love is demonstrated in His warnings. Throughout all of Scripture and throughout all of redemptive history, God has repeatedly warned about the consequence of sin, the inevitability of eternal judgment. Those are warnings out of the love of God who is not willing that any should perish and who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

And then fourthly and finally, God's universal love is demonstrated in the Gospel invitation, that is in calling all sinners to repent and embrace Jesus Christ. The gospel was designed then to be extended to the whole world and preached to every creature because Jesus Christ, in fact, is the Savior of the world. He has been so identified by God and so announced and is thus. We know that not all the world will come to Him, but He is no less the Savior of the world. It would be as if a king looking out over his nation saw a universal plague and appointed the most noble and gifted physician of all physicians as the official physician of the kingdom, the national physician. In our parlance we would say the Surgeon General. He knows that not all the people who have the plague are going to come to the physician who has been appointed by the king as the physician of the nation. He knows that not all of them will seek out his healing capability. But he is nonetheless the official physician. And Jesus Christ, though not sought by sinners, is nonetheless the official Savior of the world.

And so, we have then discussed the fact that there is in God's heart and in His nature a love that extends to everyone. And the gospel then is offered to everyone. And Romans 10:13 sums it up by saying, "Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved." "Whosoever will, let Him come," it says in the book of Revelation. God then loved the world enough to provide a sufficient atonement for their sins and to call them all to repentance and faith. The problem is, people are unwilling to come. In John 5:40 Jesus said, "You are unwilling to come to Me that you might have life." The prophet said, "Why will you die?"

Well this is God's unlimited love. But there is a second proposition and it's our proposition to discuss today and it is this, God's love is limited in degree. You say, "What do you mean by that?" What I mean by that is God's universal love has its limits. First of all, let me suggest this to you, that when that universal love of God is rejected, when it is spurned, when it is denied, it turns to hate. You say, "You mean God reaches the point where He hates the ungodly?" I would never say such a thing were it not said in Scripture. In Psalm chapter 5, the fifth Psalm and verse 5 it says, "The boastful shall not stand before Thine eyes, Thou dost hate all who do iniquity, Thou dost destroy those who speak falsehood, the Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit. The Lord hates those who do iniquity." In the eleventh Psalm and verse 5 it says, "The Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence, His soul hates."

The psalmist picks this up and wanting to have a godly perspective and a godly attitude affirms the very same thing, for in Psalm 101 the psalmist says, verse 3, "I will set no worthless thing before my eyes, I hate the work of those who fall away." Later on in Psalm 119 and verse 104 the psalmist says, "I hate every false way." And in Psalm 139 and verse 21, "Do I not hate those who hate Thee, O Lord?" Verse 22, "I hate them with the utmost hatred."

That's why we have to say that while there is a sense in which God's love is unlimited, there is another sense in which it is limited. His universal love is temporal. It is limited to time. It is not eternal. It is not complete. And I might add, it is not a saving love. Oh, in a sense it is because it says He is the Savior of all men, but that means in a temporal way, that He delivers them in this life from the judgment they deserve and lets them breathe and live. But there are limits. He loves them only in this world, only for a while and when they are fixed in rejection toward Him, His love turns to hate.

And so, the universal love of God is not nearly to the degree of His love for His own. And so when we make this second proposition that God loves in a limited degree, we're talking about a very, very important reality. There are some people who would like to believe that God will just love everybody so much that ultimately they'll all get saved. And if they don't get saved, then He'll take them to heaven anyway and forgive them on the other side of the grave. No...no, God's love spurned turns to hate and God's love universal becomes animosity and vengeance when it is rejected. That's what prompted the Apostle Paul to write in 1 Corinthians 16:22, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed." Literally, let him be damned. God's love, His temporal love, His temporary love which is to all men spurned turns to hate.

But let's talk about this second love, that love which is unique to believers. Turn to John 13, now we're talking about a love of a completely different kind, to a completely different degree. His love for those who believe, His love for those who respond to the gospel is far greater than His love to the world in general. And this love which is to the greatest degree is limited only to those who believe. John 13:1 sets the scene, it is the last Passover meal that Jesus is having with His disciples. This is the night Judas will go out to betray Him. The next day He will be arrested and executed. He knows He is on the brink of that. And that's the scene as John writes, "Now before the feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father...that's His death...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."

There is no question, as I pointed out, that He loves the world in an unlimited sense, but He also has a special love for His own who are in the world. And how is that love defined? By this phrase, "He loved them to the end." That is the descriptive that tells us what it means that He loves His own who were in the world. He loves the world but to a completely degree and limited, He loves His own who are in the world. And it is described as loving them to the end.

Now that little phrase "to the end" is the key to unlocking this understanding. In the Greek it is eis telos. In the end, to the end, either would be acceptable but not necessarily the only translation. Let me give you the broadest possible understanding of that phrase which I think is its intention. Eistelos describes basically a quality or a degree of something, and we'll understand it, I think, when we look at just several significant meanings.

First of all, it can have the meaning of completely, eistelos unto completion. Telosis the word connected to the word telousti(?) which Jesus said on the cross when He said it is finished. It means completely, perfectly, fully, comprehensively. Jesus loves the world but He loves, listen to this, His own...you should underline those two words because that's what this is about, His own. He loves His own perfectly, completely, fully, comprehensively. Let me say it simply, He loves His own as much as He can love. He loves His own to the complete extent of His capacity to love. He loves His own enough to make them equal to His Son, as far as redeemed humanity could bear any equality because He makes us joint-heirs with Christ to inherit everything that is His, and He makes us into His very image in our glory. And He lavishes us with all of the blessings of eternity. He loves us as fully and completely as a redeemed human could ever be loved by a God whose love knows no limits. That's what eistelos conveys.

Secondly, it can mean to the last...to the end. In that significance it would be saying that He loves us all the way to the end of life. It never changes. To the end of His life, to the end of our life, that love will never turn to hate. There never will be a time when some limit to it is imposed. He will continue to love us right on to the end. And this was such an appropriate time to say that because frankly, if this love were somehow conditional on us, there would be every reason for it to wane. I mean, He's gathered in the upper room with His disciples and He's very much aware of their failures and their weaknesses and their disappointing actions...very much aware that they struggle to comprehend the simplest truths, very much aware that they are a cowardly disloyal frightened group who very soon will demonstrate that by scattering all over the place when He is taken prisoner. Their leader will deny Him vociferously with a curse. Even after the resurrection they will be pining away in unbelief and He'll have to appear to them to let them know He's alive. They're so weak and so disloyal that if He allowed them to be taken prisoner in the garden, they would abandon the faith so He can't let that happen. Even after they're able to see Him in His post-resurrection appearance, even after they've touched Him and heard Him and seen Him, they will still lapse in to significant disobedience and He will have to confront them in Galilee and restore them and call them back into ministry and even ask the question...Do you love Me? And when He's hanging on the cross dying for their sins, they won't be there...with the exception of John and some women.

Now He knew all their weaknesses and there was every reason to assume that He had given it a good shot and He had loved them as magnanimously as was reasonable, and this is what He got in return. And as if all that was to come to pass which He knew was not enough, at the very supper

where He is with them now they are arguing about which of them is going to be the greatest in the Kingdom...blatant pride and self-promotion and boastfulness as opposed to the humility which He had exemplified before them. And He has to exemplify again immediately after this by washing their dirty feet and showing them how to humble themselves.

To put it simply, there wasn't a lot to love. But He loved them to the end. In other words, this was a love that would never ever die, it would never ever wane. It didn't matter what they did because it wasn't conditioned on that. If it had ever been conditioned on that it never would have existed in the first place.

There is a third significance to this term, eistelos, it can mean eternally, it can mean forever. It means not only will He love them to the end of their life, not only will He love them to the end of His life, but He will love them forever...forever. In fact, He will tell them a few moments after this, "I'm going to heaven to prepare a place for you that where I am there you may be also," which is to say I love you to the degree that I will take you to be with Me forever. This all is contained in the phrase eistelos, all of it.

This is not just some general love that extends itself in common grace, in compassion, in warning and in the call to the Gospel. This is not a temporary temporal brief love that turns to eternal hate for all who spurn it, this is something different. The degree of this love is very limited, it is limited to His own that's the key phrase, it is limited to His own. And on their behalf it is a love that is as comprehensive as God can love, that lasts as long as life lasts and then beyond that lasts forever. That's God's love for His own. And He is about to make the single great demonstration of that love by dying for those He loved.

"Greater love hath no man than this," Jesus said, "then that a man would lay down his life for the ones he loves." And that's what He will do. And the ones He loves are not worthy, that's evident. They're not the people who have somehow earned it, they are the people who by grace have been granted it. "While we were yet sinners God commended His love toward us." How? "In that Christ died for us."

He's only a few hours away from His death where He will demonstrate that He loves His own perfectly. He loves His own through all of life. And He loves His own forever. This is the greatness of this love. And the hymn writer years ago said, "The love of Jesus, what it is? None by His loved ones know." He faces the cross. He faces the sin bearing, the agonizing separation from God, the painful, lonely, forsaken execution and murder. And yet like a father who loses himself in the love of his children, as He Himself faces death, He wants to affirm how much He loves these utterly unworthy men. And beyond them, all who are included among His own. It is a love that only those who belong to Christ can experience. It is a unique and marvelous love. It is a love that gives its life. It is a love that forgives. It is a love that saves. It is a love that gives eternity and all its glories.

Now when you try to grasp the uniqueness of this love, you're looking for an illustration to grab and I want to share one with you this morning, and I'm not going to go beyond this, but it's going to take some time to develop it. It's worth the time. The best way to illustrate the different kind, the different quality, the different degree of love that those who are His own experience is to go to the Old Testament and look at Israel because Israel was His own people. And they provide for us a very good illustration.

Let's go back to Deuteronomy chapter 7...Deuteronomy chapter 7, and I'm just going to briefly introduce the truth here and then go to another chapter which is just an incredible thing, in a moment. But in Deuteronomy chapter 7 just to start at verse 6 you have here a very, very important beginning point. And here God is speaking about Israel, His chosen people. They are the elect nation called "Israel, My elect, chosen before the foundation of the world to be His nation." And within that nation many individuals chosen for salvation. But this is His chosen nation. Verse 6, "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."

You say, "Why was Israel God's people? Because they chose God?" No, because God chose them. Plain and simple.

And then verse 7, "This choosing is connected to love, the Lord did not set His love on you, nor choose you," now there you have the compare...the companions. He loved, so He chose. And He says, "He didn't love you and He didn't choose you because you were greater than any of the peoples." And I don't think He's talking just about that there were more of you. I think He's saying He didn't choose you because you were greater than anybody else because the truth was you weren't. He chose you, verse 8, "Because the Lord...what?...loved you." Why did He love them? Because He chose to love them. "And so He made a promise and an oath which He swore to your forefathers and He brought you out by a mighty hand and He redeemed you." There you go, there's the picture. He loved you first, then He chose you, then He redeemed you.

Humm..."Know therefore," says verse 9, "that the Lord your God He is God, the faithful God who keeps His covenant and His loving kindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments, but repays those who hate Him to their faces to destroy them. He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face."

God loves by His own will. Out of His love He chooses. He makes a covenant and He will not break it but He will redeem whom He loves. That's the pattern.

Now to see that pattern unfold in the most graphic terms of the whole Old Testament, go to Ezekiel 16. This is the longest chapter in Ezekiel's prophecy. There are 48 chapters, chapter 16 is the

longest. It is the most vivid. It is the most dramatic. And it is the most forceful chapter in Ezekiel and one of the most dramatic in all of Scripture. And what it does is explain to us this unique love that God has for His own. He loves so He chooses and He will redeem whom He loves and chooses. It is an incredible chapter.

Now let me give you some warning. It is very graphic. It is very distressing. It presents the nation Israel in such loathsome and sorted terms that rabbis within Judaism through the years have not permitted this chapter to be read in any public meeting. And you can go all the way back to the Mishnah and Rabbi Eleazar Ben Hercannis(??) and you find there a prohibition against reading this chapter publicly. Why? Because it focuses devastatingly on the iniquitous character of Israel. But the sad part of it is that the chapter is not about Israel's iniquity, it is about God's maintaining His love toward a grossly sinful people and not to read it by saving face disconnects you from the profoundest truth of all Scripture, and that is that God has set His love by His own will upon a certain people, chosen them and will redeem them.

So when you miss the distressing picture of Israel, you will also miss the profound demonstration of God's love. This chapter focuses on God's electing gracious, saving, forgiving, eternal love for those He designates to be His own. Let's start at the beginning.

"Then the Word of the Lord came to me saying, Son of man...that's the term for Ezekiel...make known to Jerusalem her abominations and say, Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem, your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanites, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite." Stop there.

At this point in history Jerusalem is God's city, Jerusalem the beloved. It belongs to the nation Israel. It is to be a place for the worship of the true God, a worship place is there, a temple is there. But something tragic as happened. He says Jerusalem is full of abominations. He's referring to idolatry, the worship of false gods and idols. And the Lord says to Ezekiel, you've got to tell Jerusalem that I know about her abominations. And here is what the Lord wants to say, you're going back to your roots because your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites and your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. Amorite and Hittite are general names for the dwellers of Canaan. They simply scoop up all the pagan idolatrous tribes that were there when Israel arrived. Jerusalem once was in the hands of pagans. And he says you've gone back to those pagan abominations, you've gone back to being like it used to be.

Later on in the chapter he'll say there's a proverb like.."like daughter like mother," you've gone back to the way our mothers behaved...the Amorites and the Hittites. You've filled this city and you've filled this land with pagan idolatry. And Jerusalem, of course, is a symbol for the whole nation. Notice verse 4, "As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing, you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths. No eye

looked with pity on you to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you, rather you were thrown out into the open field for you were abhorred on the day you were born." He's talking about Israel.

You know, when a baby was born and it wasn't wanted, it was born to a prostitute, she couldn't carry on her profession with a baby in her life and so a prostitute typically would take that baby and throw it in an open field to be eaten by cur dogs and animals to die. She wouldn't even wash it. In those ancient times they would take a salt solution to cleanse that which coated the little body as it came out of its mother's womb. That was not done. With the umbilical cord still dangling out of the little stomach of that infant, it was just pitched into a field and God says that's how you were when I found you in Egypt. Nobody in the world wanted you, you were a slave people. Nobody cared about you. You were defenseless, you were poor, you were liable to perish, you were loathed and abhorred by everybody. You were an outcast. You were unwanted. You were nobody. No compassion. That was Israel, unwanted, uncared for.

Now this is the marvelous reality that God decides to set His love on that child...dirty outcast, left to die in the midst of a pagan world. He's talking about Israel's time in Egypt. They were scum. They were outcasts. They were waste material.

And then in verse 6, "When I passed by you and saw you squirming in your blood, I said to you while you were in your blood, Live. I said to you while you were in your blood, Live." I came along and I picked you up out of Egypt and I gave you life. Why? Because I determined to love you. Why? Because there was something lovable? No, you were ugly and bloody and dirty. Nobody wanted you. There was nothing about you to elicit compassion. But I passed by and saw you squirming and I gave you life. And here He's talking about the early period of growth as the nation Israel comes out of Egypt and comes into the promise land and starts to form.

"And I made you," verse 7, "like numerous plants of the field and you grew up and you became tall and you reached the age for fine ornaments, your breasts were formed and your hair had grown, yet you were naked and bare." This looks at Israel, they've sort of become a nation and they're starting to grow and develop but there's no wealth and civilization is very limited, it's a pretty wild group, nomadic.

Then in verse 8, "Then I passed by you and saw you and behold, you were at the time for love." What does that mean? Marriage time. Israel had reached maturity. And He said, "So I spread My skirt over you and covered your nakedness." It wasn't proper anymore to be naked, you weren't a child anymore, you were an adult and you had reached the time of love and you couldn't be naked and so I covered you. I spread my skirt. That was a custom, by the way, which signified espousal to a marriage. You can read about it in Ruth chapter 3 verse 9. I not only picked you up out of the field when you were a bloody dirty infant but I carried you until you grew. And then when you became



mature enough, I deemed it proper to marry you. "And I swore to you and entered in to a covenant with you so that you became Mine, declares the Lord God."

This is the marriage of God to Israel. He just determined in His sovereign will to love Israel. That's all there is to it. Nothing lovable about her.

And then He says in verse 9, look at this, and this all describes what the wealthiest king would do for his bride, "I bathed you with water, washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil." It's like picking up a wild woman out of the most uncivilized kind of culture. "I anointed you with oil," and then in verse 10, "I clothed you with embroidered cloth and I put sandals of porpoise skin on your feet. And I wrapped you with fine linen and covered you with silk and I adorned you with ornaments. I put bracelets on your hands and a necklace around your neck. I also put a ring in your nostril." I know some of you don't like that but it's biblical. I don't think it went in the middle with a rope around it. It was on the side. "I put earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head."

The love here is incredible, isn't it? This is just lavish, absolutely lavish. "And you were adorned with gold and silver," verse 13 says, "your dress was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth; you ate fine flour and honey and oil so you were exceedingly beautiful and you advanced to royalty." This is what we would call today a "makeover" of major proportions. This is what God did when He brought Israel to full bloom. And there came David and the kingdom flourished and it was magnificent and it was powerful and it was revered.

And then came Solomon and it was the greatest kingdom in the world. And the Queen of Sheba came because of the wonder of it, just to see it all and the beauty and the royalty of it was all because of the goodness of God.

And then verse 15, "But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame." Yeah, you got widely known and you started having all kinds of opportunities to interface with all kinds of nations and people, and you became enamored with your beauty and how great you were. And you started to have relationships with all these others and you poured out your harlotries on every passerby who might be willing shameless. This wife been picked up as a baby, nurtured until she was marriageable and then espoused to God and then wed to God and then adorned with royalty and now all of a sudden she is out on the street and she will commit adultery with any person who passes by. And this, of course, has reference to her harlotries, her spiritual harlotries in the worship of idols. Israel embraced all kinds of idols.

In verse 16, "You took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors." In other words, you took your own clothes and turned them into shrines to the false gods. "And you played the harlot on them which should never come about nor happen. You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver which I had given you and you made for yourself male

images that you might play the harlot with them." And you know, when they were wealthy and God had given them silver and given them gold, they used it to buy idols, to form idols, to build alliances with pagan nations.

Verse 18, "You took your embroidered cloth and covered them and offered My oil and My incense before those idols and My bread," notice how many times He says "My." It was always from Him. "My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma, so it happened, declares the Lord God. Moreover you took your sons and daughters whom you had born to Me and you sacrificed them to idols to be devoured." In other words, they took their little babies and they put them on a fire to the god Moloch and let the fire burn the little baby to appease the deity. "Were your harlotry so small a matter...verse 21...you slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire? And besides all your abominations and harlotries you didn't remember the days of your youth when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood. You forgot what I had taken you from. And it came about after all your wickedness, woe, woe to you, declares the Lord God, that you built yourself a shrine and made yourself a high place in every square. You built yourself a high place at the top of every street and made your beauty abominable and you spread your legs to every passerby to multiply your harlotry." Literally the whole land was completely engulfed in idols.

"You also played the harlot with Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and multiplied your harlotry to make Me angry. Behold, now I've stretched out My hand against you and diminished your rations," and indeed their days of greatness descended. "I delivered you up to the desire of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines who are ashamed of your lewd conduct." Even the pagans can't believe how lewd you are. "Moreover you played the harlot with the Assyrians because you were not satisfied, you even played the harlot with them and still were not satisfied. You also multiplied your harlotry with the land of merchants, Chaldea, and even with this you were not satisfied." It's an insatiable lust for spiritual adultery. "How languishing is your heart, declares the Lord God, while you do all these things, the actions of a bold-faced harlot."

And then He says something that is just amazing. "When you built your shrine at the beginning of every street and made your high place in every square and disdaining money, you were not like a harlot." In other words, you didn't even want money for it. Harlots do it for money, you didn't even want money, you just wanted the harlotry. "You adulterous wife who took strangers instead of her husband. Men give gifts to all harlots, but you give your gifts to all your lovers to bribe them to come to you from every direction for your harlotry." Here the harlot is paying the person seeking harlotry.

Thus verse 34 says, "You're different from those women in your harlotries in that no one pays the harlot as you do because you give money. No one plays the harlot as you do because you give money and no money is given you, thus you are different." You see the degree to which they've gone? "Therefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord," here comes judgment. "Thus says the Lord

God, because your lewdness was poured out, your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries with your lovers and all your detestable idols and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to idols, therefore behold, I shall gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved and all those whom you hated, so I shall gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness. Thus I shall judge you like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged and I shall bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. I shall also give you into the hands of your lovers and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, leave you naked and bear. They will incite a crowd against you. They will stone you, cut you to pieces with their swords. They will burn your houses with fire, execute judgments on you. In the sight of many women I will stop you from playing the harlot and you will no longer pay your lovers. I shall calm my fury against you, My jealousy will depart from you, I shall be pacified and angry no more because you have not remembered the days of your youth but have enraged me by all these things. Behold, I in turn will bring your conduct down on your head, declares the Lord God, so that you will not commit this lewdness on top of all your other abominations."

What's that? The Babylonian captivity. That is a direct prophecy of 586 B.C., started actually a few years before that when Israel was destroyed by the Babylonians. They were massacred, they were slaughtered. Their cities and towns were plundered and burned. And God says I'm going to bring this about and you're going to be hauled off into captivity. And that is exactly what happened in the Babylonian captivity. Ezekiel is predicting 586 B.C. when Israel was destroyed and the whole nation massacred and the remaining living people carried off into the Babylonian culture to be refined.

Then notice what comes next. Verse 44, "Every one who quotes proverbs will quote this proverb concerning you, saying, Like mother, like daughter." What does that mean? Her mother was the Hittite and the Amorite and she's acting like her mother. "You are the daughter of your mother, verse 45, who loathed her husband and children, you are the sister of your sisters who loathed their husbands and children. Your mother was a Hittite, your father was an Amorite." In other words, you're just living out what you were. You've gone back in spite of My love, in spite of My love.

I won't take the time to read all of it but in verse 46 to 59 is an incredible section. He says your older sister in verse 46 is Samaria who is north of you, your younger sister who is south of you is Sodom. You're acting like Samaria and Sodom. Sodom which was consumed once by fire and brimstone and now has come back and been repopulated with paganism. Samaria judged by God and now has come back in paganism. Verse 47, "Yet you have not merely walked in their ways or done according to their abominations but as if that were too little, you acted more corruptly in all your conduct than they. You are worse than Samaria, you are worse than Sodom." You're obviously the daughter of your mother and your father, the Amorites and the Hittites, you are pagan and to a degree beyond Sodom and beyond Samaria. Your abominations are worse and you're going to be more humiliated than Samaria and Sodom who are your sisters, for they too were born of the Amorites and the

Hittites. In fact, verse 57 says you have become the reproach of the daughters of Edom and of all who are around here, of the daughters of the Philistines, those surrounding you who despise you. Everybody sees how corrupt you are, even the pagans.

Verse 59, "Thus says the Lord God, I will also do with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath by breaking the covenant." Is it any wonder that the rabbis don't like to have that read? All that, an unbelievable indictment ending in the Babylonian captivity, ending in the pagan world looking at the lewdness of Israel and thinking them to be worse than they were when in fact that is exactly the case. Listen, they were less lovable in the beginning and they were more wretched after God made them His bride than any of the people around. They started out being the least, they ended up being the worst. And that's why the end of the chapter is so utterly shocking.

Verse 60, "Nevertheless," God doesn't say I will hate you with a holy hatred, I will despise you, He says, "Nevertheless I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth and I will establish an ever-lasting covenant with you." What is this? Why not do it with the Sodomites, they're a better bunch? Why not Samaria, they're better? You don't understand. These are the people I have chosen to love and with whom I have made a covenant that is an ever-lasting covenant. I love them as fully as I have a capacity to love, no matter what they're like I will love them to the end of their life and My life, I will love them eternally, I will love them enough to provide an offering for their sin. Why? Because I determined to do so.

Verse 62, "Thus I will establish My covenant with you and you shall know that I am the Lord in order...here it comes...in order that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation when I have...what?...forgiven you for all that you have done, the Lord God declares." Is that overwhelming? I'm going to silence you, I'm going to reduce you to humiliation. How? By forgiving you. By forgiving you? Why didn't He forgive Sodom? Didn't choose them. Why didn't He forgive Samaria? Never made a covenant with them. You see, God loves whom He chooses to love, determines to make a covenant with those people, that covenant is the ever-lasting covenant made in eternity past within the trinity which works its way out in a redeeming purpose on behalf of those chosen people which redemption cannot be gainsaid nor can it be withheld. Sodom was destroyed and unredeemed, Samaria unredeemed, Israel worse than both and God forgave her.

Why is it that God would so forgive? Because He set His love on Israel...listen to this...and made Israel His own possession. They're Mine, He said. And His love for them is very different in degree than that compassionate warning love that He has for the whole world. This love is perfect. This love is comprehensive. This love is complete. This love is saving. This love is eternal. It is this love that caused Him to lay down His life for His own.

Let me give you a personal illustration. Second Samuel chapter 12, we've seen a national one, I want to close with a personal one. Second Samuel chapter 12, this really points up how that love focuses on an individual. You remember David's terrible sin with Bathsheba, he had actually caused her husband to be executed. And then he had committed adultery with her and God, of course, was very displeased and the child of that adultery died. He then married his adulteress and she was very sad because the baby died, an illegitimate baby, conceived in iniquity. But now they're married. Verse 24 of 2 Samuel 12, David comforted his wife Bathsheba. He was trying to comfort her because her baby died. And he went into her and lay with her and she gave birth to a son and he named him Solomon. Look at the next line, it says, "Now the Lord...what?...loved him." What does that mean? It just means that, the Lord loved him. The Lord determined to love Solomon.

Solomon is a baby. Solomon doesn't believe or not believe. The Lord set His love on him. But he was a child born of a sinful wicked union.

But the Lord loved him.

But when he grew up, I mean, he had hundreds of wives. A man is not only an adulterer who does that, he is a fool. And then he had concubines. Why...why would the Lord love him?

Because the Lord delights in loving sinners. He just loved him because He chose to love him.

Look at Nehemiah 13...Nehemiah...you can listen to the verse, verse 26, it says this, "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin regarding these things?" Yes, you know, all of his foreign wives which brought idolatry and all kinds of things in. Here we're back to the same kind of sin the nation committed. Didn't he sin? Yes. "Yet among the many nations there was no king like him. He had foreign women caused him to sin, but God made him king over Israel," and then it says in the middle of the verse, "he was loved by his God."

People, that's all you can say. For whatever purpose exists in the mind of God, He chooses to love whom He chooses to love. And whom He chooses to love He forgives and redeems...the rest are left to the consequence of their own sinful choices. So when we talk about God's love, there is a love that is unlimited, but there is a love that is limited only to His chosen people.

You say, "Well, how do I know if I'm chosen?" It's not hard. Do you believe? Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe that He came into the world as God in human flesh? That He died on a cross to bear your sins and rose again the third day? Do you believe that He is the only way in which your sin can be forgiven and you can go to eternal heaven if you believe? You were chosen.

Father, thank You for the power of Your truth. It is so overwhelming, it is so powerful, it is so glorious. We are in awe of it. We stand stunned and like Israel, humiliated. Is it any wonder that Paul said that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief? Is it any wonder that he was so astounded that God...that You would choose him that he said, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God be honor and glory forever and ever, Amen?" O Father, our hearts cry out to sing that same great doxology when we realize that you chose us, that you commended your love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us, that you loved us to the greatest extent and gave your life. Father, we are humbled, we are grateful and we want to honor that love and love You because you first loved us. We know that love will show up as we keep Your commandments, for Jesus said, "Whoever loves Me keeps My commandments. Thank You for this great love of which we are utterly unworthy. And, Father, make us worthy to bear Your name. Help us to walk worthy of such love. And make this particular time of the year, this particular season especially a joyful one as we bask in the wonder of such great love. For our Savior's sake we pray. Amen.

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