

“GOD’S LOVE NEVER QUILTS!”

By Rom A. Pegram (4/29/18)

Let me begin with our text for today. This psalm (song) shows us King David’s devoted trust in God ... in times of *deep trouble*. Just listen to Eugene Peterson’s translation of this scripture (Psalm 86:8-15, MSG)...

There's no one quite like you among the gods, O Lord, and nothing to compare with your works. ⁹ All the nations you made are on their way, ready to give honor to you, O Lord, Ready to put your beauty on display, ¹⁰ parading your greatness, And the great things you do— God, you're the one, there's no one but you! ¹¹ Train me, GOD, to walk straight; then I'll follow your true path. Put me together, one heart and mind; then, undivided, I'll worship in joyful fear. ¹² From the bottom of my heart I thank you, dear Lord; I've never kept secret what you're up to. ¹³ You've always been great toward me— what love! You snatched me from the brink of disaster! ¹⁴ God, these bullies have reared their heads! A gang of thugs is after me— and they don't care a thing about you. ¹⁵ But you, O God, are both tender and kind, not easily angered, immense in love, and you never, never quit.

Once again, the title of this worship series is “GOD LOVES YOU.” The real issue today, however, is this: *HOW DEEPLY DO WE BELIEVE IT—THAT GOD LOVES US?* Life experience has taught me that one of Satan’s most effective strategies is to undermine our understanding of the LOVE OF GOD...

- He knows our confidence in God’s love tends to be fragile, dependent on whether we think our lives are going well or not (thinking God may withhold his love when we fail)...
- And Satan wants to keep it that way because, as soon as we stumble or have a bad day, he only needs to whisper a negative thought here, or a half-truth there, and we find ourselves whittling the huge LOVE OF GOD down to a meager facsimile—thinking God just loves us as others do, but *that’s just not the case*...

In this spirit, we begin to see *God as an impatient taskmaster*, pushed to the edge of his patience by our missteps, and ready to come down on us *hard* at any moment! Oh, there may have been a time when we thought God was loving, but, a lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. That was before we *did* this ... or *forgot to do* that. And now we must find some way to earn our way back into God’s good graces! ‘Ever felt like that in your life?

You know, that might be how it works with a friend ... or a spouse ... or a parent. BUT, IT’S NEVER THE WAY *THE LOVE OF GOD WORKS!* I want you to know today that ... *before, during, and after your stumble* ... and every stumble to follow, *God’s love remains the same*—intact and perfect! Why? Because it’s God’s nature—the kind of love that never, ever changes! We can see it in God’s word...

- He didn’t stop loving *Adam and Eve*, even after they ate the apple...

- He didn't stop loving *Abraham* when he tried to have a son by his own ingenuity ... or lied about his wife on two separate occasions...
- He didn't stop loving *Moses*, even when he committed murder in Egypt or let his temper get out of control when he struck the rock in the wilderness...
- God didn't stop loving *David*, even though David committed adultery and, essentially, murder ... by having Bathsheba's husband killed...
- And God didn't stop loving *Peter*, even though he denied Jesus three times...

Are you getting the picture? Folks, let me say it plainly today: GOD'S LOVE NEVER QUILTS! His love will never, ever give up on us! Today, *I want to get into one of the most incredible examples of God's unrelenting love the Bible has to offer!* It's the story of an 8th century Jewish prophet named Hosea ... and his wife, Gomer. God had called Hosea to be a prophet to the 10 northern tribes of Israel, just before the Assyrian army took them into captivity in 722 B.C. And to give some background to Hosea's prophecy, we need to remember that God formed a covenant with Israel that was *always likened to a marriage covenant*...

- The vows were exchanged at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24...
- The vows were renewed when they came into the Promised Land (Joshua 8)...
- They were renewed again after Israel had settled into the land (Joshua 24)...

God's love was like a cherishing husband—deep, intimate, tender, & protective. God, the heavenly Groom, and Israel, His earthly bride, had pledged their fidelity to one another *3 times ... but the bride did not remain faithful!*

Do you remember, last week, when we talked about the 10 Commandments being commandments of love? Apparently, that truth didn't stick with the people of Israel—even a short time after they were given to them. Israel broke every commandment ... and then some. 'Adultery' was even worked into their religion at the time; that's how far 'off the mark' they were! *This is what happens when God's people ignore his rules*...

Finally, they reached a tipping point in their relationship; *that's when God sent Hosea!* Some believe Hosea prophesied in order to point out the bad things the people were doing (which was partially true), but God also had another objective. God wanted to show the people that *HIS LOVE NEVER QUILTS!*

Here's how the story goes: At the beginning of Hosea's story, God gave Hosea this shocking command (Hosea 1:2, NLT): "When the LORD first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, "Go and marry a prostitute [an unfaithful person], so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution [unfaithfulness]. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute [unfaithful] by turning against the LORD and worshiping other gods." Now, what would it've been like to be a fly on the wall and hear God asking Hosea to do this unthinkable thing?

This, folks, was a lesson God's people would never forget! In obedience, Hosea took the harlot Gomer to be his wife—a love story not really consistent with human nature! It

doesn't return evil-for-evil! It's a love that only makes sense when we realize it comes from God. Here's the essence of God's love in this story: *We see clearly that...*

GOD'S LOVE IS COMMITTED. In Hosea 11:1, 3-4, we see God loving his people as a Father, as a Husband, and as a Shepherd; Hosea 11:4a (NKJV) says, "I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love." Over and over again, God showed his loyal love for his people Israel, in spite of their being unfaithful to him...

Chris Spielman's story is a direct counterpoint to the lack of love and commitment Israel had. Spielman was one of the NFL's better linebackers. He'd starred at Ohio State in a career that put him in the College Football Hall of Fame. After going professional, he played on four Pro Bowl teams. Then, in 1998, at the top of his career, he sat out for a year. The NFL and his fans were put on the back burner, because Chris's wife was fighting breast cancer.

Stephanie Spielman and her doctors fought the cancer aggressively. When chemotherapy made her hair fall out, Chris shaved his own head in an act of solidarity. All that year, he took care of the household, took care of their children, and supported his wife. He returned to football in the 1999 season, only to quit before the season actually began. You see, his heart was at home...

Stephanie battled the disease for more than a decade before passing away in 2009. After she died, Chris said, "She was my only girlfriend."

That's just like God's love. When God says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you," that's exactly what he means! GOD'S LOVE IS COMMITTED. Also...

GOD'S LOVE CAN ENDURE CONTEMPT. In Hosea 11:7 (NKJV), God says through Hosea, "My people are bent on backsliding from Me. Though they call to the Most High, None at all exalt *Him*." Here we see the contempt of Israel for God, in spite of his loyal love! How could there be such a rebellious response to such a perfect love?

In verses 5-6, we see God's response and ... at this point ... and it's one of anger! Who could blame God? Think of how you'd react to such unfaithfulness ... or infidelity!

But, *the story's not over...* When we move on through Chapter 11 of Hosea, we find also that...

GOD'S LOVE IS FULL OF COMPASSION. In Hosea 11:8 (NKJV), we hear God say, "How can I give you up, Ephraim? *How* can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? *How* can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred." As God goes through the 'How can I' questions, you can just see God's compassion—even for a rebellious people—*never giving up!*

God's love here reminds me of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, when he says (Matt. 23:37, NKJV): "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under *her* wings, but you were not willing!"

Jesus unshakable devotion to the city he loved shouldn't surprise us; as my mom would say, "He got it honestly." He was acting just like his Heavenly Father! Folks, true love, unconditional love, loyal love—GOD'S LOVE—is not fearful of being hurt/suffering ... and does not hold back! It's full of COMPASSION! Finally...

GOD'S LOVE IS A CONSUMMING LOVE! In Hosea 11:9 (NKJV), we hear through Hosea: "I will not execute the fierceness of My anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I *am* God, and not man, The Holy One in your midst; And I will not come with terror." How can God spare Israel when they obviously deserve the ultimate punishment? John 3:16 (KJV) helps explain the answer: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." At the cross, justice and mercy, grace and truth, righteousness and peace, all flow simultaneously from THE LOVE OF GOD ... and it will absolutely *consume* our lives, if we'll let it...

When Rachelle Friedman attended her bachelorette party just before her wedding, she was about to realize the fulfillment of a dream: walking down the aisle to marry her sweetheart, Chris Chapman. That marriage took place—a year later. But instead of walking, Rachelle rolled down the aisle in a wheelchair. A freak poolside accident at the party left Rachelle paralyzed from the waist down.

Rachelle and Chris postponed their wedding for a year, but not their love. Chris said after the accident he never thought, "What am I going to do?" It was, "What are we going to do?" ... It was one step at a time." Their lives and love are going strong with no looking back. A tragic circumstance changed the *look* of their love—wheelchairs, an access van, lots of physical therapy—but not its *loyalty*...

That's how God's love is: No matter what you've done ... no matter how far you have fallen ... no matter what you've heard the enemy whisper in your ear, GOD'S LOVE NEVER QUILTS! HE LOVES YOU. HE ALWAYS HAS. HE ALWAYS WILL...