

Love and Faithful

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Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[0 : 00] Well, good evening, folks. It is wonderful to see you as we dive into this very great but massive topic together. We live in a world that is obsessed with love.

Wet, wet, wet sang, love is all around. The Bee Gees sang, how deep is your love. Whitney Houston sang, I will always love you. And Meat Loaf said, I will do anything for love, but I won't do that.

Our world is obsessed with love. The songs that we listen to, the conversations we have, the movies we watch. Love is a big theme. It's something that we chase after and it is something that we want.

But love is also something that is massively misunderstood. See, people can think of love as a fuzzy feeling that is there one second, but gone the next.

We use the words so flippantly that it seems to have lost all meaning. We say things like, I love burgers. I love that jacket on you. I love that color or that shade of blue.

[1 : 13] We say we love our friends when we put down the phone. We say we love our spouses and we say we love God. The way we use the word and how often we use it shows that we don't really understand what love is.

We can't properly know what love is until we know God. God is the one who needs to inform our understanding of love, not the culture around us.

Because when we let our culture define love and define God's love, we might be tempted to think that we need to earn God's love. Or that it's dependent on our devotion to him.

The truth is that God's love for his people never changes. It is a constant because God never changes. He is constant. Now this evening we have the impossible task of tackling two massive attributes of God in one night.

We're going to think about how God is the very definition of love and how he is faithful. But why take on this mammoth task of doing both of those attributes of God together?

[2 : 30] Well because God's immense love cannot be separated from his unwavering faithfulness. And because God's unwavering faithfulness is a perfect extension, an outward expression of his immense love.

So let's look at these two truths together and be blown away by how awesome our God is. The first thing I want us to see is that God's love is immense and unchanging.

So contrary to popular belief that love is a fuzzy feeling, it's an emotion, that's just not true. Love isn't determined by the size of gift you get on Valentine's Day.

The number of friends you have on social media. Or by the amount of validation and compliments you get in any given day. None of those things are bad. But they are nothing compared to real love. Love is only properly understood in terms of God. Because God is love. So here's how the Bible defines love in 1 Corinthians 13.

[3 : 45] Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking.

It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects.

Always trusts. Always hopes. Always perseveres. Love never fails. Love never fails.

Love never fails. There is no way. Any of us here tonight could live up to that standard of love. just take that last part love never fails we won't have to think hard or long for us to remember times where we have failed loved ones our attempts to love fail all the time but the love of God never fails we could never really love someone in this way as 1 Corinthians 13 says because it's impossible that's the whole point because when we read this list we shouldn't think of our own love but it should

point us to the love of God 1 Corinthians 13 is God's own description of love he is the only one who can properly define what love is because as was read at the beginning of this service John 1 John 4 8 tells us that God is himself love but looking at those descriptions in 1 Corinthians of what love is it is easy to see how the father fulfills them isn't it see the whole of creation is a product of the perfect love of God

God's love is seen in him creating and sustaining the world God's love is seen in the fact that he has continued since sin entered the world to call a sinful creation back into a right relationship with him not because he needs us because he wants us love means wanting the best for the other person God's love this world so much that he went out of his way to express that love to see God's love we could open any part of the Bible and see it clearly but I'm just going to focus in on the nation of Israel to help us grasp just how deep God's love is for his people so the nation of Israel were a people who constantly rebelled against God from the very beginning God made them his people and yet every single turn they rebelled against him how did God respond out of deep love for them he sent prophets to them over and over again to call them back into a relationship with him

[6 : 53] God put them first think back to Egypt the nation of Israel in the beginning of Exodus crying out to God in their slavery and misery working under the cracking whip of oppressors abused and mistreated they cry out to God and how does he respond not as a distant God who doesn't care or who is far removed from their suffering Exodus 3 verse 7 God reveals himself to Moses and says I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their suffering listen to that language I have seen I have heard and I am concerned does that sound like the words of an apathetic distant God no it sounds like a God who is invested in his people who wants their best a God who loves them and so God intervenes in a mighty act and delivered them out of Egypt out of slavery and into freedom and yet they still doubt they still question his love they were miraculously delivered by God out of Egypt and still on the border to the promised land they doubt and rebel against God again and so God gives them over to the consequences of their sin and they wander in the wilderness and still out of his immense and unchanging love

God provides for this rebellious people in the wilderness I remember they've been walking in the desert the middle of nowhere Sabino and I spent a night in the desert in the Middle East a few years ago and there is nothing no water no food just barren wasteland for miles and miles and yet out of his great love God provides some kind of bread for his people to eat called manna and he was with them that whole time but look at their response in Numbers 11 verse 4 again the Israelites started wailing and said if only we had meat to eat we remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost also the cucumbers melons leeks onions and garlic but now we have lost our appetite we never see anything but this manna they think that it was better under slave masters than being with a God who loves them and what brought about this kind of thinking well basically it was a desire for fish and chips they remembered cucumbers and salads they seemed to think that they were sipping watermelon cocktails on the bank of the river Nile instead of the reality of forced labour that they were under now I'm all for leek and potato soup

I love copious amounts of garlic and onion but it isn't enough for me to choose a life of slavery and yet throughout the whole Old Testament God repeatedly calls his rebellious people back into a relationship with him but every time they rebel they reject and they refuse to follow him if I was the recipient of such behaviour I would walk away I'm human so out of anger I would refuse to care for a people who refuse to return such immense love put yourself in God's shoes have you ever tried to love someone who keeps hurting you who keeps rejecting you it is draining it is tiring and it's not something we would keep up for very long but that is the treatment that God has been getting from the nation of Israel from the very beginning and yet God moves towards them and every time he does that they give him the cold shoulder if any of us were in God's shoes we would probably have walked away and abandoned them years ago thankfully God is more gracious than we are because he constantly goes towards his people even when they reject him he calls them back to follow him because he knows that that is what is best for them that is true unfaltering immense unchanging love so if we really want to understand love we must look to God because he is the very definition of love and the topic of God's love is much much bigger than we have space for tonight but the main thing to remember is that God's love is immense and it is personified in Jesus Christ

John 3 16 says this for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life so the subject of God's love is this world God

didn't wait for a world to love him first instead he sent his son into the world that was still in sin and rebellion against him Jesus is the expression and gift of God's love God didn't just feel sorry for a rebellious world and was incapable to do anything about it he is all powerful and he sent his son to express his immense love to us a wayward people and the recipients of God's love are the whoever believes see God loves this world but they only see the fullness of that love when they believe in Christ and only then are they welcomed back into that loving relationship with a God who wants to be with them that was the life we were created to live and what is the result of God's love well it is that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life

Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love to this world if we want to know how much God loves the world look at how Jesus spent time with the outsider look at how he cared for people how he mourned at the effects of sin how he was grieved at the pains of others and ultimately how he was nailed to a cross even though he was innocent so that we sinful people could be back in a right relationship with God and know his love in all of its fullness and yet don't you feel like Israel every single day I know I do we so easily fall into sin we're so easily dragged back into that life and we romanticize the things that used to bring us pleasure and we forget the torment that they brought us and how they ensnared us in our sin and in those moments the devil creeps into our minds and says that we're beyond

[14 : 44] God's love because Satan knows how to trip us up but he is the father of lies whatever Satan is telling you this evening do not trust it he will only sow darkness and deception but God brings light and truth the Bible makes it abundantly clear that God loves his people and that includes you regardless of what you've done regardless of what you're struggling with this evening you are not alone but God is with you and he loves you the promise of God's immense and unchanging love is that it never goes away but because we're so influenced by the culture around us we think that God's love is like a light switch that is turned off the minute we sin that is not true God never leaves his people God's love for his people is not determined by their actions by their wins or their failures or by their religious acts friends if you're here tonight and you are a

Christian you need to know that God loves you so much that Jesus went to the cross for you that doesn't mean you have a license to sin but it should bring about a change in our life because as we are confronted with this immense and unchanging love of God the only right response is to love him back to worship him to be in awe of him and to want to follow him with all of our lives see the topic of God's love shouldn't only fill our minds but it should change our hearts it should challenge our thinking it should impact our lives the immense and unchanging love of God should blow our minds because as Romans 5 8 says God demonstrates his love his own love for us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us so God didn't wait till you were perfect

God didn't say get your life sorted and then come to me God made the first move God promised from the very beginning of the Bible that he would make it possible for a rebellious people like us to be made right with him and that truth should humble us every single day because the living God the one who flung the stars into space the almighty and all powerful one saw fit to take sinners like ours and call us family the topic of God's love is much much bigger than we have space for tonight but the main thing to remember is that God's love is immense and that it is personified in Christ and I know it's cheesy but I'm sure we've all sat in kids talks when the kids are asked how much does God love his people they stretch out their arms as far as they can and they say this much it's cheesy but it's true

God's love is cross-shaped Jesus hanging on a tree pierced and broken beaten and mocked bruised and bleeding every drop of blood falling to the ground is a physical demonstration of God's love for you every moment of pain as he hung on that cross is a testimony to the fact that you are loved with a never lasting love that will never fail that will never run out Jesus is love personified showing us the immense love of God by dying in our place and that should lead us to worship God all the more the second thing I want us to think about this evening is God's unwavering never ending faithfulness now the word the NIV often translates as faithfulness is the Hebrew word hesed it can also be translated as steadfast love or the ESV often translated as God's loving kindness and the key idea that it communicates is that God is loyal within the bounds of a relationship it means that God is faithful that he is true that he is committed that he is invested in and loving towards his people faithful it means that he is totally trustworthy and perfectly faithful and is bound up with his character because being completely trustworthy and faithful means that God cannot lie there is no falsehood in him how much of a contrast is God's faithfulness with our

flakiness forgiveness how many times have you promised to do something or you've been the recipient of a promise and you've based your plans on it maybe you've been looking forward to it rearranged your week because of it and yet you are left with the sting of disappointment you're left deflated as the person isn't faithful to their promise and it hurts that will never happen with God whatever he promises to do in the Bible he will do it it may not be in the way we think it may not be in the timescale we have in mind or we want but he is perfectly faithful and it will happen looking throughout the

[20 : 41] Bible this truth is abundantly clear time and time again God makes amazing promises to his people and he will always come through on them even when they are rebellious and not deserving of that loving kindness and faithfulness one of the main reasons one of the main ways sorry we see God's faithfulness in action is in Jesus see right at the beginning of the world when sin entered the world God promised to send the serpent crusher Genesis 3 15 and from that moment on throughout the whole book of Genesis and the whole Old Testament people were looking for signs of this Messiah because they know that God is faithful so Isaiah 25 verse 1 says this oh Lord you are my God I will exalt you and praise your name for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things things planned long ago

God's faithfulness to the nation of Israel was one of the reasons they praised him because they knew that even if they were not true to the promises they had made with God he would be and that faithfulness meant that God would not abandon his people no matter how many times they rebelled against him Deuteronomy 4 31 says this for the Lord your God is a merciful God he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your ancestors which he confirms to them by oath now if you look through Israel's history God had every right to destroy them for their lack of faith for their rebellion for their constant questioning of him and yet because of his unwavering never ending faithfulness to his covenant promises he didn't no matter how much Israel pushed God away and rejected him he always called them back because he loved them and he had made promises to be with them and to be their

God ultimately we see God's faithfulness personified in Jesus it is through Jesus and his death on the cross that God is being faithful to his promise to forgive wickedness rebellion sin that gives us confidence because when we turn to God's word and we hear what God the Father says when we hear what God the Son says Jesus when we hear what the authors of the books of the Bible say as they are inspired through God the Holy Spirit we know that it is all based on the faithfulness of God that does not waver and that does not falter we could spend weeks looking at different examples throughout the Bible that point us to God's faithfulness but the main thing to remember is that God's faithfulness is a guarantee it is unwavering it is perfect and it is personified in Jesus see God isn't only faithful to

Israel time and time again so often we reject God we rebel against him we sin we live contrary to God's word we do things wrong and we mess up and it is God's faithfulness that calls us back to him this topic of God's faithfulness shouldn't only fill our minds but it should change our hearts challenge our thinking and impact our lives God being faithful means that we can trust his promises we can trust that he is God we can trust that what he has revealed in the Bible is absolutely true and trustworthy and we can base our lives on it it also means that you can have confidence that whatever life throws your way sufferings and trials hardships and struggles you can know that God is with you through it even if it doesn't feel like it but he is there he will never leave and he will never abandon you that is his promise

God's faithfulness means that our salvation through Jesus is complete it means that for the Christian the eternal future in the presence of Jesus is a guarantee that we should eagerly anticipate and look forward to and the flip side of that is that God's faithfulness means that he will also judge those who do not repent and put their trust in Jesus God is faithful to his promises both to save and to judge that should impact what we do with God the knowledge of who God is God's unwavering never ending faithfulness is the perfect expression and extension of God's immense love no greater love has this world ever known than the love of

[26 : 16] God for his people and so whatever Satan is telling you God's faithfulness isn't based on your feelings or on his lies God's faithfulness is based on his character and who he is the faithfulness and love of God that you read about in the passages of the Bible the exact same way he thinks about you today we live in a world that focuses and talk so much on about love and yet a world that misunderstands love so much wet wet wet sang love love is all around the Bee Gees

sang how deep is your love Whitney Houston sang I will always love you and Meatloaf sang I'll do anything for love but I won't do that but here is what God says about love God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners

Christ died for us the love and faithfulness of God is a vast topic that we will never be able to fully comprehend or understand but it is important I'll end with just a little story Carl Barth one of the 20th century's most well known and respected theologians was asked by a student during a Q&A; session what the most important doctrine was and the greatest thing he'd learned after so many years of studying the Bible that was his job it's what he did full time and after a short pause he looked at the student and said Jesus loves me this I know because the Bible tells me so friends God's love and faithfulness are fundamental to our understanding of who God is and they are great causes for us to praise him with all of our lives let's pray together heavenly father we thank you so much for your love for the love that is immense for the love that is unwavering for a love that meant you sent your son into this world to die for sinners like us so that we could go from darkness to light from death to life and for your faithfulness that we can know you will never leave us heavenly father we ask you to forgive us for the times that we think about these things so glibly would you help our minds be transformed would you help our hearts to be softened and would you help our hands to get to the work you have called us to do in Jesus name we pray amen