

Knowing the Father's Love

Do you know, really know, that God loves *you*? Do you know that He sees *you* as precious and valuable to Him? There may be some who think they are worthless, unloved and may even dislike themselves. While that's how you may feel, it's not the truth. God unconditionally loves and accepts you and sees you as precious and valuable to Him.

John 3:16 ... *"For God **so loved** the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."*

How much value do you place on the lives of your children? Can you name a price? If you are too young to have children, or old enough but have not had your own children, then think of how much your parents value you. Then think of the enormity of God's love for you. He gave His Son in your place on the cross so that you could be free from sin, live by His life and enjoy eternity in his presence. Do you fully comprehend and understand what that means and how much God loves you?

John 15:13 ... *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."*

Rom 5:8 ... *"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

Do you really know how much the heavenly Father loves you? Do you understand the extent of Christ's love for you? Do you give time and thought to this? We should. Do you know that you are unconditionally loved and infinitely valued by God?

If you do, then what does your life say about how much you value His love? Are your daily thoughts, words and actions telling God, yourself and everyone around you that you absolutely know and value God's infinite love? After all, if we know, appreciate and receive God's unconditional love then surely our response should be a reciprocal love. When a young man and a young woman are attracted to one another they act towards one another in a loving manner. Their love for one another drives them to do and say things that show the other person how much they love them. They don't just go off and do their own thing and occasionally get together when convenient to enjoy each other's company. So if we really know God loves us, and He certainly does, then surely we should consistently respond in love and live in a manner that demonstrates how much we appreciate His love and love Him in return.

Eph 2:1-10 ... *"And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. But God, being rich in mercy, **because of His great love with which He loved us**, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created*

in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

Just think on all the words of that passage! I encourage you when you go home to re-read that passage and meditate on it for a while.

Eph 3:1, 14-21 ... *"For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—*

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, **being rooted and grounded in love**, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and **to know the love of Christ** which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."*

Let's dissect and meditate on these scriptures for a moment.

"Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus" – here's a man who absolutely knows the enormity of God's love for him, and calls himself the "prisoner" of Christ Jesus. That's his response of love. "I'm bonded, chained, yes the very "prisoner" of the One who loves me and gave His life a ransom for me." He is writing from prison in Rome. He doesn't see himself as a prisoner of Rome, but a prisoner or bond servant of Christ. His circumstances don't phase him one iota, he is in love with the One who first loved him. His dire circumstances do not in any way dampen his understanding and appreciation of God's love for him, or his love for God and God's family. And this love is flowing out of Paul towards the Ephesian folks. Paul shows us what the loving response to God's infinite love looks like.

He starts off ... "for this reason", and then interjects with some information concerning the ministry appointed to him and the insight given him, and then in verse 14 gets back to ... "for this reason"... which is to offer up the prayer that follows.

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name." In the natural, your birth certificate states your given name and your surname (family name). That's the surname or family name of your father. As believers, we who have been birthed by our heavenly Father, bear His name! We are His! That's whose you are, and who you are! Hallelujah!

... *"that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."* We will look at what it means to be strengthened with power a little later.

But what Paul is really focused on and praying about is that we would be **rooted and grounded in God's love** and that we may be able to comprehend ... *"what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to **know the love of Christ** which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."*

Knowing beyond any shadow of doubt, all the time, that we are loved by God – the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Knowing the enormity of His love. Knowing His love is infinite and unconditional. Knowing we have a Father who loves us and seeks the best for us.

You see, many times when things in our lives are rough, when we are facing dire circumstances or situations, when tribulations are overwhelming, we tend to think God has abandoned us and ask how on earth can He possibly love us and allow all this bad stuff to flood us. Right? Some may even think He is a mean and unloving God. Right? Granted, that may well be how you feel and see things, but the truth is He does love you.

Well, let's look at some more scriptures to help our understanding.

Prov 3:5-6, 11-12 ... *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."*

*"My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord or loathe His reproof, for whom the Lord **loves** He reproves, even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights."*

Heb 5:8 ... *"Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation."*

Heb 12:5-11 ... *"and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when you are reprov'd by Him; For those whom the Lord **loves** He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.' It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness. All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."*

God's great love for us not only forgives us and cleanses us from sin, but it also provides life and guidance in order that we may live the "abundant life" Christ desires to live in and through us. His discipline is driven by His love for us. But you'll only understand that if you are rooted and grounded in His love.

So the circumstances and situations we face, no matter how harsh that may seem in the natural, are part of the Father's overall loving plan to bring us to maturity in Christ. They are to be embraced and not shunned.

Rom 8:28-29, 38-39 ... *"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so*

that He would be the firstborn among many brethren ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

You see, if you are rooted and grounded in the *infinite* love of God, how then can you possibly be disturbed by changes or circumstances in the *finite*?

Obedience on our part is love's response to the infinite and unconditional love of the Father. It says, "Father because I know you love me I willingly submit to your hand of discipline, in order that I may grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ my Lord, that Christ may be seen in me in all I am, in all I do and in all I say. I want my life to be a love song to you my loving Lord."

Earlier I said we would look at what it means to be strengthened with power. In order to do this we need to look at another passage of scripture and a couple of illustrations.

We look at Daniel chapter 3. Nebuchadnezzar set up a golden image and decreed that everyone must bow to it and worship it, and for those who disobeyed the punishment would be that they would be thrown into a furnace of blazing fire. The three Hebrew men Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refused to do so because their love and allegiance was to God, the One who loved them and gave them favour. They were dobbed in and had to front up before Nebuchadnezzar. He gave them one more chance to obey, but because they loved God they refused and were willing to suffer the punishment. We pick up in verse 16.

Dan 3:16-18 ... *"Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. But even if He does not, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up."*

This made Nebuchadnezzar raging mad and he ordered the fire to be heated seven times hotter and had the three men bound and thrown into the furnace.

Dan 3:24-30 ... *"Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astounded and stood up in haste; he said to his high officials, "Was it not three men we cast bound into the midst of the fire?" They replied to the king, "Certainly, O king." He said, "Look! I see four men loosed and walking about in the midst of the fire without harm, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods!" Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the door of the furnace of blazing fire; he responded and said, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, come out, you servants of the Most High God, and come here!" Then Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego came out of the midst of the fire. The satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king's high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire even come upon them. Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not*

to serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." Then the king caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Babylon."

So here's the deal as far as God's power toward us is concerned – **resurrection power is only available and of value to the dead**. Because these men knew the unconditional love of God towards them, their response was one of loving obedience and worship that led them to lay down their lives in honour of God. They were willing to die in honour of the One who loved them, for He was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The power of God, resurrection power, was unleashed on their behalf and they were protected from the flames and heat!

We finish off with three short illustrations:

First, the hammer and nail. The nail gets hit over and over by the big heavy hammer. The nail may think this is so unfair. The nail may see the hammer as a horrible enemy. But the nail and the hammer are merely tools in the hand of the builder. There's purpose behind this. The nail will eventually hold the structure in place and provide a framework for a house, a place of habitation of a family. Without the nail this cannot happen. Without the hammer this cannot happen. The builder is in control and the house gets built.

Then, the file and the piece of metal. The piece of metal is being ripped away by the file. It may hate the file and the pain it causes. But unless the metal is filed to the right dimensions the part won't fit and the machine won't run. But the file and the metal are in the hands of the fitter. The fitter has the master plan and the machine will be fixed.

Finally, the ore and the furnace. The ground up copper or iron ore go into the furnace. The grinding process was painful and now it's extremely hot and the fire causes the ore to melt. The ore succumbs to the excruciating pain of the furnace and may think this to be horrifically unjust. "I was sitting in the ground minding my own business and all of a sudden I'm in the furnace being scorched." But the master foundry man knows just how hot and how long the process will take, until the dross and gangue material can be poured off leaving the pure and valuable metal for casting into ingots. The ore and the furnace are under his careful control.

I think you may have the picture by now! We are the nail, the metal and the ore. Our lives and the circumstances and situations that we face every day are in the hands of our loving heavenly Father, the Master Craftsman, who dearly loves us and sees us as precious and valuable, and Who is busy completing the work He began in us.

Phil 1:6 *... "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."*

So don't focus on the "hammer" or the "file" or the "furnace" you're facing, but rather on the one who is in control, and who loves and values you and sees you as a part of His loving final plan. He loves you and sees you as precious and valuable. Spend time meditating on how very much He loves you. Ask for a revelation of Himself and His love. Get to know, intimately know Him and His love. Then in

response, show your love through willing obedience and submission to Him and His work in bringing you into conformity with his Son.

Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to be rooted and grounded in God's love, so that you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

'Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.'