

LOVE LASTS

1 Corinthians 13:7

Sermon for Peace Church

November 23, 2008

PURPOSE – To find in the love of God at the Cross a love which hopes and perseveres.

MAIN IDEA – Love perseveres because it always hopes, drawing that hope from the love of God in the Cross of Christ.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. FIRST CORINTHIANS 13:1-7 *READ*

... and let me add to this reading a prayer from Ephesians 3:18:

“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 that love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

2. That prayer is the ULTIMATE PURPOSE of this series, “What Love Is Like” – that through these phrases, each of us might have a FULLER sense of WHO GOD IS

- God is love ... God is patient & kind, not self-seeking, easily angered, ...

(i) So that, in beholding love, “you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” ... SO FULL that you can’t help but spill it forth to others.

3. The FULLNESS of love is particularly clear in our last 4 phrases:

Love always: PROTECTS / TRUSTS / HOPES / PERSEVERES

(i) Last Sunday we covered “Protects & trusts”

A. Love “shelters” = the Greek word for ROOF – love “holds things under it, within it” / Love bears all things (KJV) / “love covers a multitude of sin” – it’s WIDE

- How wide? As wide as that CROSS-beam!

“Come to me all you who are weary (by burdens), and heavy-laden (by guilt) ... and I will give you rest.” HIS LOVE IS WIDE

B. And His love is DEEP

In the book, "The Hiding Place", Corrie TenBoom was asked how she could endure a Nazi concentration camp without bitterness, she replied, "There is NO PIT SO DEEP that the love of God is not deeper still."

Pursuing the depths of love, Jesus went through the agony of the Cross ... & beyond! - "He descended into hell" – And so love TRUSTS in all circumstance. His love is DEEP

"There is no pit so deep that the love of God is not deeper still."

4. Today we think of the HEIGHTS & LENGTHS OF LOVE

- Love always HOPES ... and PERSEVERES

The phrase can also be translated – "IN ALL THINGS" ... love hopes / perseveres

= "In any circumstance" ... That's what love does.

A. The heights of love (the perpendicular beam) stretch into the heavens – like Jacob's ladder.

B. The lengths of love ENDURE forever.

After a very long and boring sermon the parishoners filed out of the church saying nothing to the preacher. Towards the end of the line was a thoughtful person who always commented on the sermons. "Pastor, today your sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God!" The pastor was thrilled. "No-one has ever said anything like that about my preaching before. Tell me why." "Well - it reminded me of the Peace of God because it passed all understanding and the Love of God because it endured forever!"

- The love of Christ is HIGH & LONG – so love hopes & love perseveres.

THE TWO ARE CONNECTED:

5. Victor Frankl wrote powerfully on this last century from his experience in surviving the Holocaust Camps. In "Man's Search for Meaning", he writes,

The prisoner who had lost faith in the future - his future was doomed. With his loss of hope in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline and became subject to mental and physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate. We all feared this moment - not for ourselves, which would have been pointless, but for our friends. Usually it began with the prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed and wash or to go out on the parade grounds. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there, hardly moving.

Those who held on to a vision of the future – whether it be a significant task before them, or a return to their loved ones – were the most likely to persevere in their suffering.

Those who know how close the connection is between the state of mind of a man - his hope, or lack of it - and the state of immunity of his body, will understand that the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect.

HOPE LEADS TO COURAGE & PERSEVERENCE

6. John Ortberg, a pastor & writer applies this same truth to serving God. In the most recent Leadership Magazine, he was asked: “What is it that enables a person to last (& even flourish) in ministry?”

He responded – *“It’s not their giftedness – though effective ministry aligns with spiritual gifts; it’s not education – though reflective leaders are sorely needed nowadays; it’s not resources or connections or IQ or support systems – though all those are good things. What makes enduring and healthy ministry possible? IT’S HOPE – It’s an unforced, consistent conviction that somehow God is at work in the midst of our efforts and that therefore they are not in vain - like AGED ABRAHAM ... against all odds, Rom. 4:18 - IN HOPE he believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been promised Him (Rom. 4:18).*

- (i) Hope leads to perseverance – and without it, we SHUT DOWN ... and lead MINIMAL LIVES.

7. It’s not unusual in this age to face situations that SEEM HOPELESS.

Situations with family, finances, ministry, business – you’re stuck; there are no EASY ANSWERS; things are DARK:

Will my child ever give his life to follow the Lord?

How can this ministry ever revitalize?

The bills are too high / the marriage too strained / life too empty ...

... what does love do in such difficult circumstance?

THE PRESENCE OF LOVE HOPES

II. LOVE ALWAYS HOPES

1. HOW? Like Abraham, we hope in FAITH.

Rom. 4:18 - IN HOPE he believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been promised Him (Rom. 4:18).

(i) Faith takes the covenant promises of God, whatever the circumstances, & TRUSTS:

Lord, you have called me by name – Is. 43 – I am yours. When I pass through the waters, YOU WILL BE THERE! Those waters won't sweep over me. The flames will not set me ablaze.

(ii) But not only does faith TRUST, faith REPENTS.

Oft times the trying circumstances we've got into are the result of our own misplaced values & wrongdoing. We've not done things we've ought to have done; and done things we ought not have.

We hope in a spirit of repentance – learning to align our will with God's.

A. So when our children or grandchildren are not walking with the Lord, we scrutinize our parenting – or lack thereof. When our life is not fruitful, we scrutinize “in the Spirit”.

And we repent. > “Lord, lead me in your righteousness.”

B. Same with ministry difficulties or financial difficulties.

Christian living is learning the art of repentance in the ongoing ministry of the Spirit's conviction.

“In repentance & rest is your salvation.” – Is. 30:15

(iii) Faith CLAIMS HOPE in the promise of the Cross.

- That this death (Cross) is full satisfaction for the justice & wrath of God

➤ “I cannot pay what my folly deserves. What I deserve does merit despair. But, Lord, I believe that your justice is satisfied at this Cross of Christ – so I plead for mercy.”

ALL of our hope is ultimately in the meaning of that Cross.

a. Shortly before he died, it is reported that the famous atheist Jean-Paul Sartre was wrestling with deep feelings of despair. So he would say to himself, “I know I shall die in hope.” But then in honesty & sadness, he would add, “But hope needs a foundation.”

Here is the FOUNDATION that God Himself has established for hope in the bleakest of nights – even death itself – the CROSS OF CHRIST!

Hebrews 6:19 – *“We have this hope as an ANCHOR for the soul, sure & secure.*

Love hopes in the Cross. Love hopes in repentance. Love hopes in trust.

IN ALL THINGS, LOVE HOPES ... and because it hopes, love gains courage to PERSEVERE.

III. LOVE ALWAYS PERSEVERES

1. Love won't give up, even in the most trying of circumstance. It ENDURES.

The Greek word used is a military term that means, “to hold a position at all costs, even unto death ... whatever it takes.”

Ray Pritchard comments: *“The word pictures an army surrounded by superior forces, being attacked and slowly overwhelmed on every side. One by one, comrades fall at your side. But through the din of battle comes a command: “Stand your ground, men. And if necessary, die well.” Even so love holds fast to people it loves. It perseveres. It never gives up on anyone. Love won't stop loving, even in the face of rejection.”*

(i) In Spurgeon's sermon on 1 Corinthians 13 – titled, “Love's Labors”, he writes, *“Behold the Cross! See the patient sufferer and that ribald multitude; they thrust out the tongue, they sneer, they jest, they blaspheme; and there he hangs, triumphant in his patience, conquering the world, and death and hell by “enduring all things”.*

2. Love perseveres

- That's what the unending nature of this RING symbolizes.

No matter the circumstance

- For better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness & health ... till death do us part ... love perseveres.

3. It perseveres too in MINISTRY:

One day George Mueller, an outstanding Christian leader in the 1800's – known for his orphanage work & prayer life, began praying for five of his friends who lived not for the glory of God. After many months, one of them came to the Lord. Ten years later, two others were converted. It took 25 years before the fourth man was saved. Mueller persevered in prayer until his death for the fifth friend, and throughout those 52 years he never gave up hoping that he would bow before Christ! His faith was rewarded, for soon after Mueller's funeral the last one became Jesus' follower.

LOVE PERSEVERES – in praying for people

- In caring for people
 - Even if they're ungrateful
 - Even if they've hurt you
 - Even if they're different from you.

In all things, love perseveres.

3. This is an appropriate FINAL DESCRIPTION of love because it reminds us that love is much more than a feeling.

It's a DECISION. It REQUIRES COMMITMENT and ... It can involve pain

Love is not easy – our work as a church & as Christians will not be easy in this age!

Perseverance is required!

LOVE CALLS US TO TAKE UP OUR CROSS, and follow its way.

IV. CONCLUSION

WHERE DO WE GET THE STRENGTH TO DO THIS?

"In this is love (here's the source) – 1 Jn. 4:10 – not that we loved God, but that He loved us and gave His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins ...

Love hopes & perseveres because this (cross) is the CENTER of our life and it means EVERYTHING to us!

... We love because He first loved us."

1. We're going to close our service this morning and this Series on Love by inviting you to RESPOND TO GOD'S LOVE AMONG US – to receive and give that love.

You'll notice on the wall today HEARTS.

They are there for you:

To CLAIM LOVE FROM GOD & COMMIT TO BRING HIS LOVE INTO THIS WORLD.

(i) We want each of you to take home a heart of love today.

- The hearts are spread out on the various walls of love – for you to identify with that aspect of love – thanking God for it in FAITH / asking Him to deepen you in it in OBEDIENCE.

1. After I lead us in our closing prayer, I'll ask you to stand ... and first, go to the wall up front – our "love-wall" ... & take a heart from that section of love you most identify with.

(If all the hearts have been removed from that section, just take another one – God knows your prayers.)

This is TACTILE & KINESTHETIC PRAYER (= movement prayers / touch prayers)

2. Then after you've secured your heart, instead of going back to your pew, let's make a circle around the sanctuary – find yourself to a place along the outside of the pews – then we'll sing our closing hymn and be commissioned from this place.

3. GOD IS LOVE.

Whoever lives in love, lives in God – and God in him. And in this way love is made complete among us – so that we'll have confidence for the Day of Judgment – because in this world we are like Him (1 Jn. 4:17)

LOVE LASTS

It lasts because love always hopes; it always perseveres

I pray that in some way God has used this series on love to challenge and deepen you in knowing His love. Let's claim that love today. Let's trust His Spirit to grow us in that love.

LOVE LASTS – but not only through this age. LOVE LASTS INTO THE NEXT AGE.

"Now these 3 remain (beyond this age) – faith, hope & love" ... and the greatest of these is love."

AMEN

PRAYER:

(Please find your way to a wall of love, take a heart in thanks, faith & prayer, then find yourself a place at the outside of the sanctuary.)