

Title: A Christmas Love Story  
Date: December 6, 2020  
Subject: Thinking about God's love expressed to us  
Scripture: Romans 8:28 - 39

The four themes used in many churches during Advent are hope, peace, joy and love but not necessarily in that order. Faithfulness or something else sometimes gets thrown in the mix. This morning we're going to use one of the advent themes -- love. In my mind, it's the most essential summation of the Christmas story. We're going to develop that theme but we're not going to use what would be considered a Christmas Scripture.

READ Romans 8:28 - 39.

When we look into God's word, we want to hear what God says because it's his words he is speaking to us. It's his love letter to us. I'm going to use a little different format as I'll take what God's word says and put it in a form where God is speaking in the first person.

The supreme thing you need to understand is that I love you. I have always loved you. "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). That means it's of long duration. You are mine forever. I knew about you before the dawn of creation. I know everything there is to know about you. I not only know your name, I know what you had for breakfast 17 days ago. I know when you got up this morning. I know what time you'll fall asleep watching TV tonight. I know what you were thinking about during the offering time. I know your IQ to the 15<sup>th</sup> decimal point. I know the kind words you said to the little boy who fell off his bike back in third grade. I knew what your DNA would be and what it would reveal. I know the things that God only knows, not just about you, but about the billions and billions who've lived and will live

Most importantly, I knew who would respond to my love and I knew you would be one of them. If I'm being perfectly frank, you were totally lacking in redeeming qualities and did nothing to deserve love since you were sinners. You were "foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by passions and pleasures...lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another...But when my kindness and my love appeared, I saved you, not because of righteous things you had done, but because of my mercy" (Titus 3:3 - 5).

Part of the love I lavished on my children is that I've justified you. I've declared you not guilty from your sins and wicked ways that separated you from me. When I see you, I see my Son since you've established a relationship with him by trusting him to be your Savior. Therefore, you're in a right relationship with me.

I have glorified you, placed you in a position of being part of the family. I've warmly welcomed you and adopted you as sons and daughters. You are heirs of all the spiritual blessings I provide. My purpose for you is that you would be conformed to the image of my son Jesus Christ. I want you to become more like him, more like the family.

My dearly loved child, my plans and purposes for you are for good, the absolute best, your absolute best. Be assured of that. Be very assured. I'm working for the good of those who respond to my love and love

me in return. "I love those who love me" (Proverbs 8:17). I love those who love my Son and obey his commands (John 14:21). Nothing can frustrate what I intend for you.

It may be difficult to understand as there are times when it'll seem there isn't much good in your life and the world around you. There'll be times when it seems like I'm not working or you feel I'm not working. I tell you the truth, I never stop working. It may seem like you're wandering through a dark forest with eerie creatures and scary shapes without a glimmer of light. I am still there. Even though you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I am with you. I am present with you to comfort you, strengthen you and remind you that my goodness and mercy are with you all the days of your life and above all, that you will dwell in my house forever (Psalm 23).

I have always, forever and continuously, been working even though you may not feel it or sense it. I am working when you're at the top of the world, when everything seems to be going your way. My grace is extended toward you. I'm working in the quiet moments when it seems like nothing is happening. My grace is extended toward you. I'm working when you're in the desert, when it seems as if your soul is as dry as dust and going to shrivel away, when it seems like your very life is being sucked from you. My grace is extended toward you. My grace is always extended toward you. "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from me the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17).

Since I have a grand and fantastic plan that's beyond human understanding, that no eye has seen, that no ear has heard, that hasn't entered into the mind of any human being, since my knowledge of you was before you were born, before any person was born, and since I've included you in my forever family and brought you into a right relationship with me, the question is "What can be said in response to what I've done and doing for you? If I am for you, who can be against you?"

The short answer is: no one and nothing. However, knowing human nature so well since I created it, I know you're inquisitive and there are many thoughts going through your mind about possible scenarios. You want more specifics. I'll give you more specifics.

Could someone bring a charge against you whom I have chosen? Is there some human who could point their finger at you and declare you as evil? Is there some group of people like a court system which could bring accusations of eternal guilt against you? Is there some government which could declare you as wicked, not merely as a person who does wrong sometimes but as a person who belongs to evil? Is there any spiritual power – angels, demons or the devil himself -- who could bring any charge against you – you're evil, eternally guilty and rejected by God? They most certainly will try in an attempt to discourage you and shake your confidence. They will scream at you, "You're a loser with a capital L!" They will slander and try to get you to think you're totally undeserving -- you are, but I have taken care of that. I tell you the truth, it's impossible for them to separate us because I'm the one who has justified you and declared you righteous. I'm the one who has pardoned you and if I've pardoned you, you're in a position of safety and security and free from any and all charges. I continue to justify you.

Can some individual, tribunal or government condemn you, sentence you to a life sentence in hell, which is certainly the ultimate death sentence? Can any spiritual power – angels, demons or the devil himself condemn you? The devil would love to be the judge and pronounce judgment on you and have you share his fate. They'll do everything in their power to defeat you. Again, no one can. I'm the one who is the Judge. My verdict is there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

Here's the reason. Christ Jesus died for you. I could have spared him, not sent him from our unstained paradise and beautiful home in heaven, not allowed him to be cruelly mistreated and killed on a cross for you. But where would that leave you? No place, no place good. To prevent that, I put my plan into motion.

My son gave his life as an atoning sacrifice for your sins (1 John 4:10). My son, my one and only son, the one who is co-equal with me and is fully God took on the form of a human to become fully man so that he could be the perfect God man. He humbled himself and gave himself to take your place. He is the one the charges were brought against.

The charges were brought by me as he was the one who took on your sin and the world's sin. It is he who was condemned. He became sin and bore the burden and punishment and penalty you should have borne. He did it willingly and out of love. But there's much more.

He not only died, but he was also raised to life. His resurrection from the dead gives proof he has power to do what he said he was going to do, that what he did on the cross had benefit for you. It wasn't just a pipe dream, an event that could evoke tears of emotion because someone was willing to die for you. The cross wasn't the end. The grave wasn't the end. My son rose from the dead in power, glory and majesty!

And even that's not the end. He's by my side in heaven as a continual intercessor for humanity, for you. He serves as a constant reminder that he has taken the punishment for those who come to him, for you. He is preparing places for my children, for you, in my heaven.

Why can I and do I emphatically declare what I'm proclaiming? If I didn't spare my own son but gave him up for you, what makes anyone think that I'll withhold any good thing from you? If I went to the ultimate sacrifice and paid the ultimate cost, why would I withhold that which doesn't measure up to worth of the ultimate gift? Because I'm a piker and have sour grapes? No. You are my child. I've already given you the best in my Son. I will never shortchange you.

I tell you the truth, since I gave my Son, the ultimate, there is nothing good that I will withhold from you. Much of it is waiting for the future so I can completely dazzle your minds.

And yet there are questions. The general question: "Who shall separate you from the love of Christ?" The general answer is: "Nothing! Absolutely nothing!"

Again, let's look at specifics. "Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?" That's a lot of bad things. Can they separate you from my love? No. And again I say, "No, no, no, no, no, no and no." Pain, loss, disease and hurt are not signs I've abandoned you and don't love you. Job loss and financial pressures don't disrupt my love for you. When you fail, and you will, even miserably and

spectacularly fail spiritually, I don't remove my love and disown you. Troubles and difficulties may be used by your enemy to try to create distance. He is a fiendish foe and seeks to work you woe. His craft and the power are great...but not great enough. Anything he attempts cannot and does not achieve his intended purpose. All of those things I have overcome and I give you the power to overcome. You're part of the winning army because you're on my side. My Son gained the victory over sin, death and the devil at the cross. He shares that victory with you. I will rescue you.

What about death? Can it separate you from me? Death is difficult and tragic when viewed from human perspective. I tell you the truth, it's a steppingstone, a doorway to the next phase of your existence. Being put six feet in the ground doesn't create greater distance between us. The body is in a holding pattern but your spirit, the real you is already at home with me. Death eliminates the barrier of separation as we're present together. We're closer than ever, closer than you ever dreamed possible.

What then about life? If death brings you to heaven, then does staying on earth and having your heart continue to beat mean that you're separated from me? No, because I am with you at all times.

What about angels? Can they separate you from my love? No, because they're my special messengers who were created to do my bidding. They're my helpers to fulfill my wishes. They don't act contrary to them. They don't seek to create distance between me and my children. Sometimes you humans get to see their activity and are aware of them. Some of you may even entertain some of my angels unawares.

What about demons, the anti-angels who serve their master the devil? Can they separate you from my love? They'd love to create distance between us by whispering lies to you that I don't really care, that I only want you for a puppet. They scheme to crush and destroy you, to push you toward self-pity and bitterness. Don't worry about them. They don't have the capability nor power to separate you from my love, not even a single millimeter. What are demons and the devil to me? I have destroyed the gates of hell.

What about the present? Can all the stuff that happens in your life – the busyness, work, societal changes, political issues, economic volatility – create disconnection from my love? No.

What about the future? Will you moving from the current plane of existence to the next make me lose track of you? Will you somehow fall through the cracks? No chance. Heaven is a place where you'll be with me forever. I know those who are my sheep. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can or will snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27 – 29).

Can any powers separate you from me? I'd like to see them try. What could mortal human beings do in a tug of war over you? Nothing. How about the “rulers, authorities, and the powers of this dark world as well as the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms who wrestle and struggle against you”? (Ephesians 6:12). They don't concern me. I created them and can wipe them out with one blast from my mouth. They can't drive a wedge between you and my love. And as for some unnamed power, I AM, which means I'm the POWER over all.

What about height or depth? There is no pit so deep that I am not deeper still. What about other dimensions like space and time? The Russian cosmonauts who circled the moon and said they saw no evidence of me were blinded to the truth. They couldn't see the Creator for the creation. I fill the heavens, all the tens of billions of light years of space (and beyond). There's no chance of space separating us. I can't lose you over the course of time.

Let's cut to the chase. There is absolutely nothing in all of creation that can separate you from my love as evidenced through my Son Christ Jesus.

I am your refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, you don't need to fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. Everything's going to be OK (Psalm 46:1 - 2).

Did you notice I use the word *love* a lot, that I say, "I love you," a lot? My love is not just with tongue or words but with actions and in truth. I demonstrated my love while you were still sinners in that my Son Christ Jesus died for you (Romans 5:8). I so loved the world that I gave my one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). There is nothing that can separate you from the love of Christ. Nothing can separate you from my love that is in Christ Jesus.

If you want to know the extent of my love, look in the manger. I sent my Son to live among strangers. And then to die alone. He is the greatest expression of my love. He's the gift that keeps on giving. He's a present you don't have to wait till Christmas to open.