

"THE GREATEST SENTENCE IN PRINT"

I John 4:8

INTRODUCTION:

During the past days, farewells have been given, and the concluding days plus the funeral services for ^{Horatio} Hubert Humphries has taken place. He died of cancer at age 66. One of his close friends ^{said he} taught us all how to hope, how to love, how to win, how to lose. He taught us how to live, finally - and how to die. ^{it}

The remarkable things as recorded in Newsweek concerning Humphries' last moments on this earth, were recorded in a simple statement. A squeeze of the hand. He whispered his last words to his wife Muriel and squeezed her hand. And the final thing that happened was - ^{for} three hours Muriel held his hand and at 9:25 on Friday evening, he died.

The key thing that I get out of this is - there was love. Human love. By simply his wife, seated by his side, holding his hand for the last three hours of his life. That, indeed, is a great expression. And of course, it was a fine tribute to be in print. I read those words, and I began to think. They are great.

But then I turned to I John 4:8 - and I read, (God is love). And I said that is the greatest sentence in print. Because that is the key note of the mission that is behind everything in this world. That sums up the whole content of this Bible. If I were to ask you to write down what you think of this Bible, and what it stands for, and sum it up in very short fashion. What kind of words

would you use. I think you would use these words - God is love. The Bible is simply God's love story. A story of the love of God who ascends the world and this is an amazing thing. People tell us that the Bible is full of impossibilities. And I know and you know that God majors in the impossible. And here is one who gives us, I think, the greatest statement in print. This is the wonderful thing concerning the story of Hubert Humphrey. But now when I come to the doctrine of God's love in the Bible, this is the subject that we need to think about tonight. *started - But of that - Love - Love -*

Many years ago Moody built a church in Chicago. He had something put in on the gas jets right above the pulpit, so that the first thing that you would see, when you went in for a service in the evening. There would be a text shining out in letters of fire. And the message is this text - (God is love).

One stormy night, before time for the meeting, the doors were open. A man partly intoxicated saw it open, and thought he might go in and get warm. He did not know what sort of place it was, but when he pushed in - the door opened and he saw the Scripture text. (God is love). Well, he pulled the door too. He walked away muttering to himself, and he said - God is not love. (If God is love, he will love me. He would love me. And God does not love a wretch like me. But he kept on with this burning down into his soul, that God is love. God is love. God is love. After a while, he retraced his steps. He came into the building and he took a seat in the corner. When Mr. Moody walked down after the meeting, he found the man weeping like a child. What is the trouble, he asked. What was it in the sermon that touched you.

I didn't hear a word of your sermon. Well, what is the trouble? He said

that text up there - that Scripture. Mr. Moody sat down and from his Bible showed him the way of life. And the man was saved.

Now in thinking about the doctrine of love, I could tell you a whole lot of things that I might think the love of God is. And probably you hear a lot of things that other people say. But I would like to take this plain Bible statement about it because I think it is a foundation of all that we do and teach. The Bible is a truth. And this Bible has proof that God is love. And everything else will crumble. And we will find in the Bible that God is love.

Now the love of God may be difficult to define. It is not because it is something unknown. But it is a great fact of life. It has qualities to it. That we need to think about. God's love is intelligent. It is not mere sentiment.

God's love is benevolent. It is a principle of good will. It wishes good to its objects. He sends his light upon the just and the unjust. Matt. 5:45.

God's love is righteous. In everything that he does for its object, all love is given and received with a moral condition.

Love gives itself - all that God gives to man is meant to be an expression of himself. In all that he gives, he wants to give himself. He is the best of all of this.

Now God's love demands man's love. This means that he wants the undivided affection of his people. As the relation of a husband and wife. Man finds his blessing by giving himself whole-heartedly to God. God seeks the highest good of the loved one.

Love is the very nature of God. Love is not something accidental or incidental. It is the very nature of God. When John says, (God is love.) God is love and love is eternal. And God's plan of salvation is eternal. And God is love, and helps us to understand the creation itself. It is nothing that consists beyond the love of God.

Jude 21 - we are admonished to keep yourselves in the love of God. (So you take time to be holy. Speak oft with thy Lord. Abide in him only. And trust in his word.)

Dr. E. Y. Mullins defines this love as the self-imparting quality in the divine nature which leads God to seek the highest gift and the most complete possession of his creatures. This love is grounded in the very nature of God.

In the New Testament there are two words that are rendered love. (Phileo) 25 times. Philos, 29 times. And (Agape) 116 times. And Agapao, 142 times. Now of course they are words that denote friendliness or a sense of emotion. But the word (agape) denotes a love grounded in esteem, admiration, and veneration.

And when the Bible says God is love - the word is agape. And this word finds its source in God. I John 4:10. It is out of this love, that God purposes salvation for man. And man's love rises to respond to God's love. A real good analysis of love is found in I John 4:8-21. And to dramatize these verses, you will find a cross that love is here expressed.

You will first note the wonder of the love of God. And there is really something that disturbs us today that we find little preaching on this theme. We sometimes explore other ideas that are very surfaced. And even in our popular literature today, some of it yields to the matter of wanting to be practical. And some of the words in print and in sentences today are commonplace. And many of these are to exploit the minds of men. Rather than to bring men to explore the mind of God. And this is an ill day for religion. When we put such a shallow place in theology. Because the central theme of our Christian faith and belief, is not in all of these things about man and man's achievements. But they are wrapped up in the wonder and the mystery of God. So the dealing with some of the by-products of religion - we should forget and come to the main theme here. God is love, it says. Here are the roots, the eternal that will never wear out.

This is really a great theme because it is bound up as we discover in John 3:16. 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. Now this is a theme that is too great for any man. The love of God is much broader than the measure of a man's mind. And as we venture into this, we discover that God really cares. Does God care. Is he interested. Or is my life wrapped up in fate as some of the Greek God's would have one to believe.

Or is God indifferent to this world. He is not moved by our situations. The Christian answer is very clear - God's love is on the throne. And this we discover, is what the Gospel presents.

You remember Paul talking in Eph about the depth, the length, and the height. God was so marvelous - as it was manifest in Jesus. And in the words of John, God loved the world. This includes every part of the earth and all the people of the earth, that he gave his only begotten son. This is the depth of it. It is love to the utmost. And there is nothing more to give. Whosoever believeth here is a call which includes every individual. Even you who listen tonight. This is love's length - it reaches the furthestest point, where man is found. And everlasting life this is the height of it. Nothing can out last the everlasting. Now one can only stand and think about such love as this. But John has the true foundation for all of Christianity. And here is something that is not a sword. It is not a symbol of power. It is just a cross of compassion.

One of the greatest discoveries of the New Testament, one man said, is this. That God loves us - before we have begun to be worthy of his love. As we yield our mind and heart to the infinite teaching of that love, which holds all things together. We think about the great possibility of this statement.

Think for a moment about the motive of God's love. Henry Ward Beecher one day was visiting a farmer. He observed on his barn a weather vane. And on it inscribed - God is love. Do you mean by that, asked Beecher, that God's love changes with the wind. No, said the farmer, I mean that no matter what the weather

is, God loves. *Direction of wind not change*

Now this is a great truth. And it makes all the difference between Christianity and other religions. Because there are those who believe in fate or in chance. Here is the love of God which comes to us in strife, in death, in sorrow. That God's love is always there. The motive of God, through his love.

God so loved the world. That was not just to display his power nor to glorify his law. But for love's sake - he acts. Somehow the veil is lifted. And the secret of the Lord is known. And here is the real motive. That moved God to act. In all of this, why did God act in this deed. It was because of an infinite love.

Now we need to be careful when we think about divine love. And not to debase it on the level of humanity. And sometimes we moderns often call love the gratification of some impulse. Or it is some vice that we want to glorify. Or it is something that we feel is a kind of love.

We need to know that the love of God is holy. It has nothing in common with this grandfatherly type of coddling that we think about or even see portrayed in some church groups. But this God's love fortifies the soul, and it inspires the pilgrims. He suffers and he forgives at the price of Calvary. Love was there. And any description of it otherwise is inadequate. The love of God is in his

infinite concern for the well-being of his people. What is necessary. He undertakes. And it is uncompromising and is holy.

This love envelopes the world. Deep in the heart of God, we read here that it was love that passes knowledge. Let there be light, and let the sun, stars, and moon move in their courses. It was this love that said, let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness. And that said, it is all beautiful. And it was for our temporal and eternal needs. God's expression of his love and his providence. Is here found in the creation because it was good.

And love increases its revelation to us. As you hear the voice of Jeremiah
(I have loved thee with an everlasting love.)

We are told that God first in his love reached out to a man in the ur of the Chaldeas, Abraham by name, and led him into a land that he had not known. It was a great day in the history for him to learn the power that love alone was going to guide his family. Isaac and Jacob and Joseph. And then the nation Isreal. Hosea 11:4 says "I drew them with the cords of a man with bands of love. The revelation of the heart of the eternal expanded until an Apostle, who stood in the light of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ was moved to say - God so loved the world.

So the love of God is revealed at the world moves. And it comes to flow in the creation, and in the redemption story

Now the love of God is to give. And it is boundless, and it is always the urge of love - is to give. Now if something is fraud or counterfeit, it does not have that element about it. But then when God, who wanted to send his love, he gave himself. The gift of self is love's final test and glory. Love is the outgoing of self into the lives of others. The very nature of God. And it is the very nature of love. It is really the climax. Because at last, it lights up the center - the meaning of Calvary is that for our salvation - God has given himself. And that is love to the utmost.

What is necessary for man's forgiveness, God has done. And not only to forgive but to restore, and to enrich us with the grace of his own character. That when he appears, we shall be like him and with him forever.

So the value of your religion or any religion, is by the revelation of God's love. It means - knowing and having communion with him.

Fa^ror wrote a hymn once - For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind. And the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind.

Isaac Watts wrote another hymn - When I survey the wondrous cross. On which the prince of glory died. My richest gain I count but lost. And pour contempt on all my pride. And after he had stood there and looked at the cross for awhile, he wrote these words. Were the whole realm of nature mine. That were an offering far too small. Love so amazing, so divine, it demands my soul, my life, my all.

Yes, men have marveled at the extent and the quality of the love of God. God is love. And Paul said, "he loved me and gave himself for me." John wrote again, "behold what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us. That we the unlovely, the undone, the unworthy, the unrighteous should through his love become the Children of God."

Unto him that loved us - they are thrilling words and yet they are mysterious. And how wonderful it is. Aren't you glad that you have met with them. Unto him that loved us. In the book of Rev. 1:5. "And washed us from our sins in his own blood. And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his father. To him the glory and dominion forever and ever."

God's love is an everlasting love. And this is something we need to note about the doctrine of Love. The fact of God's love. Concerning human redemption - it must begin with the fact that God loves us. (Not) that he will love us. But that he will love us now. And how wonderful. We cannot get started in thinking about this until we accept that marvelous fact. That God loves us now. And that God goes on loving us. God has no beginning and will have no end. His love for man is real and it is unchanging. And likewise, unceasing.

It is really beyond our (description). He does love - he did love - he will love. And we can properly say that God's love is going to be for us forever. That God is this way. John records it in this single act. To the abiding state of God's love.

There is something else about the greatest sentence in print. It tells us this - God's love is a personal love. It is never going to be changeable - it is personal and individual. It is tender. Most of us, when we talk about loving the world, that love is such a broad and general term. We do not put ourselves under much responsibility to love anyone in particular. Or sometimes we say, we may love the church. We may love it in a group. But it would be better characterized to say like the shepherd, his love for his sheep. Now he pursued the lost sheep. And he brought that sheep back in his arms. And he was restless until that one lost sheep was back in the fold. And that is really great.

Now lots of people are willing to leave all the evangelism and the process of redemption to other people and other organizations - few of us talk about the love of God and then we talk about it in some vague and rather general terms. We never really identify with the whole story of human life. As he said of one person, he loved everybody so much, that he did not love anybody very much. Well, now that is big and that is broad.

But we need to see here that he loves me. And his love is stronger than sin. It is deeper than our sorrow. And it is mightier than the death that we are going to face. And we stand here in a multitude of things and we discover that Jesus loves me. Remember that day when Jesus was moving through the crowd, and a woman pushed her way through and touched the hem of his garment. Jesus knew immediately that one seeking soul had come to him. Yes, his love had come in that tragic hour to that one life.

Whittier wrote one time - I know not what the future hath, of marvel or surprise. Assured alone that life and death, God's mercy underlies. I know not where his

islands lift. They are fronded palms in air. I only know I cannot drift. Beyond his love and care. ')

I read about a little boy who used to read the words of the Psalmist. "When my father and my mother forsake me - then the Lord will take me up." He did not like that verse. Though he did not tell anybody about it. But what kind of a God is it that does not take me up until my parents have let go of me. But that was a false interpretation of course. But that was the way he reasoned. And he assured himself that God would never get a chance at him because his own dear father and mother would never let go of him. And then one day, he heard a Christian scholar say, young gentlemen, I think this is a poor translation. I think this is a better one. "When my father and my mother forsake me, then will the Lord increase his hold upon me."

Then this young man really grasp something. That here was a God that was going to love him. When he was healthy, and when everybody else loved him. He would love him in his success and in his triumph. If life should deal to him heavy blows, that even his best friends and his own parents let him go. And washed their hands of him - God would use every need to lay claim upon him. God would increase his hold. That is the kind of God I think we are talking about tonight. God is love. He is one who has always loved us. And he will go on loving us.

Now there is no thing like generalities that will do. And when you talk with Jesus - you say, oh Jesus thou art human enough to understand my needs. And thou art divine enough to supply my needs. Now this may not be all together 100%

theology but I think about the marvelous thing of God's love. Joyce Kilmer wrote a poem about trees. But also another verse - which goes:

Because the way was steep and long
And through the strange and lonely land
God placed upon my lips a song
And put a lantern in my hand.

And truly God has blessed us with a love that is very personal.

It is simple to tell how much water is in a boiler. You look at the long glass gauge on the side and it will show you the water level. Sometimes if you look how people treat others, you have a perfect gauge of how much of the love of God is in their hearts. The love of God is a personal thing.

The love of God frees us from sin. God sent his son into this world. That you might through him be saved. Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sin. To him who loved us and loosed us from our sin. These words, as Neffett translates them, brings to us an experience. We think of sin and all of its defilements. But we rejoice in the love of God which cleanses even the uncleansed. And sets us free.

We have been washed from our sins. And you and I have come out of this world - we have nothing to brag on ourselves. Until the sense of this need, even in the presence of God has been getting away from us. We have been for the last 100 or

200 years.

✓ There have been men who have tried to humanize God.

✓ There have been men who have tried to deify man.

✓ There have been men who have tried to minimize sin.

Now we have been trying to pull God down from his throne, take him off the throne, rob him of his majesty, strip him of his holiness - and make him just like Santa Claus. He is just like of like a parent who puts up with disobedient children. We have been trying to lift up man in the same manner. Man is a sinner. But he needs to be redeemed.

There are people who talk about the (divinity) that is within us! ~~Why do we~~ have this. ^{Why not} release so little of it if we have so much of it. Think of the sin or the corruption, the gambling, the drinking, the crime, that we have. We do not see very much divinity running around in the world today.

Several years ago someone wrote a book - "The Vanishing Sinner". And said just as soon as we get rid of a few preachers, the whole idea of man being a sinner and needing a saviour will be gone. All that man will need then will be a bathub and a cottage. And a few dogwoods blossoming in his yard.

And that is really a stupid philosophy.

In the last place, God is love. It gets a man ready for everlasting life. That whosoever believes in him, shall not perish. Now we shudder at the thought of being cut-off. And it is more of life that we would all like to have.

But we have lost the sweet of love everlasting. Think about the golden gates of Jerusalem. And we forget about the unseen and the eternal world.

Truly, God makes us. And he lifts us up. And he sets us free. And he puts us in his kingdom. And he makes us a kingdom of priests. This is his business. Not to bring goats but to lay upon the alter of the world's need a sacrifice of our redeemed lives committed to the will of God. And it was the business of the priest to speak to men for God. And to speak to God for men. And this is where love gets into action. To go directly, immediately, to the presence of God. In the tabernacle they had the holy of holies. And certain people never dared to pass beyond the outer courts. They had no right too. And some of those who went beyond unto the holy places of God. Nobody except one man - the great high priest. And he entered but once a year. And it is reported that he went in with a silk cord tied about his left ankle. Which was left outside. It was thought that any man that went into the presence of God might fall dead. And this meant that his friends could bring him out without endangering themselves. And that is what they thought of God. But nobody went before God except the great high priest.

What a privilege - that every believing, trusting soul can go into the presence

of God. God is love.

(Love) has made itself manifest. P. P. Bliss said that as a young man he wrote the song - Oh, how I love Jesus. But he failed to understand the full picture of God's love. As in his mature years, he wrote the following hymn. Which magnifies God's love. "I am so glad, that our father in Heaven, tells of his love, in the book that he has given. Wonderful things in the Bible, I see. This is the dearest, that Jesus loves me."

Many years ago a Christian physician, Dr. Walter L. Wilson, told a story of a man who wanted to bring the Gospel to some prisoners. He could not because of the rules of the prison. And they refused him until he got a novel idea. Which was accepted and he could send in the message. He had a mirror made with the message of John 3:16 on the back. Also, on the back of the mirror was this message. "If you want to see who it was God loved, and for whom he gave his son to die, look on the other side." To look into a mirror is to realize we look into the face of one to whom God is love. In his love, let Jesus die.

I read a story that brought a glimpse of God's love that I never had before. I do not know whether it is true or not. A man was set to watch a railway draw bridge over a river. He threw it open and let vessels through. He heard the whistle of a train up the track, and sprang to the lever to bring the bridge back into place. As he was doing so, he accidentally pushed his boy into the river. He heard the cry, father, save me - I am drowning. What shall he do? The man stood at the post of duty, brought the bridge back so that the train could pass over in safety. And then he jumped into the river to save his boy - but it was too late.

He sacrificed his boy to his duty. But I heard that story. I wondered if it had been my boy, that man owed it to those on the train to do what he did. God owed you and me nothing. We were guilty rebels against him. God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son. That whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.

What are you doing with his love - are you going to accept it or trample it under foot. Accept Christ and you accept that love. Reject Christ and you trample that love under foot.

Isa. 53:5 - He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes are we healed.

The story of Mrs. Bottom of N. Y. City, of a good friend in her girlhood, who she lost sight of for 18 years. Going back to New York she was passing along the street. She saw her friend's face at a window, Gray hair. She ran up to the door of the house and spoke to the maid. Take me to your mistress. She is not at home. Oh yes, she is, I saw her at the window. And she went in and they fell into one another's arms. What has become of you for all these years asked Mrs. Bottom. And she answered, come into the other room. And I will show you. In the room, it was magnificiently fitted - but there sat a boy of 17 years of age. Sarcely able to talk. Mentally retarded in every way. And the mother said, my duty lies here, with my darling boy. Mrs. Bottom said, in a moment of thoughtlessness, she asked how can you endure it. I do not wonder that you are

prematurely gray. I knew you would not understand my love for my sweet boy.
But her friend said - it is no burden, no care to live for and serve my boy.
If someday he will only give me one sign that he recognizes me that I am his
mother. I will be repaid for all the years of love that I have lavished upon
him. This was but a faint image of the love of God.

Mrs. Herbert Humphrey sat 3 hrs holding his hand until Doc claimed Herbert! Fantastic human love!

What are you going to do with this love of God. That boy did not repay his
mother's love. For as Mrs. Bottom said, he was retarded and did not know any
better. Now you, you know God's love. How are you going to repay it. The
greatest sentence in (print) God is love.