

S. N. Nov. 25, 1976 A.M. -

"THE GREATEST THING I KNOW"

John 3:14-17

Phonetic 136-  
Refer to love volume 26  
From

INTRODUCTION:

What is the greatest single thing you know? What is the greatest single thing you know about God? There are many great things that we know. But I believe the greatest thing and the most marvelous thing, and the most unsearchable inexhaustible mysterious thing that is almost impossible to explain is the (love of God). It is impossible to explain life or death, or the resurrection of Jesus, or any of these aside from love.

If you knew that you had one last speech to give - what would you choose as a subject. I think you would select and chose to discuss God's love. We live in a time when this is generally disregarded. People need to be told about God's love. On every hand we meet with people, or we hear about people, whose lives are loveless.

In the (English language) we have several words of expressed love with different meanings. We have everything from affection between the sexes and the deepest expression of man's appreciation for God. In the Greek language there are two or three words that are interpreted love in English.

1' Eros - it means erotic or (physical) love basically. It is a love from a selfish form or standpoint.

2' Philia - another Greek word translated into English as love denotes (friendship) or brotherly love. As would develop between those mutual likes.

3' Agape - is still another Greek word which is much deeper in the type of love. It is universal and it is (unselfish).

In his last message to our congregation (Rev. Black), at the dedication of our education building, spoke of agape love. (Jesus) always used agape when he was talking about love. And we get a blurred meaning of the teachings of Jesus when we try to think of love only in terms of mutual affection. A liking for a person.

(Jesus) said thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself - Matt. 19:19. The obvious interpretation is, one's neighbor - the person next door or the one down the street. One who lends us his car or cuts our lawn. Or who invites us to his home for a steak dinner. The word neighbor includes the fellow who is not at all congenial. He may have a sulky disposition. It may be your neighbor across the sea.

The Greek word agape is translated and corresponds with the interpretation of Christian love. It is the way God intends for us to love others. It is the giving of self, unhesitating, unconditional, and this love seeks and wishes for others the highest and most possible good. God's love is wonderful and God's love is everywhere in this world. And our minds cannot understand the love of God. Everytime I think of the cross, I am reminded of God's love for me. And many questions come to mind - why did he love me so much? Why was he willing to pay such a high price for me? How can I express my appreciation for his love?

If we just look at the (text) - for God - the greatest lover. So loved - the greatest degree. The world - the greatest company. That he gave - the greatest act. His only begotten son - the greatest gift. That whosoever - the great opportunity. Believeth - the greatest simplicity. On him - the greatest attraction. Should not perish - the great promise. But - the greatest difference. Have everlasting life - the greatest possibility.

And that is why I say, this is the greatest thing that I know. As the author wrote - could we with ink the ocean fill, were the sky of parchment made, where every

stalk on a earth a quill, and every man a Scribe by trade. To write the love of God above. Would drain the ocean dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.

There are several reasons why I believe that this is the greatest thing I know.

## I. THIS LOVE IS MAGNETIC

It has power - it pulls us toward that which is honorable and noble. God invites us to desert our allegiance to self. And to retreat from the evil and to live in his love. There is something within us that is restless and has a longing to God. St. Augustine said, we can never be truly happy until we give ourselves to him. That was an idea he found many many years ago. The Centurian in Mark 15:39 probably watched Jesus as he was nailed to the cross. He was an official. He witnessed many a crucifixion - but Jesus' was different from all the other victims. And somehow God's magnetic love had a pull for that Roman officer's heart. And when Jesus died, he was the first man to speak. Truly this man was the son of God. It is no doubt that it was the first time in his life that he felt the magnetic force of God's love pulling him out of his pagan world of hate into the Christian world of love.

Even this morning, while I preach, there will be those who feel the magnetic force of this love pulling at your heart.

## II. TRANSFORMING

Another reason why this is the greatest thing I know - it is a transforming love. God's love brings us to the place where we can be forgiven of our sins. And be cleansed from the stain of evil - the thoughts and the deeds. Beloved, let us love one another

for love is of God. And everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not - loveth not God. For God is love. I John 4:7-8.

It brings about moral standards that are higher.

If I asked you today, where is the loneliest place in the world. Somebody might suggest the desert. Somebody else might say, a high mountain peak. Yet another person might say, it would be in the middle of the ocean. The loneliest place in the world is the human heart when love is absent. When there is no love there is desolation. Emptiness, loneliness. People need to love.

A man on a stormy night came to visit the preacher. He felt alone in the world. He had been deserted by his family and his children had turned against him. And lightning was flashing and thunder was roaring. The rain was hitting the window pane. He said, I have always believed in God - but the way I feel tonight, I don't even feel that God knows I exist. I feel like one of those drops of rain lost in the cruel hard world. No body loves and no body cares for me. So finally, the man of God said to him, do you really believe that. God really loves you. And reminded him of the wonderful mother that he had. I want us to pray and then I want to ask you a few questions. They prayed. Then he asked him the question, do you believe that your mother loved you? That was the first question. Yes, he replied. We had a large family - my mother was able to love each and everyone of us. And, without a shadow of a doubt, she loved us. He told him that God's love was just as strong for each child. The second question - do you believe that Jesus Christ gives us a picture of the Father? He said, yes. And then in a few moments, that man walked out into the storm battered night. With a renewed sense of God's love.

There are many mothers who have had many children. They have loved them. They have been a source of concern - they have lost many hours of sleep when they've been away from home. I've even heard mother's say, I just can't go to sleep until the last

one is home. Now I have often felt that love like that is much like God's love.

Jesus told us the beautiful story about the Good Shepherd. His love for the safety of all of his sheep. He leaves those that are safe in the fold and goes out to the rugged hills and searches for the stray sheep. Tenderly places on his shoulder and carries it to safety. God's love is big enough, is transforming as it reaches out to those in this world.

Can you picture a four-year-old asking permission to go somewhere. But his father's better judgement rebels against it. And in a bitter disappointment he said, I don't love you anymore. And the Father took him on his lap and asked, why don't you love Daddy anymore? He looked up in hesitation - because you won't let me go where I want to go. And then the Dad turns his face toward his, and says - remember, I love you. And no matter what you do or how you feel towards me, I will always love you. I hope you will never do anything that will cause me shame or hurt. And remember I love you and nothing can change that love. By this time, the little fellow had his arms around his Daddy's neck and said - I really do love you Daddy.

It is something like this transforming power that God gives us. Our children and our attitude, and the way we live. We may act like we don't love God anymore. But God is very sensitive - over and over again he tells us that his love never changes.

### III. IT'S ETERNAL

His love never gives up. It follows us down the road of life. I think even to the corridors of Hell. When God made us - he showered us with his love. Paul wrote that I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor

powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creatures will be able to separate us from the love of God. Which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Rom. 8:38-39.

I Cor. 13:8 says, love never fails. Charity never faileth. What did Paul mean by that little phrase. We could interpret it two ways. Love never loses a battle. It always succeeds. Love appears many times to be defeated. Because of jealousy, envy, and malice. Love may be beaten, may be retreated. But never defeated.

I think the second thing in that phrase of Paul's - love never faileth. He meant to say, love never ends. Love never deserts us. Love never falls down on the job. Genuine love never complains. Always there with us. Like the lady who waited on her sick husband for seven long years. And spent sleepless nights sitting by his bed. She grew frail. She denied herself proper rest. But she had the patience, understanding, and the love. To stay there and the last words she said at his funeral service - thank you, God. For giving me the strength to care for him until the end. Love that is never failing - eternal. Love knows no limits in its endurance. If you look at the cross.

Think about those five missionaries - deep in the jungles of Ecuador. They flew their plane over a tribe of auca indians - dropping gifts, trying to express friendliness. In the spirit of love. Soon after they landed, the savage indians killed the dedicated men. And their bodies were found in a river. Some of the widows of the five missionaries stayed on. And helped teach the children of those native indians about the love of God. Why did they decide to stay. God had given them a magnetic desire. To serve and to help others.

When Sadhua Sundar Singh was converted to Christianity, his parents used every stragedy to get him to go back. Finally they forced him to leave the house. His first night in the wilderness he spent under a tree. Hungry. He said I remember the

joy and the peace in my heart - the presence of my Saviour. I had my New Testament in my hand that was my first night in Heaven. That great man traveled many many miles and once he was with a guide in the Himalayas. They were caught in a heavy snow blizzard. And they stumbled over a man almost dead. Half covered with snow. The guide encouraged Singh to leave the man and to try to rescue him would endanger their lives. The guide felt they must head for shelter. While the guide hurried on - Singh stayed. With an effort to rescue the man. He lifted him to his shoulders. And battled the storm with the (extra burden) Just before darkness - Singh saw the mouth of a cave. He stumbled in - and he stumbled over the frozen body of the guide. Singh's body had been kept warm by his extra burden. And thereby his life was saved. (It) was his unfolding love for others that would not let him pass a dying man without making an effort to save him.

You know our Lord Jesus asked Peter three times after the resurrection, lovest thou me and each time he responded in the affirmative. Jesus told him to feed the lambs and to feed the sheep. If he really loved me, Peter, act as if you do. That is one possible proof of our devotion. To our Lord. If we really love God in our hearts, it will reflect in our service and our willingness to do for him.

In New York City there is a quaint little church (favored) by actors and actresses - called, the church around the corner. On the wall hangs paintings of famous people. There is a story how this church got its name. It is in the book - I went to church in New York City. Upon the death of an actor named George Holland, a friend of his, Joseph Jefferson, went to one of the fashionable churches on Fifth Avenue. Asked the preacher if he could have a funeral service there. The Pastor refused and directed him to the little church around the corner. And Jefferson said, (may God bless the little church around the corner).

(Every church) ought to be the little church around the corner. The sinner's friend.

But when any man comes to the end of the road, the end of that road ought to be open, an open church door. Where he can find the grace of God. Transforming, redeeming love of the Saviour. For God so loved the world - the whole wide world. And everybody in it. That he gave.

George Matheson of Scotland, was a young man desperately in love with a certain young woman. Engaged to be married. When the Doctor told him he was losing his sight. He knew that he would have to talk to her about it. The Doctor tells me I am going blind. In a few months, I won't be able to see. And you don't want to spend the rest of your life leading a blind man around. I want to do the right thing - so I am offering you release from this engagement. She accepted. And his heart was broken. And afterward he wrote these beautiful lines.

Oh love that wilt not let me go  
I rest my weary soul in thee  
I give thee back the love I owe  
That in thy ocean's depths it's flow  
May richer fuller be.

God loves us. God loves you. This is the greatest thing I know. And all he demands is that you accept his love. And love him in return. For all eternity - it will be yours.