

S.N. Nov. 27, 74 P.M. WXPRT
Nov. 27, 83 A.M.

THIS STRANGE LOVE

John Peterson wrote a comte ^{John 3:16} of the greatest story of the ages entitled Love brings him down.
It tells the story of Jesus Birth & how love brought him down.

"For God loved the world so much that he gave his only son so that anyone that trusts in him will never perish but have eternal life." All great men have had their favorite text. And perhaps there is no text in all the Bible that has been the text that we might call everybody's text. Here, a very simple heart - is the very essence of the Bible. This text tells us many great things. And these things seem to be strange because it developes for us something of a love.

It tells us that the origin and initiative in our salvation lies with God. That something - that Christianity is presented in such a way. Many times it sounds that God was persuaded to work out forgiveness. Sometimes men speak of God as being angry or unforgiving. Or at other times as loving and gentle. But some times we get the idea that Jesus did something to change God's attitude about sin. And to bring forgiveness. But our text tells us that it was with God that it all started. It was God who sent his son. And he sent his son because he loved men. At the back of everything, there is the love of God. And we call this, in our sermon tonight -- Strange Love.

I'd like to develop this idea for us. Love is one of the greatest forces in the world. It binds up wounds. It soothes sorrows. It lifts burdens. It rights wrongs. It giyes courage and strength for life's task. It helpsto forget ourselves and see what is best for others. It turns gloom into cheer. And puts life on every step we take.

To know about love is to know about the divine nature of God. I John 4:8. He that loveth not - knowth not God. For God is love. " Now God has created us in his

image. And we are able to love because we are a little bit like him. God shares his love with us. And puts his divine love into our hearts if we will let him. It is only thus that we can love as he commanded and expects. Jesus said, "you have heard that it has been said - Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you - love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you. Matt. 5:43-44. So it is truthfully good for us to look at this subject tonight. God commended his love toward us. In that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Rom. 5:8. This is strange. Love saw the guilt of sin and sought a pardon. Love saw sin. And sought ground for reconciliation. Love saw defilement of sin and sought a way of cleansing. Love saw sin and its damage and brought restoration. Love saw sin as enslavement and sought freedom. Love saw the death of sin and sought to bring a way of life.

Let us now think of this strange love in three or four ways. I would like to focus our attention in order that we might have something to tie our ideas around in this sermon. *ways it is illustrated*

I. ILLUSTRATED BY MAN'S LIFE

Yes, love is something that is strange and it has been illustrated in the life of man. For the word love - many times we say we love pumpkin pie. We love baseball. We love our best friends. We love our children. We love a parade. We love God. And there are all kinds of love that has been expressed by man.

John Fostini is reputed to have the world's largest collection of love letters.

He contends that too many people forget that the secret of romantic success is to confess love (without) fear or shyness. Now these love letters make courtship happier and greatly help him to win his heart's affection.

He says that everyone wants to feel that someone loves him. And to receive a love letter assures him of this in the most enduring way. Now out of this large (collection) someone said, how can you tell if a love letter is sincere? He replied you can sense whether it is heart felt. If it isn't sincere - it is not a love letter.

Well now this is one way that strange love is illustrated in man's life.

Let me bring to you a second strange way. For example there are insurance brokers in Britain sometime ago who reported that they were doing a booming business in writing policies on girls. Young men go to the insurance broker and take out a policy, against their girls falling in love when they go on vacations on the continent. One broker said that he had 200 young men whose girls were going to Europe resorts for their vacation. And they have taken out policies which stand to net them about \$2,800 if their sweethearts marry someone else. Now the policies only apply to engaged couples. And of course in the last two years when this was reported, the engaged couples were for girls between 17 and 25. And they had another policy that was a little cheaper for girls between 25 and 30. And so these men wanted the assurance that they so deeply loved - that they were spending their money for insurance against their falling in love with and marrying other men.

Now to the credit of the girls, it has been reported that as yet, nothing has been paid by the insurance company to the men.

Now this is strange love - when we think about it. Human love ebbs and flows - but divine love knows no change. And you don't have to have an insurance policy in connection with divine love. As someone wrote this poem - I love thee in life. I'll

love thee in death. And praise thee as long as thou lenth me breath. And say while the death dew lies cold on my brow, if ever I loved thee - Lord, Jesus, tis now.

Yes, it is illustrated by a man's life. This strange love. A mother placed her four year old son and her 3 months old baby out on the porch to catch a little ray of sunshine. The little boy was impressed with the fact that he was to act as a guard over the baby brother. He nestled up close to him - and there was also a 3 months old collie puppy, on the porch - pressed against the little boy. The three formed quite a picture. A man was passing by with an educated heart for beauty. He walked across to the little boy and spoke very softly. What are you doing, sonny, he asked. And the boy answered - I'm loving them. And that little fellow was sitting perfectly still with deep emotion in his heart. He said he was loving them. You know, there is no human tongue nor pen that can write and tell about this strange love. And especially when you think about the strange love, of what God was doing when he placed his son in the arms of Mary. He was loving us. That is one of the greatest stories of mankind. And yet we find this strange love illustrated in man's life.

We have definite love for one another. I read the story of Dr. Hobbs *And Broochy* telling about how he stood by his wife and he said, we held one another's hands and looked down in the face of our son who had been stricken with polio. Back in the 1940's. And totally paralyzed, the little fellow nine years old, lay there. I'll never be able to forget when my wife turned to the doctor and said, isn't there something that can be done. And in those dark days, that fine Christian Doctor stood there - a trained specialist, a student of medicine, and held out his hand in a gesture of dismay. He answered, there is nothing. Nothing we can do.

Now this brings us really to the part of our text, when the human heart is stricken with sin sickness. And turns and says, is there nothing that can relieve my sorrow. Is there no way I can break these bands from my heart. Is there no way I can change my life. And there comes back these ringing words. For God so loved. And if this takes place, truly, it is a strange love. The Saviour of the world. The one who could say before Abraham - I am. The one of whom the angels sang at his birth. The one of whom the angles spake when he said the Holy Spirit shall come upon you Mary and the power of the most high will over shadow you. Therefore, the child to be born of you will be called holy, the son of God.

Therefore, it is illustrated by man's life this strange love - can someone do something.

✓ II. ILLUSTRATED BY WIDE-ANGLE LENS

Our second point or idea leads us beyond human love now to the great idea that you know as all tourists and people who are camera conscious today - that one of the results is there is more understanding and importance put on the wide-angle lens which is useful for close-up pictures.

Now it is interesting that when we come to the Bible, we find in John 3:16 - this type of lens. In a spiritual sense it is occupied with distant scenes. With large problems. And in another way it brings up right before our faces, things that we have over-looked. And it urges us to look at the world, and at life, through the wide-angle lens. What are we going to do about it. God so loved the world that he gave. Here it is - the greatest hour of sharing in all the world. It is here - put on the screen for us. And it is illustrated by the wide-angle lens of our wonderful, wonderful God.

Through this lens, we have observations of the world. The astronauts brings back pictures to us. And it shows us that the world is a large ball moving out in space. This ball, we call the earth or the world. And as we think about it - we say the world is in a mess. Now why do we make such a statement. Is it because a large part of the world's population is hungry. A large part is sick or in war because of injustice or poverty, or corruption. Or spiritual values that have been lost.

There is hope in this situation. If the world is in a mess - it is of advantage to know it. And it is also of advantage to know that in our text through this wide-angle lens - we are privileged to stand here and share in the greatest thing on earth. It is my conviction as to what we are talking about - you cannot buy it. The only thing you can do is share this good news. What is it that the world wants today - what is it that you want today. The human race may refuse to listen. But here is something that is very strange in this wide-angle lens. It does not say that God so loved America. Or that God so loved the Jews. Or that God so loved the black race. No, it says that God so loved the great big wide world. And only with a wide-angle lens are we able to see this. If he hadn't loved everybody, he wouldn't have loved anybody.

Now God is not in a little box - he is bigger than that.

Dr. Roy McClain told about a first-hand experience that a lad had when he was 19 years of age and wounded on the mud flats and the Japanese had pinned him down flat. Death was inevitable if someone didn't venture and limb to bring him in. So one of the chaplains in the Marine outfit crawled out to the boy - and the lad recognized the Chaplain and said, but sir, "I don't belong to your religion." Without the slightest hesitation the Chaplain sorta smiled and said, "no, you don't belong to my religion. But you belong to my God."

Now if somehow we can get our dimensions correct, that here is the good news that

God loves the world through Jesus Christ. Now to whatever extent does the world know it right now. In this day in which we live. I do not know. But here are the wide-angle lens - that God loves the world.

Now this is great news - it may be strange. When the death of Franklin Roosevelt was announced - now that was news. But it was news about one man dying. Now this text tells about the only perfect man who ever lived. And that is good news. Because he conquered death. Now to what extent does the world know this. The news of this redeeming love.

Fred Barnes was a pastor in Guntersville, Alabama, and they were having a revival meeting in his church. One evening when the invitation was given an elderly woman came forward to make a public profession of faith and ask for baptism. After she shook hands with the pastor and sat down on the front pew, he began to sob almost uncontrollably as he buried his face in his hands.

After a few moments, the pastor stood up. At the end of the invitation, he said to the congregation, folks, I'll have to ask you to forgive me. My emotions almost overcame me. I am too happy really to speak. When I came here 8 years ago and took a census of this community, I found 81 people over 50 years of age who indicated they were unsaved but preferred our church, if they went anywhere. I put their names on a little book I carry, and I promised I would pray for each one of them everyday. I have kept that promise and the Lord has been good. This lady is the last one of the 81. I've seen everyone of them come to Christ. No wonder he wept for joy. The Scriptures effectual fervent prayer of the righteous man availeth much. James 5:16.

Now this pastor was looking at the world through a wide-angle lens. He had the whole community upon his heart. And that illustrates for us a strange love.

✓ III. ILLUSTRATED BY A DARK LINE

This strange love is illustrated here - that those who believe in him should not perish. And there is no verse in all of the Bible that we better love or often quote as I have said. It is so plain that a child can understand it. And God's attitude of love to the world - his free gift of eternal life, and the simple condition of obtaining that life by trusting in Jesus are truly tremendous. But that text has one dark line in it - even though it is a bright picture. The phrase - (should not perish) Reminds us that there is a peril connected with this matter of a strange love. It was not put in here for God to frighten someone. A person sometimes tries to frighten a child by telling him that there is a boogie man that is going to get him. No, but he is talking about those that are going to perish. Now this means to be lost. It does not mean that one is a hardened criminal. Or a well-to-do person. It simply means that one is out of touch with God. And that he does not know how to return to God and the word of God is very plain at this point. That a man is lost.

It is sort of like Daniel Boone that famous man of Kentucky, who lived most of his life in the uncharted wilderness. Once he was asked, (if he were ever lost?) No, he said, once I was badly bewildered for three days."

By his knowledge of wood craft - he found his way back to civilization. Now but in a spiritual realm, there are many who are hopelessly confused and who never make their way to God.

They are bewildered like Daniel Boone. They will never find their way out.

If a man in life's travels - he wants to go to a foreign country - he wants to get him a map and find him some guides that will help him. He will be embarrassed if he does not know the right direction to go in. He will be unable to read all of the map signs. And he will be unable to speak the language. He will not know the lay-outs

of the streets.

Now those who live in God's world knows what this means. Now the same is true as God is talking about those that should not perish. He gave his son that he might save men from such bewilderment and such an aimless life. Now you can lose your way completely. No doubt Daniel Boone lost his way. He may have wandered in circles until he was hungry and exposed. But how tragic it is for someone to lose his way in this world and to be lost. There are people who drink in order to drown their troubles and to get away from life. This is futile - it is like a horse on a treadmill - forever walking and arriving nowhere. Man without God soon finds life is tasteless and profitless.

It is like a child down on the seashore. You have watched children on the beach build them castles of sand. Only to see the tide come in and wash it away. Now you can watch men and women who do not follow God's directions in planning life. They will find that their work is vain. Now God cannot go contrary to his plan and to his purpose because he sent his own son to save that men might not perish.

I read about a couple buying a new automobile and it stalled on a railroad crossing. They looked up - a fast train was coming. They didn't have time to get it started - the man and his wife jumped to safety. The speeding train hit the automobile broadside and ground it into shreds. Worthless junk. Now the automobile's metal and upholstery was still in existence in a sense that you couldn't find all of the pieces. Now in a similar fashion, men are lost. They are not satisfactory to God. They live in a pointless way as the sheep that was lost in the mountains. As the coin that was dropped by the woman. As the boy that was lost in the far country away from the homestead.

To be lost means to be in isolation - away from God. I don't know how to illustrate this exactly but Everett Hale told a story once about a rebel against the United States.

In the early days of this country, the man was brought to Federal court for treason. During the progress of the trial, he cursed the United States. He wished that he might never hear the words again. The judge removed him from the courtroom and when he brought him back - he gave him this unique sentence. And he imposed it upon him. And he told him that he wished that he would never hear the word United States again, so he was going to fix it so that he should never have anyone mention it to him of his native land. Therefore, instead of putting him in jail - he placed him on board of ship, that was leaving the harbor and making a voyage to a foreign land. He had him locked up in a cabin. When the ship came back on its return voyage, just before it reached the home port, each time this man was to be transferred to another boat that was going to a foreign port. So that he could not see the shores of America - confined to a cabin. He was fed well. No body ever talked to him about home. And if a newspaper were given him - it was first censored. All the references to America were removed. No books or parcels of America were ever put in his hands. He was treated with cold and silence. And as far as the sailors were concerned, he might as well have been dead. In this dreadful isolation, he lived out his days. And the story goes, only at the end did he gain touch with his homeland.

Now this story is a faint picture of what happens to a man who refuses and rejects Christ. Little by little he draws away from the Saviour until all consciousness of God leaves him. And God has forever withdrawn from him and from his presence. Even though God is love - a lost man faces an eternity without love. In spite of God's mercy - there can be then no way to pay his penalty of sin. If God is light, man who has rejected this must sit alone in everlasting darkness. God says I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Therefore, this text, this strange love is illustrated by a dark line that you should not perish. And God has put forth his last effort to save you.

Dawson Trotman, the leader of the navigators, had been water skiing. He climbed

into a motor boat to rest. And he exchanged seats with one of the girls in the boat to give her a safer place. Since she could not swim. A few minutes later - both of them were thrown into the lake. Trotman kept the girl's head above the water. Until the boat could return to pick them up. Just as she was taken aboard - he sank. He gave his life to save her. Had he not sacrificed the (last ounce) of his strength, she would certainly would have been drowned. Today she owes her life to a man who did for her what she could not do for herself and was willing to risk all for her safety.

The Bible says that Christ also has suffered for sin. The just for the unjust - that he might bring us to God. I Peter 3:18. That he has taken upon himself the heavy load of sin that we could not lift ourselves. He came to seek and to save that which was lost.

So we have illustrated by man's life - we have illustrated by the wide-angle lens. And we have illustrated by a dark line in the text. There is one last illustration.

✓ IV. ILLUSTRATED BY POWER TO LIFT:

Now our text tells us the main spring of the being of God's love. It is easy to think of God as looking at man in their disobedience and in their rebellion and saying - I'll break them. I'll humble them. I'll bring them to discipline. I'll punish them. And it is easy to think of God as seeking the allegiance of men, in order to lift them by his own power. But the tremendous thing about this text is - that it shows us God not acting for his own sake but for ours.

It was not to satisfy his desire for power that God acted. Or to bring the universe under his heel. It was to satisfy his love. That God is not happy until every wandering child has come home. God does not crush men into submission - but he seeks to win them

by his love.

This is the power that lifts. You see something of the wideth, depth, and height here. It was the world that God so loved. Not the nation. Not the good people. Not only the people who loved him - it was the world. The unloveable and the unlovely. It was the lonely who had no one else to love them. The man who loves God, and the man who never thinks of God. The man who rests in the love of God. The man who may reject or spurn the love of God. All of this is included. As St. Augustine said, God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love.

J. P. Schofield gave some verse - I heard a sweet story, I know it is true,

It took a firm grip on my soul

It told of a Saviour who came to save

And make a broken life whole.

His love won my heart

A love that will never depart

He took sin away and came in to stay

His love won my heart.

I want to be faithful, and loyal, and true

To the love that won my heart.

This strange love has power to lift because it is a perfect love. It is an eternal love. Why the prophet proclaimed, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, so God said. Jer. 31:3. And it is an unchangeable love - having loved his son - which was in the world - he loved him until the end. John 13:1. Now we cannot explain such love. We can talk about it. We can give hints about it. We can talk about our testimony of it. How do you define it. I don't know, you have to talk about how you feel about it.

Love often times knows no bounds. Feels no burdens. Thinks nothing of trouble. Attempts what is above strength. And pleads no excuse of impossibility. This is something of real love that really is of the purest and the deepest affection. And this strange love goes beyond that which is friendly in feeling. Beyond that which is just affection. But it brings strength to the individual.

Professor Drummond in the Changeless Life - an essay, told about a young Scotch girl whose life had been one of fashion until one day all of that was changed and she became serious and earnest and devoted to her Lord. She had a wonderful character from then on. And she wore around her neck a golden locket which no one was ever allowed to open. One day in a moment of unusual confidence, one of her companions was permitted to touch the spring and learn its secret. There was no human photograph. No earthly face. No name. But printed neatly in her own handwriting on a piece of satin ribbon, were these words: "Whom having not seen, I love." And of course, this is strange love. The one altogether lovely. Draws like a magnet. Oh Love that gave thyself for me, help me to live and love like thee. And kindle in this heart of mine - the passion fire of love divine.

An old saint once prayed, enlarge thou me in love. That I might taste how sweet it is to love and to be dissolved. And as it were to bathe myself in thy love - let me sing the song of love. Let me follow thee my beloved. Let my soul spend itself in thy praise. Rejoicing oh love. Let me love thee more than myself - and love myself only for thee. And in thee, all that truly love thee as the law of love commandeth, shining out from thyself.

There is a story that is powerful concerning love that lifts. Mauchman Nee, he was a scholar without compare. And in the history of China, he was something marvelous as he translated many textbooks that have been used across China. This was in his heart - a great spirit. And it is difficult to imagine the power of Christ's love

their way to us tonight. As a Communist force began to move down upon China, word ran ahead of their approach. Because of the prominence of the Christian leader, Mauchman was warned to flee from his homeland. He was surely to be the target of the Communists. They would not tolerate his outspoken Christian beliefs. He had ample opportunity to get out of China. However, he held on to the power of love. God had called him and bound him to China - and there he would stay. He could do nothing else but remain in China.

The Communists moved into the providence where he lived. They watched him with caution and concern. Later he was arrested as one too dangerous, as one too dangerous to be loose in the Communists society. Even then he continued to minister to his beloved China, by writing messages out of prison. When writing materials were taken from him, he sent messages out carefully memorized by his messengers. Many times these messengers came out from the Communists guards. They had been saved by the witness of his living testimony, to the grace of God. All over China these messages were distributed in leaflet form. Chinese Christians carefully waited for his messages. Even from prison - he was the leading Christian in the movement of the mainland of China.

The Communists tried every way short of death to stop him. They did not want to kill him because this would be a martyr and thus thrust this Christian movement ahead. Still the messages would come out and they seemed to have no way of stopping them. In final desperation, they brought him out to the city square for public display. There they severed his arms at the elbows. It is reported that when the arms were cut and lay helpless upon the ground, that Nee held those bleeding limbs up toward Heaven and exclaimed - Thank God for the marks of the cross. He was held by the power of love. This strange love that would not let him go.

Now this supreme example of the compulsion of love is seen in our text - in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These precious words of God declare that we ought to be saying, God, we are not ashamed to be called by thy name. We ought to praise God for the claims of his love. Which hold us in its power until his kingdom - the kingdom of our Lord shall be realized upon this earth.

Augustine - "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love."