Experiencing the Love of God

 All of us desire to be loved and the ultimate love we can receive is the love of God. God represents the definition of love. Love is evident in everything God created. The best example of God’s love comes in the form of the Word. In the gospel of John 14:21 says, “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.” Love is self-giving, self-sacrificial and self-denial. God demonstrated this love in John 3:16, “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whomsoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.” God keeps us on his mind at all times. Even in God’s anger, His love is still reflected and given to us. The nature of God reflects love toward humanity and conveys the will of God for his children.

 If we define the love of God in the Greek translation it would be agape meaning unconditional love. Love that keeps on giving. God’s love extends past the moments of anger, disappointment, and frustration. His love continues in the midst of our sins, infirmities and transgressions. Our Father’s love surrounds us and keeps us in the hollow of His hands. God’s love doesn’t require being loved in return, individuals might be unresponsive to the love shown, unkind and unworthy. Yet, His love isn’t contingent on the love we give. Many of us struggle to love anyone unconditionally, the way that God loves us. What God wants us to do is to love him the best way we can and to recognize his love is everlasting. Passionate, eternal and always giving describes some of the ways God expresses his love for us. God consistently expresses and demonstrates this love for others.

 In the Romans 8:35-39 reads as such, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This passage speaks about the fact and reality that there is nothing we can do or anyone else can do to separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. In essence, we need to rest assure that God’s love is truly unconditional and everlasting.

 As we read in I John 3:1a “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!” Since God’s love is the greatest force in the world, we should learn more about its working. The first aspect of the love of God, we must understand the challenge of love. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?...shall tribulation, or distress…or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35) As a people of God we are subject to disappointment, as are all humans. God’s love makes the difference in outlook, strength and endurance. True story is told about how a pastor was sitting next to a dying friend in a hospital bed.  The man in the bed had terminal lung cancer and was just told he had only months to live.  The pastor was trying to comfort his friend by going on about the generosity of God through Jesus Christ.  The man stopped him and said, "Pastor, no offense but I don't buy it.  I've been a struggling alcoholic my whole life.  My wife left me, my daughter wants nothing to do with me, and now I've just been told that I only have months to live.  How can you say that God is generous?"

That pastor asked the man, "Can I tell you a story from Acts chapter 2?"

The man replied, "Thanks but I'm really not in the mood for more Bible verses."

The pastor said, "You asked how I can say that God is generous.  Can I have just a minute to tell you why I believe with all my heart that He is, even to you?"

"Ok" the man said.

The pastor opened his Bible and began to give an answer to the man's question.  "In Acts chapter 2 the disciples are in the temple courts on the day of Pentecost.  They begin to speak in different languages through the Holy Spirit.  The crowd thinks they are drunk but Peter speaks over everyone and says, 'These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:"

The man interrupted, "You can still be drunk at nine in the morning, believe me I know."

Laughing the pastor says, "Well, in this case they weren't drunk."  He continued, "Peter went on to explain to the crowd using the Old Testament Scriptures how Jesus was in fact the promised savior.  Peter ends his sermon with these words from verse 36, 'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.'  Now when Peter says, 'whom you crucified', he means, 'whom **YOU**crucified.'  These were probably many of the very same people who yelled, 'Crucify Him' to Pilot on Good Friday.  Verse 37 says, 'When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?"

The man asked, "What does that mean? Cut to the heart?"

The pastor answered, "It means that they we overcome with so much guilt and remorse that it cut them to their core."

The man said, "I know that feeling."

The pastor went on, "The most amazing thing is how Peter responds.  He doesn't say to them, 'Too bad you blew it.'  He doesn't say to them, 'You murdered the Son of God and you are going to get what's coming to you.'  Instead Peter replied, **'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'**  They killed God's Son and He offers them forgiveness and the gift of eternal life. That's God’s overwhelming generosity.

 The man asked, “Great for them but what does that have to do with me?”

The pastor asked the man, “Can I be blunt?”

The man said, “I don’t have time for beating around the bush.”

“My friend, I love you, but you have made a mess of your life,” the pastor said.  “You messed up your relationship with your wife, your daughter and you drank and smoked yourself into an early grave.  You stopped going to church years ago and turned your back on God.  But now that you are looking at only a few months to live, God has a gift for you.  Instead of turning His back on you, He gives you forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ.”

The man was quiet for a long moment and finally said, “I guess that’s pretty generous.”

The pastor began praying for his friend and giving thanks for God’s generosity and grace.  A few months later, when the man was taking his final breaths, he was surrounded by his pastor, friends, his ex-wife and his daughter.  They were all there to express their love for him and he died a rich man.  We all need to change our outlook and perspective about life based on the love of God. Christians can accept life’s challenges with the assurance that God never fails. He is wisdom. He is power. He is love.

 We must remember the conquest of love, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:27). Christians can go down in defeat because they try to make it on their own strength when trouble, trial, and testing strike. They fail to depend on God’s love. But God’s love knows no defeat. No mountain is too steep, no valley too deep. “We are more than conquerors through him that loved us” (Romans 8:37). The apostle Paul in Romans 8:38 was “persuaded that neither death, nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,”. Paul was confident in God’s love and possessed a confidence of love. He knew that it would endure through any and every situation. We also must be confident in God’s love. Our heavenly Father has revealed His great love for us through Jesus Christ.

 Finally, let’s reflect on the constancy of love as a part of experiencing the love of God. Paul says, “neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:39) People make excuses for lack of faith, hope and love. God’s love is constant and sure always. How marvelous is the assurance that there is absolutely nothing that can come between us and the love of God unless we ourselves allow it?

 Let’s experience the love of God by understanding there is a challenge to love, a conquest of love, the confidence of love and the constancy of love in the Romans 8:35-39 passage. God’s love is never ending and eternal. Celebrate his love everyday by obeying and seeking to do the will of God. God loves you so very much.

Amen