

God's All Knowing Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 January 2017

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 00] Thanks, Ian, for reading. We'll just refer to that parable right at the end of our little time of meditation here now. You'll hopefully have a card that was inside the notice sheet that we'll be working through together as we think about this theme of God's all-knowing love.

Let me pray for us as we do that together. Father God, we do praise you for your loving character. And we know that our understanding of that is so flawed.

So we ask this evening that you will fill this space with this time that we have, this opportunity we have, with your wisdom and your word.

And give us ears to hear that we might more fully grasp the depths of your love for us and respond rightly to you. In Jesus' name, amen.

So this is the third in a mini-series. Before Christmas, we had a couple of Sunday evenings where we looked at this issue of the love of God and thought about how God is love is one of the most famous statements in the Bible.

[1 : 08] It's a wonderful thing that God is defined as love. But the problem can be, especially if you became a Christian later in life, after your childhood, that when we hear God is love, we take understandings and experiences of human love and we transfer them onto God.

So we allow our definition, we allow our kind of human love to define love and think, well, God must be exactly like that. David Wells says this.

He starts with 1 John chapter 4, verses 8 to 10, just on the screen there. Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us.

He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

So that's John telling us what love is when he says God is love. But David Wells says this. John's sentence to finding love would have been completed quite differently in the West today. In this is love, many would say, that God is there for us when we need him.

[2 : 15] He is there for what we need from him. He is loving that he gives inward comfort and makes us feel better about ourselves. He is loving that he makes us happy, that he gives us a sense of fulfillment, that he gives us stuff, that he heals us, that he does everything to encourage us each and every day.

See, doesn't that fit exactly with what popular culture would tell us that love is? I was thinking about this song, Give Me Your Love, by Sigala, that I kept hearing towards the end of last year, where the words, so pop song, where the words about love were like this.

I may be selfish, but I'll take your pain. When you get weak, I'll make you strong again. When all is lost, I will comfort you. So give me your love, I need it. Give me your heart, I'm bleeding.

Give me your love, I need it. So love is about meeting each other's needs by giving strength and comfort to one another. So if we transfer those human experiences of love onto God, do you see how kind of unnerving that could be?

We think, well, God is love, but what if his love changes? Because people change. What if his love for me is strong today, but wanes in a few years' time?

[3 : 27] What if I fail to please him? If I'm feeling less loving towards God, will he feel less loving towards me? But thankfully, when we look at the Bible and what it says as it defines love, God, of course, being the first love in eternity, we find out that God isn't just a bigger version of us.

That's part of the problem. When we think of God, we often think of this kind of white-bearded human in the sky who's like us, only a bit bigger to have created everything. He's like a sort of big, friendly giant.

The true God is completely different to that and beyond our imaginings. And that makes his love very different and wonderfully different from human love. So tonight, three questions.

First one is, what does God know? What does God know? And the answer, of course, is absolutely everything. His knowledge is worth reflecting on, though.

It's a detailed knowledge. That is, he knows the smallest, tiniest details about every one of us. Matthew chapter 10, Jesus says, Even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

[4 : 34] So nothing escapes his notice about you. His knowledge is a timeless knowledge. See, even when someone knows you very well, in human terms, they can't predict what we'll be like in the future because there are so many variables.

They don't know how you'll react. They don't know what will happen to you, whether you'll hit illness or tragedy and how you'd react to that or something very fortuitous might happen to you. How would you respond? But God knows all of that.

So in Psalm 139, the psalmist writes, All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. He's written them out. He knows how we'll be forever.

He also has a knowledge of us that's not just, it goes beyond the thin veneer that other people see and know. So Proverbs 21 verse 1, A knowledge of our true selves.

Proverbs 21 says this, In the Lord's hand, the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him. So that's the Lord at work in the king's heart, not just looking at what the king does, or what anybody does, the king's representative there.

[5 : 43] But God sees the heart. He knows what's going on on the inside. He can even direct what's happening on the inside. It's a knowledge of our true selves. His knowledge is a sovereign knowledge.

That's clear in that proverb. But also in Deuteronomy 4, let's read that. That's again on the screen. This was from, sorry, not from Deuteronomy, from Daniel.

This is from Daniel when Nebuchadnezzar, the great king realizes that God is the great king. And he says this about God. His dominion is an eternal dominion. His kingdom endures from generation to generation.

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him, what have you done?

He has a sovereign knowledge. He directs everything. It's worth comparing that again with human knowledge. There's times when I will promise my children on the way home, you know, when we get home, we'll do this or we'll do that.

[6 : 48] But I can't guarantee it because then things will happen. We'll get stuck in traffic and things will run late or there'll be some kind of meltdown from one of the kids that means we have to change the plans.

So when I say we'll do that when we get home, I mean as long as other things don't intervene. When God says, I will do that, he means I'll do it because he's sovereign and nothing can direct his hand.

Nothing ever surprises him. It's also, his knowledge is an exhaustive knowledge and that means he knows our very depths. He knows the depths of our thoughts, our anguish, our troubles.

He also knows the depths of our sin. Sin that we'd rather nobody knew about, perhaps sin nobody else knows about. In Psalm 51 verse 3, David, after great sin with Bathsheba, committing adultery and then murder, he says, For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me.

So David there, fully aware of his own sin and knowing God knows all of that. But also, God knows sin within us that we have no idea about.

[7 : 56] So in Psalm 19, the writer says, But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. So there is a songwriter recognizing that there are sinful depths to our heart that we ourselves are not even aware of.

And God knows the depths of it. Now what compounds that problem for us with God is of course that his knowledge isn't just knowledge like we would acquire of somebody.

It's a holy knowledge. The Bible describes him at the end of Hebrews as a consuming fire, meaning that nothing impure can stand before God.

In Isaiah chapter 6, this happens whenever somebody sees God's glory. They are convicted deeply of their creatureliness and their unworthiness. So in Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah gets this incredible vision of the Lord all these angels around him.

And it says, Even the train of his robe filled the temple. So the biggest thing that God's people had to represent God, just the little train of God's robe filled it in Isaiah's vision.

[9 : 07] How does Isaiah respond? He says, Woe is me. When Peter, on the fishing boat with Jesus, sees the miraculous catch of fish and realizes there's something divine here, he says to Jesus, Depart from me, Lord, for I'm a sinful man.

We looked at this over Christmas at the carol service a few weeks back, that in Luke chapter 2, when the shepherds see the angels, they're terrified. Well, you know, angels are awesome beings, but they're also terrified because the angels represent God.

And in terms of seeing God's glory shining all around them, the shepherds are terrified because they're ordinary sinful creatures. Not fearful that God is far away, but suddenly fearful that God's near them.

So how should we expect God to react to all of that that he knows? If he knows all of that about us, I've got a quote here from the Gary Williams book that I've been using to prepare these, His Love Endures Forever.

Gary Williams said this, If we truly knew each other, it would be very hard for us to love each other. If we truly knew ourselves, it would be very hard for us to go on.

[10 : 23] So often we even think we're acting out of the right motives. We justify our own actions to ourselves. And then later looking back, we know that we were acting selfishly or wrongly.

There is so much about one another, just thinking about our own private lives, that if we really knew what was going on, behind the veneer of public respectability, it would be very hard for us to love each other.

And if we truly knew ourselves, it would be very hard for us to go on. So sometimes when I have done something wrong, even when I apologize for that, one thing that I'm quite good at doing is explaining to the person who I'm apologizing to at the same time why I did it.

Because it's as though I'm thinking, if only you understood quite what I meant by that, you wouldn't think I was quite such a bad person. And yet, the Bible warns us in terms of saying the heart is deceitful above all things, that actually, that's only true on the surface level.

And on a deeper level, we're much more selfish and proud and greedy than we ever really give ourselves credit for. So God sees what's really going on in our hearts and he sees what gets hidden from everybody else, the things that we do in darkness, the things that perhaps nobody else knows that we say and think and do.

[11 : 47] He sees them and he's holy. I don't know whether you're into films about gangsters, but in terms of films about the mafia or about, you know, people in organized crime, there is often, in that kind of genre of film, a subplot in lots and lots of them and it's about the wife of the gangster.

So it's all about the kind of, this quite respectable lady who has a romantic relationship with a guy and has no idea that he's a terrible criminal and then there's this subplot about how do they react, how does she react as her knowledge grows of how awful this man is that she's married.

So in The Godfather Part 2, Michael Corleone meets this lady, Kate, and she is a classic example of this. She's the daughter of a Baptist minister. They meet at Dartmouth College.

She's never met an Italian before. She thinks he's nice and exotic and they go to his sister's wedding together and they sit separately. That's a picture of them at the wedding. They sit separately from his family.

She's amazed by the money that this family have made by being good, honest Americans, living out the American dream. And then she starts to get a bit worried by the connections that seem to be going on that Michael Corleone at his sister's wedding, this pop star, turns up to sing and she thinks, well, how did he get here?

[13 : 08] And then she finds out that Michael's father helped him somehow and it sounds a bit dodgy. And then she starts to realize that there is this criminal going on in Michael's family. Eventually, though, she agrees to marry Michael Corleone as long as he promises, what he does is he promises that the Corleone family will be legitimate within five years.

They'll get rid of all their dodgy affairs. So they get married and they have two children and then Michael's father dies and when he's at the baptism of one of their kids, Michael, he orchestrates, very famous scene, the killing of the leaders of the five other kind of mafia families in New York.

and in front of her a little bit later, he gets confronted by one of the family members who the father's been killed and he denies it all but she realizes over time what's going on that actually Michael is just like his father and will never really leave the criminal underworld.

And so you watch this woman kind of, her life has fallen apart. She's got no idea what to do. She goes to mass every day to pray for her husband and it's as though she kind of thinks deep down, Michael, there are things about him that are nice because he's a good family man and he wants to take care of me and the children but she's so torn because what he does to other people is so awful and violent and then eventually she realizes that her children will get involved in the same criminal activity and she decides to leave him.

But you see this dilemma going on because what's happened is long before she leaves him her love for him has disappeared. She just wonders whether to stay with him because it's safer and better for the kids but really she's stopped loving him because she's got to know him better.

[14 : 56] And that's the genre, that's what the genre is exploring. As you get to know somebody better and you realize what they're really like if they are relatively worse than you do you stop loving them? And that's just when someone is a relatively good person.

What we're dealing with is the living God knowing everything about us and he is perfect. So how does God respond to all this knowledge of us?

Well that's our second question. How does God respond? And the answer is with surprising compassion. Psalm 78 describes this really well about God's mercy towards Israel his people in the Old Testament before Jesus came.

Let me read it it's on the go to it on the screen. They remembered that God was their rock that God most high was their redeemer but then they would flatter him with their mouths lying to him with their tongues their hearts were not loyal to him they were not faithful to his covenant yet he was merciful he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath he remembered that they were but flesh a passing breeze that does not return.

Psalm 103 verses 13 and 14 says something similar for us as a father has compassion on his children so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him for he knows how we are formed he remembers that we are dust.

[16 : 32] It's the very opposite of what we would expect if we never heard it before if you think about it because of what we are like if we ourselves are not struggling with some area of wrongdoing if in a particular area of life we have not fallen we are kind of relatively good we find it very difficult not to be very self righteous so if you are somebody who gets angry too often but you never get drunk you tend to find that if you meet someone else who gets angry a lot you have sympathy for it because that's what you are like but when you meet someone who gets drunk a lot you feel really self righteous and look down on them and find it hard to connect with them when we are good at something find it harder to have sympathy for those who are not good in that way and yet here is God morally perfect and it's as though the more he knows about us the more his compassion is stirred towards us and that is true for every human being that he is compassionate

Psalm 105 verse 9 he has compassion on all that he has made in Matthew 5 when Jesus calls us to love our enemies he says that God makes the sun rise on the evil and on the good he sends rain on the just and on the unjust Jesus himself when the rich young man came to him and went away and for all we can tell the rich young man never repented but we're told Jesus loved him Jesus wept over Jerusalem even as he warned the city because he knew that it wasn't going to turn to him it was condemned by God he wept for it universal compassion and that wells up in God a deep forgiving love for everyone who will turn to Jesus Christ and put their faith in him we hear again and again in the bible that God's love for his people is a long suffering love in Exodus 34 that he is slow to anger in Acts 13 it says that he put up with his people for 40 years in the wilderness in fact you could sum up this amazing angle perspective on God's love for us by saying this he knows us and yet he still wants to know us know us you see the bible uses the term knowing in two ways one is factual knowledge and the other is relational knowledge and God knows us factually he knows everything about us and wonderfully he still wants to know us relationally to have a friendship with us where he is our

God and we are his people even though to make that happen was so costly to him so in Isaiah chapter six that I referred to earlier where Isaiah had that great vision of the temple being filled by the hem of the robe of God he says war to me I am ruined for I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the king the lord almighty then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand which he had taken with tongs from the altar with it he touched my mouth and said see this has touched your lips your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for so the same one who brings out in Isaiah that conviction of sin and condemnation is the one who provides atonement for sins supremely we know from Jesus dying on the cross for us so what should that mean for us we've heard how God responds to knowing us so fully and deeply with such full and deep and abiding love love well we're going to think about that with a few questions on the screen just for personal reflection and the first thing is that it's a love that should change us because we can rest in the peace and security of knowing that we have nothing that we need to fear

God would find out about us that he doesn't already know and if you're a Christian he loves you anyway and that love will not be taken away we're sinning every second of every day in ways that will never get to the bottom of ourselves that is known by the just judge of the universe and yet he is a compassionate and good father who has steadfast love for us so just a couple of questions on the screen to think through for yourself and then turn to prayer and then I'll come back again for a couple of minutes so God's all-knowing love for us is something that can change us as it gives us security and peace and joy but it should also inspire us and we had our Bible reading from that story Jesus told of a servant who's forgiven a great debt by the king a huge debt that he could never repay and then he goes out and meets a fellow servant who owes him a small amount of money and he won't wipe the debt clean and it's really ugly when Jesus tells that story and yet how often are we guilty of failing to forgive people even when they've said sorry forgetting what

God has forgiven us I remember having a situation where there was a relational breakdown in a church I was in between a few people and it wasn't that the people who wronged one another weren't saying sorry it was that they couldn't forgive one another and an experienced minister was visiting and I was talking the situation through with them and he said to me so many problems in church life are caused not by sin but by self righteousness by actually being unable to forgive because people feel too self righteous getting angry at other people's sin because we've lost sight of our own so two questions on the next screen for us to reflect on about who we might look down upon and reflecting on our own need for forgiveness and then I'll lead us in a prayer the one on the other side of the cards in a couple of minutes let me lead us in this prayer

[23 : 03] I'll read it for us from the cards heavenly father I praise you for your perfect knowledge of all things you know them because you planned them and created them you know me inside out every hair on my head every one of my days you know me better than I know myself I tremble to think that you know my sins when I think of the ways in which I've sinned I'm horrified but I know that I'm not as horrified as I should be because I do not see the extent of my guilt clearly you see my sins for what they are measured against your holiness that you alone know perfectly you burn against my sins with holy zeal yet in your grace you look on me with pity and patience you know that I am flesh wind and dust you know my frame and are kind to me you know me for what I am and yet you still will to know me intimately as your child Lord Jesus you are the ruin of sinners who come into your presence unforgiven and yet you do not break a bruised reed or quench a smouldering wick you hate sin and sinners yet you laid down your life to forgive me you saw me bound by Satan and you set me free by binding him

Holy Spirit you are the Lord and search the depths of God you are symbolized by purifying fire and an innocent dove you are grieved by all evil and yet you have come to live in me making my body a temple in which you dwell Lord God make me more like you forgive me when I treat others with a harshness that you have spared me help me to show mercy to others as you have shown mercy to me in your name Amen