

# Love 1

*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: 20 January 2013

Preacher: Neil MacMillan

[ 0 : 00 ] We are going to read now in the New Testament from the Gospel of Luke chapter 10 verse 25. So verse 25, Luke chapter 10, it's page 1042.

So page 1042, the Gospel of Luke, the 10th chapter, verse 25. So let us hear, for this is God's word.

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. He asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life? What is written in the law? He replied, how do you read it?

He answered, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind. And love your neighbour as yourself.

You have answered correctly, Jesus replied, do this and you will live. But he wanted to justify himself so he asked Jesus, and who is my neighbour?

[ 1 : 09 ] In reply Jesus said, a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road and when he saw the man he passed by on the other side. So to a Levite when he came to the place and saw him passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was and when he saw him he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds pouring on oil and wine.

Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper.

Look after him he said, and when I return I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have. Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?

[ 2 : 10 ] The expert in the law replied, the one who had mercy on him. Jesus told him, go and do likewise. Amen.

So this morning we're going to focus on the conversation between Jesus and this man. And especially what we read there about the first and the greatest of all God's commands.

Which is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind. So one of the things that's been in the news this week quite a lot is the story of Lance Armstrong.

And Lance Armstrong was a legendary figure for anybody who was interested in sport or cycling. Because he was the greatest road cyclist apparently that ever lived.

He won seven Tour de France's in a row. Now the Tour de France is a race that lasts for 21 days. And in those 21 days you have to cycle something like 2,200 miles.

[ 3 : 31 ] You cycle up some of the highest mountains in Europe and so a lot of the time you're cycling at altitude which makes it all more difficult. So to win that race is an incredible achievement. To win it seven times is unbelievable.

And as it turned out of course it was unbelievable. Those of us who always thought that Lance had a little bit of an edge and that his comeback story from suffering cancer well when we thought it was too good to be true.

And I don't know if you've watched any of the TV clips of him and Oprah this week but it is painful. And one of the worst things about it of course is that many people knew about his cheating and suspected it and accused him about it.

And when people tried to raise the issue to open up the question of whether or not he was doping to win all these races what he did was he sued them.

And he destroyed, absolutely destroyed the careers of some of the people around him. He was so determined to cover up the lie and to present what he wanted to be seen as the truth that he would do anything in order to suppress the truth and live the lie.

[ 5 : 02 ] No matter the cost to himself, to his family or to others. And in that way a lot of us often are there are truths that we don't want to face.

So I was hearing this week about a man called Sir John Maddox and Sir John Maddox was an eminent scientist who for many years edited the science journal Nature.

And in 1989 Sir John Maddox wrote in Nature, this is what he wrote. The idea of a beginning is thoroughly unacceptable because it implies an ultimate origin of our world and gives creationists ample justification for their beliefs.

So he's a convinced atheist and he's writing about the Big Bang and how the Big Bang suggests a beginning point for the universe and he says that idea of a beginning is thoroughly unacceptable because it implies an ultimate origin of our world and gives creationists ample justification for their beliefs.

So we've got another case of a person who wants to choose the truths that he will believe and when the truth doesn't seem to suit his belief he says well that's just unacceptable.

[ 6 : 32 ] And so once Armstrong denied the truth, John Maddox chose the truth as it suited him and that all fits with what God tells us in the book of Romans that there is something in us that often wants to suppress truth.

And we read that in Romans chapter 1 verse 19, 18 and 19, that men suppress the truth by their wickedness since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them.

And so often we choose to suppress the truth that we know about God and what that suggests to us is this, that often we don't believe in God simply because we don't want to believe in God.

And we don't believe in God because we don't want to love God. So if God is commanding us to love him then our rebellious hearts often say back to God, I'm not going to love you.

And because of that they suppress the truth about God. So the idea that we want to look at for the next while is just this idea, this call that we've got to love God.

[ 8 : 01 ] And what I want to say about it is this, that to love God is both our greatest challenge but also our greatest joy. So to love God is our greatest challenge but also our greatest joy.

Now the context of the passage of course is that a theologian, an expert in theology has come to speak with Jesus and he asks some kind of spiritual question which is what must I do to inherit eternal life.

And then Jesus responds by pointing him to the Old Testament and to the five books of the Pentateuch and he says what is written in the law? How do you read things there?

And the man answers, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with your soul, with your strength, with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself. If he gives the right answer, Jesus endorses and commends his answer.

And then what Jesus says is do this and you will live. So love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your strength and with all your soul and with all of your mind.

[ 9 : 20 ] And love your neighbour as yourself. If you do that you will live. And so you see that immediately what Jesus is doing is he's throwing down to this man into us a challenge that is absolutely and completely impossible.

It's like sort of handing one of you a bike on the way out of church and saying right, off you go, cycle around France 21 days, 100 miles a day, come back.

You know you're not going to be able to even cycle the first 100 miles more than likely. And so when Jesus says love me with your whole being, with everything that you are and with everything that you've got, then certainly it's very obvious to me that I fail to do that every single day.

And my failure to love God is spectacular. It's not like it's a close run thing. It's much more that I come disastrously short of what God is asking for here.

And so in some ways this might feel like a bit of a hard blow and a low blow from Jesus. He's saying if you do this you'll live, but the minute we look at it we think I can't do this. So how can I live?

[ 10 : 44 ] And we're kind of left with this kind of quandary. And what does the man that Jesus is speaking to do with this quandary?

Well he replies to Jesus in verse 29 of the passage. We read, he wanted to justify himself and so he asked Jesus who is my neighbour.

So he finds himself in this quandary where he knows that he far's so far short of loving God.

And so what does he do? Well he tries to sort of divert attention and find some way of looking good. And so that's what the passage is saying. He tried to justify himself.

He's trying to make himself look good. He's trying to make himself look better, which of course is what we all try to do when we find ourselves coming short in some way.

[ 11 : 44 ] We try to make some kind of recovery and to make ourselves look better. And that kind of leads us to the heart of the problem between this man and Jesus, between ourselves and Jesus.

Because his desire to make himself look good in this situation reveals that our problem, our root problem in loving God is that we love ourselves more than we love him.

Why do we fail to love God? Because our self-love is so powerful and so strong. Instead of caring about God's reputation and God's glory, this man is worrying about his reputation, his glory.

And so often we are far more concerned about our own comfort, our own reputation, our own happiness, our own pleasure, our own needs than we are with God and his glory and loving him as he's asked us to.

So the problem that this passage points out for us here is this, that the affections of our heart are directed inwards rather than upwards towards God.

[ 13 : 06 ] And so as we sort of look at the challenge and we say, well, this is an impossible challenge. Why is it such an impossible challenge? Well, it is simply because we love ourselves more than we love God.

And what that does, of course, is it kind of searches out the question, well, do I love God at all? Do I love God in any way? And it also kind of highlights our lostness that we find it so hard to love the God who gave us life.

When we say that what lies underneath our unbelief is an unwillingness to love God as he deserves to be loved.

So loving God seems like an impossible challenge, but I secondly want to just point out that loving God is a worthy challenge. In other words, loving God is a worthy challenge means God is worth loving.

[ 14 : 25 ] And God is worth loving because God himself is love. Now, I don't know what kind of ideas you have about God or who God is or what God's like.

I saw a clip this week of somebody interviewing Richard Dawkins and in that interview, Dawkins was reading a passage from his book, *The God Delusion*.

And the way Dawkins imagines God or understands is just that God is this kind of spiteful, vengeful, sadistic, harsh, cruel, tyrant.

And so Dawkins kind of creates for himself a picture of God, again, that is convenient for the way that Dawkins wants to arrange his beliefs.

But what we want to do is just have a look or derive our ideas of God from the Bible. What does God tell us about himself in the Bible?

[ 15 : 33 ] And when we read what God tells us of himself in the Bible, then one of the things that comes across most clearly is that God is triune.

He is one God in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And that's an important thing for us to grasp because it helps us to understand that within God himself there is community.

And within the community of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, what's at the heart of that community? Well, we're told that the heart of the divine community is love.

God is love. So if God is eternal, if God has always existed, we're not imagining God to sort of have lived a very lonely, isolated existence through all eternity until creation.

We know that for all eternity God has lived in the dance of love, as some people like to put it. He's spent eternity in rejoicing in the loving relationships of the Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, delighting in each other and loving each other perfectly.

[ 16 : 55 ] So within God there is a perfection of love, a joy of love that's hard for us to grasp. And I don't know if you've ever sort of had any truly sort of sublime moments in your life, just moments that took your breath away and filled you with wonder and delight in the world around you.

But, you know, we get moments like that sometimes where we're standing at the edge of the ocean watching the sun setting into the sea. And, you know, you're just alive to the wonder and the beauty of the world around you.

And you think, man, I need to take a picture and show this to somebody so they can see the amazing sunset that I have just experienced. So every year we go on holiday to Arden Muckin

Point, which is the most westerly point of the British mainland.

And we have a caravan there on the beach looking out over Rum, Egg and Muck. A Scotsman's breakfast as it's sometimes called. Three beautiful islands and we can watch the sun sinking into the Atlantic in the evenings.

And we all get out our iPhones and start like taking lots of shots to show other people or put on Twitter or just to remind ourselves how beautiful is this.

[18:17] How wonderful to be part of this. Now, that's the way God is with His love. Within the fountain of love, within the super abundance of love that we find in the Trinity, there is this great desire to share that love and to let others experience the glory and the goodness of God.

And so God creates a world with which He can share His love. He creates you, what for, so that you can participate in the love of the divine Godhead, the Trinity.

So let's just move because you all look absolutely frozen. So let's move your fingers at least and turn the pages of your Bible to 1 John 1.

So 1 John 1. And this is how John describes what's going on or what I've been trying to describe. So 1 John 1, verse 3, tells us this, we proclaim to you what we've seen and heard about Jesus Christ, so that you also may have fellowship with us.

[19:26] And our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. So that's just a reflection of what I'm saying. Our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son, Jesus Christ.

We write this to make your and our joy complete. So how do we find complete, full joy in life? We find it by sharing in the love of the fellowship of the Godhead.

And so that's what you're made for. That's what's worth living for. It's worth living a life of loving God because God created you to know and enjoy His love.

And so to choose not to love God, to try and convince yourself that this God isn't worth loving is to miss out on what you were made for. I don't know if you've been watching the documentary Africa. I've only seen a short clip, but it was the best clip, I think, because it was the desert giraffes headbutting each other and having a square go. And it was absolutely amazing watching these two giraffes with their long necks, swinging their necks around and beating each other.

[20:39] And then one falls over and then the other one just collapses completely. It's a really dramatic bit of film. So Africa reminds us of just the amazing beauty and majesty of so many of the creatures that God has made.

But it's one of the reasons I don't like zoos very much. And so whenever I go to Edinburgh Zoo, which isn't that often, I always kind of, you know, it's a bit creepy. So watching these amazing animals being walked up and caged.

My favourite animal at Edinburgh Zoo is a tiger, and I just feel so sorry to see that magnificent creature caged and sort of in this little enclosure.

And, you know, it seems to have been robbed of its dignity and its majesty and it seems to be diminished as a creature by its captivity.

Now that's a life without the love of God. You lose your dignity. You lose your majesty and you are diminished as a human being.

[21:49] You're living in the little cage that you've made for yourself called self-love. I am my own God. And by choosing to live in this little cage, you are confining your life to the narrowest spectrum, the narrowest margins.

And you're missing out on the majesty, the glory of what you were made for. You are unfree. You are unfulfilled. You're captured by your own sinful desires and your own sinful thoughts.

And so what happens, well, Jesus Christ comes along, of course, to set us free. So it's not a good thing not to love God. You may feel proud that you don't love God.

I did it my way. You may feel indifferent about the fact that you don't love God. But I'm telling you, please, it should be a matter of regret to you.

Because you've been given a great life to live. And you are absolutely losing out on what it means to live in the image of God in this world.

[23:17] I'm going to read a verse from the Psalms to you that just speaks of the goodness of knowing God. It's from the end of Psalm 16.

You have made known to me the path of life. You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasure at your right hand.

Last thing then, very briefly, how can we love God? Well, later in the letter of 1 John, which we read from a few moments ago, John says this.

He says, we love God because he first loved us. So God's given us an impossible challenge. If you love me with your whole being, if you love your neighbour as yourself, you will live forever.

You will have eternal life. That's an impossible challenge, but it's a worthy challenge because God is worth loving. To love God is to enter into the happiness and the fullness of love.

[ 24 : 24 ] So how can we love God? Well, we can only love God by seeing first how much God loves us. That's the key that unlocks the cage of self-love.

That's the key that will set you free to live a new kind of life. So we need Jesus to show us the love of God so that that can unlock the cage for us.

Now, how does Jesus show us the love of God? Well, as we read through one of the Gospels, for instance, we're not just reading a random collection of stories.

If we go through Luke's Gospel, we see a carefully constructed narrative. And what we're being doing is we're being shown what is God like. And we're being shown that through His Son, Jesus Christ.

And we're showing the compassion, the kindness, the friendship, the love, the warmth, the goodness, the truthfulness, the love and passion for justice and purity and truth that there is in Jesus Christ.

[ 25 : 30 ] And we see here is someone worth loving when we see the goodness and the beauty of the life of Jesus. But of course, the Gospel narrative is always moving in a very kind of purposeful direction.

It's the Gospel story is taking us somewhere. And where does the Gospel story take us? Well, it takes us to a hillside outside Jerusalem called Golgotha or Calvary, because these Gospel stories, they're all moving towards the point, the great drama of the death of Jesus Christ.

Now, if the Gospel narratives are there to show us the love of God, then it's at the cross that the love of God is most clearly displayed.

It's there in the ugliest of places, the place of crucifixion, that God's love for people like us shines out most clearly.

When we see Jesus unjustly condemned, when we see Jesus punched, spat on, mocked and laughed at, when we see Jesus taken out and crucified, when we hear Jesus crying out and despair, my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

[ 27 : 02 ] When we see Jesus giving up his life today, then what's been open for us is the greatest act of grace and self-sacrifice.

Here is God's Son, holy, sinless, perfect, being brutalized and broken, not for what He's done, but for what we've done.

And what that does then is it causes us to ask, why, why the cross, why the suffering of Jesus, why did God let His Son die in this way, why did God give His Son to death in this way?

One of the reasons is because God wanted to write it clearly in the wounds of Christ, I love you.

This is how God demonstrates His love to us, Paul writes in the Book of Romans, Christ died for us while we are still sinners. Now if God loves you this way in this much, then surely this God is worth loving.

[ 28 : 41 ] And if God has paid the price for your sin, for your rebellion, for your lack of love in His death, then you think surely, what's the right response?

Is it even the right response to love Him back? And so what does the cross do?

Well, when we look into the suffering of Jesus at the cross, what it does is it opens our eyes and then it breaks our hearts, because it's my sin that nails Jesus to the tree.

It's our sin that means that God's Son is being broken.

And so what does that bring? Well, that brings repentance. Repentance is a turning away from one thing to another. And in the Christian vocabulary, repentance means turning away from our sin, from embracing sin and our self-love, turning from that to embrace Christ and love Him.

[ 30 : 14 ] What causes us to turn away from sin? What causes us to turn away from sin is when we see the harm that sin does, and not just the harm that it does to us, but especially the harm that it has caused to Christ.

That's what true repentance is. It is to grieve over our sin, because our sin has cost Jesus so dearly.

And so as we turn from sin, disown our sin, as the Bible says, flee from it, then we go to Christ. And we find in Christ forgiveness for sin and freedom from sin. And Christ works in us through the Holy Spirit. He gives us a new nature, and in that new nature, He enables us to love Him. And so I'm urging myself once more, and each of you this morning, go to Christ. Go to Christ in repentance, and go to Christ to be renewed in your love for Him.

[ 31 : 50 ] And if you've never loved Christ, then go to Him today and ask Him to enable you to begin to love Him this morning.

So that in the end, we will all be lovers of God. And as a church, we will be marked as a community that loves God above everything else, and that as a person, you'll be marked above everything else as someone who loves God.

I'm going to just pray briefly, and then we'll sing our last song. Lord God, help us to hear your word today, to absorb its truths, and to understand the impact of those truths.

And we pray that they would turn us from sin, and bring us to Christ. Amen.