

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 405

God's Everlasting Love

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 25th November, 2018**

Text: *"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it"*
(Song of Solomon 8. 7).

This is a glorious subject, the everlasting love of God to His people. Well we might say,

"No sweeter subject can invite
A sinner's heart to sing."

"The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." May we be sweetly led into it by the Holy Spirit, to know something of its powerful, gracious effect, to know something of our personal interest in it.

Now many things might be said on the love of Christ to sinners, but the emphasis here is this: it is indestructible; it can never be destroyed. So really this is put in figurative language: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." The love of God to His people is here compared to a flame, a burning flame. Well, you children know, if you throw a bucket of water on a flame, it puts it out; it extinguishes it. But the point is, this burning flame can never be put out. It burns from eternity to eternity. It is not just a bucket of water; it is the flood of the ocean, if that could be poured on it, it still could not put it out.

"Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it." Now we have first of all the everlasting love of God the Father, when from all eternity He loved His chosen with an everlasting love. Well, you say, could there be any floods there? Well, what about this: that not a single one of His chosen ever deserved that love. Rather, they deserved to be cast out, to be cut off for ever. You would have thought in the beginning that love would have been extinguished, because no sinner ever deserved it – rather the opposite, that their whole lives would be a denial of it. But the loving heart of God the Father! Many waters cannot quench His love.

But then we think again of what to us would seem to be problems, difficulties, impossibilities, of those many waters which would have quenched His love. What I am thinking of: the plan of salvation – how

was it possible that this company of lost, ruined sinners could ever be loved and could ever be saved? “Eternal wisdom drew the plan.” Blessed be God that in His everlasting purposes in the covenant of grace, in His love to sinners and His design to save them, there was nothing in heaven or earth or hell that could ever oppose His love, ever quench it, ever extinguish it.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” Now we come to the everlasting love of God the Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Now right from the beginning, Satan sought to quench that love, to overthrow it, to destroy it. You have only to think of Bethlehem, and that cruel attack on those tiny children, that desire to destroy our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. “Many waters cannot quench love.” And as we follow the Lord Jesus all through His life, really the scribes and the Pharisees, the Sadducees, were all opposed to the Saviour’s love, striving against it, fighting against it. They could never touch it, never destroy it. Especially Satan’s suggestions that the Lord should not go to Jerusalem. That would have been to quench this love, if the Lord had never gone to Jerusalem, never gone to Calvary. “He stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.” We think also of the terrible temptation in the wilderness, Satan with all his malice seeking to destroy the love of the Lord Jesus and His purpose, but steadfast our Lord Jesus stood – steadfast in His love to sinners, steadfast, despite everything that He suffered, for He “suffered being tempted.”

“But spotless, innocent, and pure,
The great Redeemer stood,
While Satan’s fiery darts He bore,
And did resist to blood.”

Many waters cannot quench the love of Christ. But of course, the great point here, when the mighty billows rolled in the mysterious Garden of Gethsemane, all the powers of darkness, all the powers of hell, really forcing the Saviour in agony and the sweat of blood – “If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” What of this love to sinners, if the cup were to pass from Him? We have to come back to that beautiful word I quote so much:

“It were an easy part
For Him the cross to fly;

But love to sinners fills His heart,
And makes Him choose to die.”

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” And the best commentary, the solemn commentary on it – the Garden of Gethsemane, and then the cross.

Then we come to God the Holy Spirit, His everlasting love. Why should He ever take a sinner, an unworthy sinner, a guilty sinner who does not deserve it? But He does. Why should He continue His work? Why should He who has “begun a good work in you ... perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”? But He does.

“The work begun is carried on
By power from heaven above.”

Why does the Holy Spirit carry on His work, calling this guilty sinner and that unworthy sinner, a Manasseh and a dying thief and you and me? Why does He bear with them? Why does He continue? Why is the Holy Spirit, though grieved, though quenched, not taken away? You see the wonders of the love of the Holy Spirit.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” We pause here. The everlasting love of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost – one God. That beautiful hymn we have just sung (633) is a commentary on it. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” There are many things that would seem as if they would quench the Saviour’s love – the terrible opposition of sin, Satan and the world – but most of all, beloved friends it is this, and this is the point that comes to you and me now this morning, amid all the things we have said, this vital point in our souls’ experience. How should I put it? If we treated any person how we have treated a loving God and Saviour, they would have nothing more to do with us. You know that, don’t you! O but our poor returns! When you think, all the Lord Jesus asks in return is love, and O the poor returns! Don’t you have to feel it, say it, grieve over it, mourn over it:

“Lord, it is my chief complaint
That my love is cold and faint”?

And yet the love of the Lord Jesus is still eternally, immutably the same.

“Whom once He loves He never leaves,
But loves him to the end.”

This ought to humble us, beloved friends. Where would we be without it? This is the ground of our salvation, and this is where our eternal security, our everlasting safety stands. There was nothing in the sinner in the beginning to deserve the Saviour’s love, and,

“Not all the wanderings of her heart
Can make His love from her depart.”

This is love beyond measure. This is everlasting love. How easy it is to speak of it, and how easy to set it out as a doctrine, but don’t we want to enter into it and feel it in our hearts, and don’t we need to be ashamed of our poor returns! O but this blessed, sacred truth, that despite all our sin and our backsliding and our carnality, and our worldliness, and our death, there can be no change, no variation in the love of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ! It is a blessed truth: everlasting love to the chief of sinners.

Now look at David. When he sinned so vilely, when he ordered the murder, when he committed adultery, what were his deserts? That the Lord should withdraw His love, love him no more. The Lord bitterly chastised him; the Lord would not let him sin cheaply. The Lord will not let you and me sin cheaply. But it is this: the Lord loved David just as much when he fell as in his most blessed moments – though He hated his sin. What a wonderful truth that is! That was the truth that John Wesley opposed and could never receive, as he brought human merit into it.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” So there you see the glory of the gospel displayed in the everlasting love of God to sinners, and it comes to this: not death itself can destroy it – and we must all die. If we have known anything of these floods, these waters upon earth – “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” O the swellings of Jordan! That terrible flood will sweep *everything* away. We will have to leave it all behind, but blessed be God, it can never sweep away the love of God to unworthy sinners. Now may we value it, and thank God for it, and rejoice in it, and be ashamed of our poor returns.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” Now then, beloved friends, I want to pass on. I want to speak of the opposite. I have been trying to speak to you of the love of the Lord to sinners. Now I want to try to speak of our love to the Lord. O isn’t there a difference! When you speak of your own love, don’t you begin to feel ashamed! Isn’t it poor! Isn’t it weak! Now then, what about this? This is the great surprise. This is the wonder of wonders. It is not just that Christ’s love to you as a sinner can never be destroyed. It is your little love as a sinner to Christ – *that* can never be destroyed. Many waters cannot quench *that* love. The mighty oceans, the floods can never drown that. When the Lord begins with us, when the Lord teaches us, when He leads us to the Saviour, we begin to feel something of His love, and then that love is shed abroad in our hearts, and for the first time honestly we can say, “Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee,” and we mean it, and we feel it. But sadly, solemnly, the time comes as our lives go on, and we are surrounded with so many things, and that love begins to grow cold, and that brightly-burning flame becomes dim. Now the wonderful thing is this: that little flame in your heart of love to Christ, you are ashamed of it sometimes, as it is so poor, so weak, but that little flame will never go out. It will burn to all eternity, and in eternity it will burn brighter than ever before.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” Do you know why? Because the Lord put it there. It is His work, because the life of God is in it. But there are many waters, and there are many floods. Your sin and your backsliding and your faults and your failures and your hardness and your deadness – you would think these would quench the flame and put it spark out, but no, they never can. But then there are afflictions which come, trials, sorrows, problems, difficulties. They destroy a lot of things. They certainly destroy the light of false flames, false zeal, false religion.

The old godly divines said – and perhaps this surprises you, but it should not really – that the floods, the mighty waters that you think would destroy this flame of the love of Christ – it is not so much the sorrows, it is the pleasures, it is the temptations of this world, it is when things are going right, when things seem to prosper in your business and in your life and in your family and with your friends. Wasn’t it Flavel who said there are thousands more who perish in the trial of prosperity than in the trial of

adversity! O but all these things. Then death itself at last. “Many waters cannot quench love.” Not only the wonderful love of Christ to sinners, but that love in your heart which at times seems so weak and so feeble, that can never be destroyed.

Of course, in Bunyan’s *Pilgrims’s Progress*, we have a very beautiful illustration of this. Some of you know it; perhaps some of you do not. Bunyan there is speaking especially of the life of God in a sinner’s heart, but it is equally true of the love of God in a sinner’s heart. Bunyan’s Christian was taken into the Interpreter’s house. He showed him many things. One thing he showed him was a very dimly, faintly-burning flame. Then he saw some dreadful person coming and pouring bucket after bucket of water upon it. He thought, “Well, surely that is going to put the flame out!” It did not; the flame continued to burn, and he could not understand it. Now the Interpreter took him by the hand and he showed him a different Person, a glorious Person, but – do not forget this – He was hidden out of sight, and the more that the one sought to extinguish the flame, the more this glorious Person kept adding oil to the flame, so it did not go out; it could not go out. It burnt more brightly, which reminds us of this: His grace – and His love the same –

“His grace shall to the end,
Stronger and brighter shine;
Nor present things, nor things to come,
Can quench the spark divine.”

So you see mercy here through the blood of Christ.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” Well then, if this be the case, we do not just want to leave it behind in chapel. Surely the point is this: O may I know this love. May Thy love inflame my heart. I do not deserve it, I am unworthy of it, but I want to know it, I want to feel it, I want to know my interest in it

So just before this, there is a prayer. The verse before confirms this sacred truth I have been trying to speak about. The verse before says, “*Love is strong as death.*” But the point is, this longing, seeking, burdened soul wants to know it, to feel it. So what is her complaint? What is her prayer? Now it is a beautiful one: “Set me as a seal upon Thine heart,” which in simple language means this: may I have a personal interest in the love of Christ, and may I sweetly feel it. Now can you pray that

prayer, any of you this morning? It is so personal: *me*. Do not pass me by. Do not leave me out.

“Set me as a seal upon Thine heart.” Not going into all the points of what a seal is, but they used to have sealing wax and melt it and put a drop of this sealing wax, and then a royal stamp was put upon it and the wax would grow hard. That seal there confirmed it. It ensured it. That is the point. This trembling soul does not want any uncertainty about it. She sees the wonderful love of Christ. She wants to be sure. “Set *me* as a seal upon Thine heart,” in Thy loving affections.

And the reference seems to be to Israel’s high priest. When he went before the Lord, he had that beautiful breastplate, the twelve precious stones, the names of all the tribes of Israel engraved on them, not just Judah, but little Benjamin, the smallest tribe. What about Reuben, “unstable as water”? His name was engraven there. You go beyond Israel’s high priest to our great and glorious High Priest, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in His everlasting love to His people. Their names are not just engraven on precious stones. They are deeply engraven upon His heart. Now that is what you want.

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.” O but if “love is strong as death,” then “set me” – unworthy me, undeserving me – “set me as a seal upon Thine heart.”

“O let my name engraven stand
Both on Thy heart and on Thy hand;
Seal me upon Thy arm, and wear
That pledge of love for ever there.”

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.”

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The love of Christ is rich and free,
Fixed on His own eternally;
Nor earth, nor hell, can it remove;
Long as He lives, His own He’ll love.

His loving heart engaged to be
Their everlasting Surety;
'Twas love that took their cause in hand,
And love maintains it to the end.

Love cannot from its post withdraw;
Nor death, nor hell, nor sin, nor law
Can turn the Surety's heart away;
He'll love His own to endless day.

Love has redeemed His sheep with blood,
And love will bring them safe to God;
Love calls them all from death to life,
And love will finish all their strife.

He loves through every changing scene,
Nor aught can Him from Zion wean;
Not all the wanderings of her heart
Can make His love from her depart.

At death, beyond the grave, He'll love;
In endless bliss, His own shall prove
The blazing glory of that love
Which never could from them remove.

W. Gadsby