

Title: **ASTONISHING LOVE**

Text: John 11:36

Subject: *The Love of Christ*

Date: Sunday Morning — February 28, 2010

Tape: John #75

Reading: *Ephesians 3:1-21*

Introduction:

The title of my message is **ASTONISHING LOVE**.
Our text will be John 11:36.

“Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!”
(John 11:36).

The tears of Lord Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus produced such astonishment in the minds of the Jews who stood before the tomb, that they exclaimed, “*Behold, how he loved him!*” But had they known what many of us know of the love of the Son of God, their astonishment would have been indescribably greater. O Spirit of God, give me grace this hour to speak as I ought of my Savior’s astonishing love to my poor soul. Oh that we might know the length, and breadth, and height, and depth of the love of God that passes knowledge, the unquenchable love of God in Christ Jesus!

Think, O my soul, what a huge volume shall be read over in eternity of the Savior’s love to me: His distinct

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and distinguishing, express, personal, particular love! Truly, my Lord, I have found, “*Thy love is better than wine!*” I am astonished that the Son of God should ever even cast a glance in my direction, that the Holy One of Israel should choose to look upon me; but that he should love me! That is utterly astonishing!

In eternity, seeing as we cannot now see, knowing as we cannot now know, as we look back over the days, and weeks, and months, and years of our lives, as we scan the ages of time and the wonders of providence, as the whole purpose and work of God is revealed to his creation, **all creation shall look upon each chosen, redeemed sinner with astonishment, and we shall look upon ourselves with astonishment, and all the universe shall say of each saved sinner — “Behold, how he loved him!”**

We see **sweet tokens and evidences** of that love throughout our sojourn here, not only in his tears of sympathy, but in the precious blood that he so freely shed for us, and in all his manifold works of mercy and grace toward us, upon us and in us. As often as we think of his love to us, we ought to cry with astonishment, **“Behold how he has loved us!”**

If we were in a right state of heart and mind, we would often remind one another, how wondrously the Savior

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loves us. If we were in a better frame **our conversations** with one another would often be taken up with this blessed subject. We waste far too much of our time upon trifles. How much better it would be if the Savior's love so engrossed our thoughts that it became the constant theme of conversation with one another! What a blessing we would be to one another if, whenever we met, we spoke of some sweet, blessed, fresh experience of the love of Christ that passes knowledge! Let's talk...

- Less about sports and more about the Savior,
- Less about politics and more about providence,
- Less about business and more about blood,
- Less about money and more about mercy,
- Less about reveling and more about redemption,
- Less about the recession and more about the Redeemer,
- Less about the President and more about the King!

Soon, in that land beyond the river, when we are seated with the saints in light, we will want no other theme for conversation. There everything will serve to remind us how the Savior loves us!

For the next few minutes, I want to simply remind you of the Savior's astonishing love to our souls. **Love is known best by its deeds.** So, let me speak a little about our great Savior's great deeds of love, love deeds wrought for us and in us by our blessed Redeemer.

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SURETYSHIP

First, let's give a little thought to the great deeds of love our blessed Savior has performed for us from everlasting. When did Christ's love begin to work for us? It was long before we were born, long before the world was created.

“Behold, how he loved us!” — Way, way back yonder in eternity our Savior gave the first proof of his love to us by espousing and undertaking our cause, as our blessed Surety. He beheld humanity as a palace that had been plundered and broken down. In the ruins of the palace, he saw every unclean thing. Who could restore the palace? Who could restore that which was lost? Who could build again that which was fallen? Who was there to undertake the great work of restoring that ruined palace? No one but the Word, who was with God, and who was God. — “He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his own arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him.”

Before the angels began to sing, or the sun, and moon, and stars cast out their first beams of light across primeval darkness, Christ the Lord stood forth to espouse the cause of his people, and pledged himself not only to restore to us all the blessings that we would lose in the sin and fall of

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our father Adam, but also to add to them richer favors that could ever have been ours except through him and in him. Yes, from everlasting his delights were with the sons of men; and to everlasting his delights with his chosen shall continue.

When I think of the Son of God, in that far-distant past of which we cannot even form an idea, becoming “*the Head over all things to the church,*” which then existed only in the mind of God and in union with him, my very soul cries out in a rapture of delight, **“Behold how he loved us!”**

“Behold, how he loved us!” — **In the secret, eternal councils of the triune God, the Lord Jesus Christ became the Representative and Surety of his chosen people.** The Son of God, knowing well all that his suretyship would involve, undertook to be the Surety for our souls, to fulfil all the covenant on our behalf, to meet all its demands for us. He swore to his own hurt, and (Blessed be his name forever!) he stuck to it! Look at Psalm 15. This Psalm is all about our blessed Surety, the Lord Jesus.

(Psalm 15:1-5) “LORD, who shall **abide** in thy tabernacle? who shall **dwell** in thy holy hill? ² He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. ³ *He that* backbiteth not

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with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. ⁴ In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. **He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.** ⁵ *He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. **He that doeth these things shall never be moved.***”

“*Behold, how he loved us!*” — In the covenant of grace, before the world began, the triune God gave into the souls of his chosen into the hands of Christ, as his righteous Servant. He trusted all his chosen sheep into the hands of the Good Shepherd. He gave Christ the charge of and charge over all things as our Surety (Ephesians 1:3-14).

(Ephesians 1:3-14) “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who **hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings** in heavenly *places* **in Christ:** ⁴ **According as** he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵ Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, **according to the good pleasure of his will,** ⁶ **To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.** ⁷ In whom **we have redemption through his blood,** the

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forgiveness of sins, **according to the riches of his grace**; ⁸ Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; ⁹ Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: ¹⁰ That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; *even* in him: ¹¹ In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: ¹² **That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.** ¹³ **In whom ye also trusted,** after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”

Yes, God the eternal Son covenanted to redeem all his elect, to keep them all by his grace and to present them “*faultless*” before the presence of his Father’s glory with exceeding joy. “*Behold, how he loved us!*” — Thus, as Jacob became accountable to Laban for the whole flock committed to his charge, the Lord Jesus Christ, “*that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,*” undertook to redeem and guard the whole flock

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entrusted to his care, so that when, at the last great muster, they should pass under the rod of him that counts the sheep, not one of them would be missing. He and he alone **became responsible** for the sheep trusted to him; and he and he alone shall have the praise of our everlasting salvation! In that great day the blessed Shepherd-Son-Surety, our dear Savior, will to say to his Father, **“Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and not one of them is lost.”**

It was in the everlasting covenant that our Lord Jesus Christ became our Representative and Surety, and engaged on our behalf to fulfill all his Father’s will. As we think of this great mystery of mercy, surely all who are truly his must exclaim with grateful adoration, **“Behold how he loved us!”**

INCARNATION

“Behold, how he loved us!” — In the fulness of time, our Lord Jesus Christ left the glories of heaven, and took upon him our nature. We know so little of what the word *“heaven”* means that we cannot adequately appreciate the tremendous sacrifice that the Son of God made in order to become the Son of Man. The holy angels could understand far better than we can what their Lord and ours gave up

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when he, the Son of the Highest, stooped to be the Seed of women, to be born of a woman.

Yet, there were mysteries about the incarnation the angels of God could not fathom. As they followed the footprints of the Son of man on his wondrous way from the manger to the cross and to the tomb, they must often have been in utter astonishment. The matters of our redemption by Christ, Peter tells us, are “*things the angels desire to look into.*” And well they might!

(2 Corinthians 8:9) “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”

The incarnation of Christ is one of the greatest marvels in the history of the universe, and we say, with Paul, “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh.” The omnipotent Creator took the nature of a creature into indissoluble union with his divine nature. Marvel of marvels! — “*He took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.*”

“*Behold, how he loved us!*” — O glorious Bridegroom of our hearts, there never was any other love like yours!

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That the eternal Son of God should leave his Father's side, and stoop so low as to become one with us, so that as Paul declares, **“We are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones,”** is such a wonder of condescending grace and mercy that we can only exclaim again and again, **“Behold how he loved us!”**

REDEMPTION

Then, *“being found in fashion as a man,”* he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, bearing all our sicknesses, and all our sufferings, and all our sins under the white hot fury of God's holy wrath and justice! If you want to see the love of Christ, if you want to behold how he loved us, **go to Gethsemane, Gabbatha and Golgotha!** Come with me to **Mt. Calvary**. By faith gaze upon him when he took upon himself the sins of all his elect, as Peter writes, *“who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.”*

(2 Corinthians 5:21) “For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

(Galatians 3:13-14) “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: ¹⁴

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That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

How could one who was so pure, so absolutely perfect, ever bear so foul a load? How could he who knew no sin, did no sin and could never sin be made sin? — No mortal can conceive such a thing. Yet, bless his name, he who knew no sin was made sin for us, that he might die the Just for the unjust, and bring us to God by the sacrifice of himself!

“Behold, how he loved us!” — *“The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all!”* — *“He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him!”* — In fulfillment of the great everlasting covenant of grace, and in prospect of all the glory and blessing that would follow from Christ’s atoning sacrifice, *“it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief.”* **We cannot have the slightest conception of what that bruising and that grief must have been, when the Son was forsaken by the Father!**

We cannot imagine what our Lord’s **physical and mental agonies** must have been. Yet they were only the shell of his sufferings. His **soul-agonny** was that which made him cry, *“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”* **Then it**

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was that the precious “corn of wheat” fell into the ground and died; and dying, brought forth “much fruit” of which heaven and eternity alone can tell the full tale.

I cannot speak of this wondrous mystery as I would, but you who know even in part what it means must join me in saying, “Behold how he loved us!”

JOINT-HEIRS

Still, there is more. The Lord Jesus Christ has so completely given himself to us that all that he has is ours. The Spirit of God declares that we are *“heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.”* He is the glorious Husband, and his church is his bride, the Lamb’s wife; and there is nothing that he has which is not also hers even now and shall be hers to eternity. He possesses nothing that is not ours forever! By a marriage bond which cannot be broken, “for he hateth putting away,” the Son of God has espoused his chosen bride unto himself in righteousness and in truth, and she shall be one with him throughout eternity.

He has gone up to his Father’s house to take possession of the many mansions there, not for himself, but for his people. His intercessory prayer is, — *“Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given*

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me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.” Join me, my brother, join with me my sister, in saying “Behold how he loved us!”

PRESERVATION

Think often upon the Lord’s dealings with us in the days of our unregeneracy. Oh, how he loved us! **How persevering is the love of Christ!** He called us again and again, but we would not come to him. The more lovingly he called us, the more resolutely we hardened our hearts and refused to him. With some of us, this refusal lasted for years; and we wonder now that the Lord waited for us so long. Yet, he waits to be gracious! — *“Therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you”* (Isaiah 30:18).

Not only did our Savior persevere in his love, enduring our insults. **All the days of our rebellion, while we passionately pursued our adulterous lovers, he provided for us, protected us, hedged us about, and passionately pursued us** (Hosea 1-3).

REGENERATION

At last, the blessed Savior, conquered us by his grace, made us partakers of his own divine nature in regeneration, and

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came to us as he comes not to the world, to live in us and dwell in us, one in living union with us! Many days have passed since then, and I asked you now to **recall what Christ has done to us since we first trusted in him.** Has his love for you cooled in the slightest degree? We have all of us tried that love by our wondering and waywardness, but we have not quenched it, and its fire still burns just as vehemently as at the first.

We sometimes fall so low that our hearts are like adamant, incapable of emotion. Yet, the Lord Jesus loves us still, and forsakes us not. We are like the insensible grass which calls not for the dew, yet the dew of his love gently falls upon us and refreshes our souls.

- He endures our indifference.
- He bears with our provocations.
- He forgives all our transgressions.
- Though our hearts are as ice toward him, his heart burns with love for us.
- Though we shut the door against him, he puts his hand in by the hole of the door and draws our hearts to himself.

Oh, my brothers and sisters, O my poor soul, “Behold how he has loved us!”

UNQUENCHABLE

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I stand before you tonight as a monument to the unquenchable love of God my Savior.

(Song of Songs 8:5-7) “Who *is* this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth *that* bare thee. 6 Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love *is* strong as death; jealousy *is* cruel as the grave: the coals thereof *are* coals of fire, *which hath* a most vehement flame. 7 Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if *a* man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.

What a description this is of the love of Christ, the “*love that passeth knowledge.*” **It is Christ who speaks in verse 5,** “*I raised thee up under the apple tree.*” And **it is Christ who says,** “*I have loved thee with an everlasting love, and with loving-kindness have I drawn thee.*” **It is God our Savior who declares,** “*I drew them with cords of love, and with the bands of a man.*” **He found me in a desert land, and in a waste howling wilderness.** “*Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it.*”

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The Lord Jesus here declares his love to his church, and **she replies**, “*Set me as a seal,*” not only on thy heart, but also on thine arm — the place of your love and the place of your strength — the place of the most tender emotion and deepest passion, and the place of power, safety and work.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? His love is invincible and irresistible as death. It is a jealous love, as unyielding and unalterable as the grave. Its comparable to fire, — coals of fire, — the very flame of Jehovah.

Here, then, is the love of Christ! Its breadth, length, height and depth, are absolutely immeasurable. **My Savior’s love is unquenchable love. No other love is really unquenchable; but our Savior’s love is. His love is eternal and everlasting, immutable and unalterable.**

The love of Christ is infinitely beyond that of a father or a mother, or a brother or a sister, or a husband or a wife. **The love of Christ is the one and only love that passeth knowledge; the one love that nothing in heaven, or earth, or hell is able to extinguish or cool; the one love whose dimensions are beyond all measure.**

(Ephesians 3:14-19) For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *15* Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, *16*

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That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; *17* That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, *18* May be able to comprehend with all saints what *is* the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; *19* And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Our Redeemer’s love here compared to fire that cannot be quenched. As such it is affirmed that “*waters,*” “*many waters*” cannot quench it. **Christ’s love for us is a thing of life which the floods cannot drown** (Psalm 69:15, 93:3).

(Psalms 69:15) Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.

(Psalms 93:3) The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves.

The waters of shame and suffering sought to quench and drown it. They would have hindered its outflowing, and come (like Peter) between the Savior and the cross, but his love refused to be quenched on its way to Calvary. Herein was love! It leaped over all the barriers in its way. It

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refused to be extinguished or drowned. Its fire would not be quenched. Its life could not be drowned.

The waters of death sought to quench it. The waves and billows of death went over the great Lover of my soul. The grave sought to cool or quench his love; but it **proved itself stronger than death.** Neither death nor the grave could alter or weaken his love for me. It came out of both death and the grave as strong as before. Love defied death, and overcame it.

The waters of our unworthiness could not quench nor drown the love of Christ for our souls. Love is usually attracted to that which is loveable. When something ugly, unlovely, unattractive comes, love (as it is called) withdraws from its object. Not so here. All our unfitness and unloveableness could not quench nor drown the love of Christ. It clings to the unlovely, and refuses to be torn away.

The waters of our long rejection sought to quench it. I repeat myself; but the repetition is needed. Is it not? How soon we forget! Though the gospel showed us that personal unworthiness could not arrest the love of Christ, we continued to reject him and his love. We continued to hate him and despise his love. Yet, **his love for us rose above our enmity to him, rose above our unbelief and survived**

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our hardness. In spite of everything we are and have done, his love was unquenched.

Though he has saved us by his matchless grace, the waters of our daily inconsistency seek to quench it his love; but, blessed be his name, without success! Even after experiencing his adorable grace, we are constantly spurning his unspurnable love! What inconsistencies, coldness, lukewarmness, unbelief, worldliness, hardness and utter ungodliness daily flows against the Savior's love, like a mighty flood to quench its fire and drown its life! Yet it survives all; it remains unquenched, unquenchable and unchanged!

All these infinite evils in us are like “waters,” “many waters,” like “floods,” torrents of sin, waves and billows of evil, — all constantly laboring to quench and drown the love of Christ! They would annihilate any other love, any love less than his. But our Savior's love is unchangeable and everlasting. — **“Behold, how he loved us!”**

When the Jews saw our Lord weeping at Lazarus' tomb, they were astonished. To them, his tears were an evidence of special love. But to us, the great token of our Lord's special love is his shed blood (Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 4:9-

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11). It might well be said of each blood-bought believer, “Behold how He loved him!”

- Child of God, Jesus Christ loves you ETERNALLY. There never was a time when he did not love you. His love for his own is without beginning and without end. It is eternal.
- The Son of God loves his own PECULIARLY. I know that God is good and kind to all men. His benevolence reaches to all his creatures. But there is a special, particular, family love which God has for his own elect. He loved Jacob, but not Esau.
- The Lord loves his people PERSEVERINGLY. Though we sinned in Adam, were born in sin, and lived in sin by deliberate choice, his love for us was never broken. Though we sin still, after experiencing his grace, his love does not cease or grow cold. His love is patient, longsuffering, lasting, and enduring. God will never cease to love those whom he has always loved. His love is immutable.
- Our Savior loves us SACRIFICIALLY. — “*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.*” He so loved us that he voluntarily laid down his life in our place: So mighty is his love that, when he knew the price of our souls was his own precious blood, he willingly poured out his life’s blood to redeem us!
- The Lord Jesus Christ loves all of his people SAVINGLY. The love of Christ for us is much more

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than a wishful emotion. He so loves his own that he desires their salvation. And what he desires he has the power and wisdom to accomplish. His love is not helpless, but powerful. He will not stand idly by and allow one soul whom he loves to perish, when he has the power to save that soul! Such love as that might suit a cruel monster; but it is not the love of our God.

- And the Lord Jesus Christ loves his people **SATISFYINGLY**. His love will be satisfied. He will never lose the object of his love. Hosea's love did at last conquer Gomer's heart. And the love of Christ will in the end conquer the hearts of all his elect. *"Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power."* This special, free and sovereign love of Christ's will satisfy all his people. He will give us all that we can need or desire for all of eternity. He will withhold no good thing from his own. In that great day which is yet to come, God's creation will stand back in awe and wonder and say, concerning his redeemed people — **"BEHOLD HOW HE LOVED THEM!"**

Bow down, O my soul, while pondering the wondrous love of Christ and the rich, boundless mercy and grace that love fetches to me in free salvation, and give all the praise and all the glory unto him. His love and his free grace, not my merit, is the sole cause of all. After experiencing such

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distinguishing, free mercy, grace and love, how increasingly astonishing it is that all my repeated and aggravating transgressions have not extinguished this love towards me. Rather, he loves me still, just as he did from the beginning! — Oh love unequalled, love past finding out! When shall this base, this shameful heart of mine so love you, as to live to your glory, O Lord Jesus? What love is Thine! What vileness is mine!

Truly, it must be said of God our Savior, **He is love**; and without him we are nothing (1 Corinthians 13). The more we meditate upon His great love to us, its character, its fullness, its blessedness; the more our hearts are compelled to acknowledge “*We love Him because He first loved us.*”

See a picture of our Savior’s love for poor sinners in the Father’s reception of the returning prodigal in Luke 15, and “*Behold, how he loved us!*”

- He Saw him.
- He ran.
- He fell on his neck.
- And he kissed him!

Amen.