

Loving God in the Last Days

by Sandeep Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of loving God in the last days and being aware of the deception of the devil, and encourages listeners to focus on God's mercy and word rather than loving themselves.

Duration: 38:35

Scripture: Matthew 24:12

Topics: "Loving God", "End Times"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of loving God in the last days, focusing on the prevalence of deception and the danger of self-love. It highlights the need to watch out for deception, maintain a pure devotion to Jesus, and prioritize loving God over self. The speaker urges listeners to embrace God's mercy, prioritize God's word over self, and love God for nothing in return, following the examples of Job and Jesus in unwavering devotion.

Transcript

The Lord has not released me to move past the word he gave me a few weeks ago, that he's coming soon. And it continues to be a word that God is impressing on my heart, and so it's a word that I'd like to continue to impress on your heart. He's at the door.

He's coming soon. And one of the things that we have to make sure is that we love God in the last days. That's what I title my sermon, Loving God in the Last Days.

There are a lot of things we know about the last days, a lot of things that people talk about the last days. People are talking about Israel, people are talking about the Middle East, people are talking about all kinds of theories, and they're definitely fascinating, but I have less and less time for those theories, because I'm getting ready to meet my bridegroom, I'm getting ready to see him, and he tells me from his word what I'm lacking. I don't need to go and look at the signs of the times, I don't need to look at reports of the Middle East to know he's coming.

I look at God's word, and he's telling me clearly, over and over again, that he's coming. And I wanna show you what Paul talks about the last days. In 2 Timothy chapter three, verse one, about the last days.

If we believe these are the last days, and God is coming soon, this is what he says. Difficult times will come. Are we living in difficult times? Will we say that we're living in difficult times? Most of us will say yes.

What kind of difficult times are they talking about? Is it persecution and hardship? Absolutely, but it's not just that. We've got to give the devil more credit. He's not just planning some shock and awe persecution and hardship campaign.

He's a sly one, he's a crafty one, and he wants to deceive us. When you read the Bible, and you read all the times that Jesus and the apostles talk about the end times, there's one consistent theme. There are times where God talks about tribulation and things like that, but there's one thing more than anything else that's talked about in the last times, and you know what it is? Deception.

In the last days, there will be a lot of deception, and that is what is in my focus when I think about the last days, is the way the devil wants to deceive us. And it talks about the last days, Jesus says in Matthew 24, verse 12, that the love of God of many will grow cold. Not a few.

These are people who had a love for God, and it's growing cold. That is the sign that it is the last days. And this is what we have to watch out for in our own lives.

That is why I've spoken often in the last few weeks on how we must watch for the trick of the devil that he'll try to draw you away from a simplicity and purity of devotion to Jesus. This is the trick of the devil in the last days. So it doesn't matter if we continue to come to church on Sunday, it doesn't matter if we continue to give our money and our time and our treasure, but if our love for God is starting to grow cold, if we are starting to lose our singular, simple, and pure devotion to Jesus, the deception has already started.

You are deceived already. And my job, as best as possible, as I stand before God, is to warn you. Don't be deceived.

The enemy will trick you by first getting your love for Jesus to get a little lukewarm. We must judge ourselves. We must analyze our hearts and say, God, is my heart for you waning in any way? Then I am under the deception of the devil.

And God says the greatest commandment is to love him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Anybody who's tried that for one day knows how difficult that is, to love God with all of us. And God is saying, in the last days, difficult times will come.

And you know what Paul says? What kind of difficult times will come? Read with me, 2 Timothy chapter three, verse two. For men will be lovers of self. Did you see that as a difficult time? Was that the difficult time you were thinking about in the last days? That men will be lovers of self? Self? And he goes on to talk, as I read it, different ways in which this loving of self comes through in verses two through five.

They'll be lovers of money. That's how they love themselves. They'll be boastful.

That's how some people will love themselves. They'll be arrogant. They'll be revilers.

They'll be disobedient to parents because they love themselves. They'll be ungrateful. They'll be unholy.

They'll be unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure, anything, all in the camp of lovers of self rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness. Do they look godly? Yep, they've got a form of godliness, but they've denied its power. Why? Because in the two kind of loves that could be there, there was the love for self, and there was the love of God, and they had a form of godliness but loved self.

How are you doing? Which camp are you in? Are you in the loving God camp or are you in the loving self camp? Both of them have appearances of looking godly, so that means they do a lot of the Christian activities, and so some of us may need to put down our anti-abortion placards and preaching out against homosexuality for a season so that we can attack self. That reigns in our thrones, because people come around our lives, and people come around our blogs, and people come around our conversations, and based on everything we say, they know exactly how we will vote. But they will also be able to tell that we too have self firmly perched on the throne of our lives.

We too, like them, worship self, worship pleasure, worship being boastful about how great and Christian your children are, how great or Christian your grandchildren are, or how great your job is, and all kinds of ways having conceit, some way loving self as opposed to loving God. If I were to ask you a question, do you know which camp you're in? If you were to look at your life, would you say that you are firmly in the camp of loving God versus loving self? I didn't say loving God versus loving the devil. I said loving God versus loving self.

And let me tell you this, so that it's clear yet again. We who are hearing the truth are under stricter judgment than those who are out there in the world. God is gonna remind you of these words when he comes back and says, I warned you.

I didn't warn you once, I wouldn't warn you twice, I warned you again and again that I was coming, and I even gave you the privilege of telling you exactly how the devil will deceive you. So we are gonna be under stricter judgment than those out in the world, and I am gonna be under stricter judgment than all of you sitting, because I stand up and teach. That is God's word.

So please understand that I have a very heavy judgment over me, that I must live before God with fear and trembling. I don't say these words lightly. I understand the task and the burden that is being put upon me when I get up and speak here.

God says the stakes are higher for you now. So we work out our salvation with fear and trembling, that when the master comes, he'll find us dressed in readiness. How do we make sure that we are loving God and not loving self? I wanna talk about three ways.

Number one, we have to love God's mercy, not yourself. Now there is a notion out there that we must learn how to love ourselves first. And where we get this from is Luke chapter 10, is where people think that this is something that people must learn and must practice, where it talks about one of the great commandments, love your neighbor as yourself.

And so they say, well, if you don't know how to love yourself, you will never know how to love your neighbors. And I wanna talk about the subtle deception that could come in through trying to love yourself. And I wanna teach from God's word, what I believe is the right way in which we ought to love and receive love.

Love your neighbor as yourself. We must understand, first of all, that there are different kinds of love that are instructed for us to have in the Bible. There is a love for God.

There is a love for your Christian brothers and sisters. There's the love for your neighbors. There's even a love for your enemies.

Are they all the same kind of love? Absolutely not. How are we supposed to love God? With all our heart, all soul, all mind, all strength, and as our neighbor, as ourselves? How are we supposed to love our brothers and sisters? As he loved us, love one another as I have loved you, as Jesus has commanded to his disciples. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Love your enemies. So there are different ways in which we have to love other people. I cannot love my neighbor the way I love God.

I hope that's crystal clear. I can't love my neighbor the way I love myself where I say I have to split my income into half and give 50% to my neighbors and give 50% to myself. I've seen people who preach that but don't live it.

They don't give 50% of their love to their neighbors or 50% love to their own family. They don't treat the whole world as if they're exactly the same as their family. It's a nice theory.

But most people who claim that they want to do it, that track record is pretty shallow. They end up loving their neighbor's wife as much as they love their own wife. They love their neighbor's money as much as they love their money.

They love their neighbor's opinions as much as they love their own opinion. And their destruction is obvious to all. We're not supposed to love our neighbors or self just by doing the mathematics of it.

We must understand, and thankfully, Jesus told me exactly how to love my neighbor as myself. And this is how I understand how I must experience love as well. And the story that Jesus told to explain this story, this commandment, was the Good Samaritan story, which most of you know.

There was this Jew who was walking down to, or traveling down to Jericho, and robbers beat him up, took away his money, and left him for dead. And a Jew, and a Levite, and a rabbi passed by and walked the other way. But a Samaritan, one of the enemies of the Jews, took, had mercy on him, and helped him, and rehabilitated him.

This was the story that Jesus said. And I want to take you to the end of the story to tell you how I believe we ought to love our neighbors. Which of these three, do you think, prove to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robber's hands? And he said, the one who showed mercy toward him.

And Jesus said, go and do the same. This is how we ought to love our neighbors, by being merciful to them. Luke 6, 36, be merciful just as your father has been merciful to you.

And I think a lot of us, maybe young people more than others, want to think that we have to love our neighbors when we haven't really got our arms and our hands around the fact that God has been merciful to us. So with this theory of loving ourselves, I want to share with you my understanding of this. And why I don't preach to people that they need to learn how to love themselves.

This is what I do say. Point number one, we have to embrace our infinite value. As people, I'm not telling you to love yourself, I'm telling you you're infinitely valuable.

I hope that's a little bit better. And this is where I get this from, the most famous verse probably, John 3, 16. God so loved the world that he gave an infinite person.

Did you see Jesus as infinity? He is. God gave an infinite person to solve your problem because he loves you so much. This is the value we must have as people.

If anybody struggles with low self-esteem, I'm not gonna tell you that you have to learn how to love yourself. I'm gonna tell you John 3, 16. God, infinity, loves you infinitely that he gave his son.

There's a vast difference that rather than us in our human way trying to love ourselves with this much love, that's about as much humans can give, I'm telling you to realize how much God loves you, which is infinity. Why wouldn't you take that? But this is how we get our value. This is how we embrace our value, not by trying to pretend that we're suddenly good people.

No, we're not. We are valuable because God loves us and God calls us valuable. Yet at the same time, we must also recognize our exceeding deceitfulness.

Jeremiah 17, nine. The heart, whose heart? My heart and your heart. You know what's the state of our hearts? Is exceedingly deceitful more than all else and is desperately sick.

Paul says in Romans seven, in my flesh dwells no good thing. And you read these statements and maybe you even hear me saying this right now and you're like, I don't believe it. Sorry, I'm kind of good.

I don't know what to say. I can only point you to God's word, which tells you your heart is exceedingly sick and your flesh, there's no good thing in it. God, these two truths need to coexist.

That God has loved you so much, so, so, so infinitely much and you are exceedingly deceitful. What comes when you put the two of them together? You have mercy. You have a proper understanding of the mercy of God.

When we put God's great love for us and our continuing exceeding deceitfulness of our hearts, when we put self on the throne, we understand God's unbelievable mercy that we can sing along when we say they are new every morning. They keep on coming like a flood is God's mercy. Because what we are asked to do with our corrupt self-life, this exceedingly deceitful heart, you may not like to hear this, but God is asking you to hate it.

Look, we are like bodies that are extremely valuable, but our exceedingly deceitful heart and our self is like a cancer. What must a doctor tell a patient for somebody who's dealing with a cancer that's ravaging it? Here, let's take this antibiotic. Let's just mitigate the pain a little bit.

That's what the doctor should tell you to do with this cancer? No, we must hate it. We all naturally hate cancer. That God says, if the doctor tells me I'm gonna have to go through radiation and chemo and all kinds of things and you're gonna lose your hair, you'll just say, where am I gonna sign? Because I hate cancer.

God tells me to hate our self-life, not dislike it, not have a problem with it, hate it. Do you think I'm being scriptural? Just so that you know that Jesus used the word hate. Before I show you the verses that Jesus talks about hate with your self-life, let me show you what Jesus talks about hate as well.

John chapter 15, verse 18, which we probably talk about ourselves. In John's gospel, Jesus says, if the world hates you, you know that the world has hated me before it hated you. And he says in John 15, 23, he who hates me hates my father.

There's that strong feeling of opposition that Jesus is talking about here. This same word is the word that Jesus uses in John chapter 12 when he says in verse 25, he who loves his life loses it. And he who hates his life, this self-life is what he's talking about that must die, will keep it to life eternal.

And then he says the same thing in Luke 14, if anyone comes after me and does not hate all of his relationships, even his own life, this hatred for anything that, for this one thing called self-life that seeks to be on the throne instead of God must be apparent in all of our lives. We must have a disgust for it. It is this hatred for this cancer that's ravaging inside of me that makes me pause from saying, go ahead, love yourself.

I can't say that. So rather than that, I say, focus more and more on God's mercy, continuing mercy that he's shoveling on you. And look upon him who's pouring it out to you in spite of this exceedingly deceitful heart and this flesh in which dwells no good thing that continues to show itself up in ugly ways.

This is why I have no problem with hard words from the Lord that he gives me. This is why I have no problem with rebukes that spiritual leaders give me. You know why? Because I already knew my heart was exceedingly deceitful and in my flesh dwells no good thing.

So when godly people tells me, wake up, correct what you're doing that is wrong, I say, God, you've been so merciful to me. You love me even more than I thought because you pointed out that other thing that was bothering you that I had no idea about and you sent a godly person into my life to tell me about that. Family, let us not fear suddenly recognizing that our hearts are exceedingly deceitful, it is.

Let us not fear finding out that you actually are capable of doing some things, it is. But we start by loving God's mercy, not trying to love ourselves. We love God, we love God's mercy.

And God's love and his mercy doesn't say I'm gonna love you and accept you the way you are. He didn't love you and accept you the way you are in the first place. He loved you by paying a great sacrifice, which is Jesus, that infinite price that he paid.

He couldn't just love you and accept you the way you were. He had to send his son. And we celebrate communion once a month physically, but we must be celebrating communion every day in our lives.

What is it? What is communion? It is recognizing God, you love me so much that me who had this deep-seated cancer ravaging my body and that continues to ravage my body when I don't stay close to you, you are continuing to show me mercy. You're continuing to throw it out. So God, I worship you for your great sacrifice.

This is spiritual communion every day. You don't need bread and wine, you can do it in your mind. But we must do this.

This is what we must focus on. Focus on God's constant mercy, not so much on loving ourselves. Point number two, focus on loving God's word, not yourself.

How do you know what are the areas of cancer that are in your life? Is your height a cancer and you must hate it? Is your weight a cancer and you must hate it? How do you know which parts of you is a cancer and which ones are not? God's word. God's word tells you what are the areas of cancer in your life which we call sin. And God says we must root it out.

And when we're trying to decide whether something should be rooted out or not, we must have the courage to root it out if it is in God's word. And when we're trying to root it out, we must realize that our self doesn't like this at all. We like the way we always were.

And God's word says love my word. God's word keeps on being given to you and you say will you love my word? And God's word isn't changing like modern research. Research is continuing to change and evolve and something you thought was true 20 years ago is not true anymore.

The baby Einstein DVDs aren't producing Einsteins apparently. So modern research is discovering something else. Jesus and the Father are not sitting up in heaven thinking we need a Bible 2.0. Based on recent studies and findings on the way humans are abusing this word, we need to bring in a Bible version 2.0. No, he's not doing that.

The Bible continues to be our definition of the areas of cancer in our lives. I hope you will say amen to these three words that I wanna share with you of God's word that we really need to see as cancer. I hope that all of us sisters will keep up the fight against the notion that your worth is based on how you look.

Next time you look in the mirror and get too excited because of how good you look or get too depressed because of how you look, I hope you will keep God's word in front of you. Proverbs 31.30, charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. So we may need a band of sisters who even need to take this verse and print it up and put it on their mirrors so that when they look at themselves in the mirror, they make sure they are presentable because we should be presentable.

But not more than that, where we start beating ourselves up or start thinking ourselves as somebody because we are beautiful. No, we remind ourselves God's word. And maybe God is finding it really hard to find sisters who truly find their value by how much they fear God.

Dear sisters, can I ask you this gently? Do you evaluate your value and your worth? You know how a litmus test, you put it in and it kind of shows a different color? Do you put that, the valuation of your life and check the value of your life depending on how much you fear God and his word? Has that become the litmus test? This is God's litmus test for you. One who fears the Lord is greatly to be praised by God. Dear sisters, we need to become a band of sisters like that who say no to self influenced by the world who says charm, I need to be charming, I need to be core, I need to learn all these things and I need to be beautiful, I need to learn the latest, I need to have the latest hairstyle.

Do all of that, but this is what really drives your value. That every day you wake up, whether there are changes in your face that you don't like or changes in your body structure that you don't like, you say, but my value is, I'm growing in the fear of the Lord. I fear him more than I used to.

God needs such women. God's finding it hard and harder to find such women. Why? Because in the last days, difficult times will come when women will be lovers of self.

And men, you can tell me where I'm gonna go. Matthew five verse 28. Everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

My dad preached on this several months ago at somewhere else and he said, men, you need to think of lust this way. When next time you lust after a woman, you must really imagine that you have just committed adultery with her. So, you know how you'd feel if you committed adultery and that shame and

that guilt and that my skin is beginning to crawl just thinking about how I just committed adultery with my wife and I had a fling with a woman in the afternoon? When you lust, you've gotta start getting your skin to crawl because God's word says, when you look at a woman with lust, you've already done that.

You're already there. So, your skin has to start to crawl with disgust that you committed adultery in your heart. And I'll tell you something, I am far from there.

That word hit me like a thunderbolt. I know this verse, I've been preaching on this verse and I don't like to lust, but I don't have a skin crawling reaction when I lust for a few seconds. But God needs a band of brothers who will move past the temptation to commit adultery, who will put pornography way in the background and say, I'm attacking now the mountain of lusting with the eyes.

And I wanna treat lusting with the eyes so seriously that my skin crawls when I look at a woman with lust. Do we have men like that who will say, sign me up for that journey? Who will treat those sins seriously? Family of God, I still desire to walk alongside brothers who are continuing and sisters who are committing to commit adultery or pornography. I wanna walk alongside and offer God's mercy and preach towards that.

But I am so much more enamored by men who are treating lusting with the eyes so seriously and gaining victory in that area. Not continuing to deal with pornography and all of those things. It's God's finding it very hard to find such men.

Why? Because in the last days, it'll be difficult because men will be lovers of self instead of lovers of God. And men and women, married men and women really need to watch the way we use our tongues. James 1.26, those who consider themselves religious but do not keep a tight rein on their tongues, their religion is worthless.

We husbands and wives gossip too much and backbite too much. And we, a lot of us as Christians are fine most of the time. But when a pressureful situation happens, when you're a little hungry or you're a little tired and your wife's not done something she should have done, the verbal javelins are thrown at her.

The words, the biting sarcasm, dripping, thrown at your wife and back and forth. And our children are being raised in this. Mommy and daddy are fine most of the time.

They sing, they give, they work, they volunteer at church, they do all this stuff. But when the pressure mounts, they start acting totally human. So they'll also grow up and during normal situations, they'll say please and thank you, yes please, all this and that.

But when the pressureful situation happens and that other boy steals his toy, bam. Verbal javelins, biting sarcasm, bullying, all these things will come out of it. Because mommy and daddy are not controlling their tongues and not raising their family in the fear of the God that says we watch our tongues.

We're watching our thoughts with our eyes, we're watching what we value in life and we're watching how we speak to one another. We're taking sin seriously. That will only happen if you love God's word over yourself.

You've gotta love the word of God that tells you what are the cancers that are running through your system. Finally, family of God, we have to love God for nothing. What do I mean by that? There's an interesting story in Job where God and the devil, God and the devil had very few conversations that are

documented.

One such that is in Job chapter one, verse eight where the Lord said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil. But the devil retorted to the Lord and said, does Job really fear God for nothing? Look what you've done to him. You've given him a hedge around him and he's got a house and all that he has in every side.

You've blessed the work on his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. But if you put forth your hand now and touch all that he has, he will surely curse you. And the devil looks at all of us Christians and God says, look at these people, don't they love me and fear me for nothing? And the devil says, well, you've been blessing them a little too much.

You take away some of those possessions. We'll see what they do. And the story of Job was how God gave the devil permission to take away some things and we see how Job continued to be faithful but then God said, okay, you can even touch his body.

And then we see the struggle. Job had an attitude, Job had some issues with God. 40 chapters.

And God's been looking for all humanity to find people, to find a person who will love him for nothing in return. Nothing. You put whatever on the other side and they say, I'll still love you, God, instead of that's gonna come in the way.

And finally, we do have as an example, our savior Jesus Christ who loved God for nothing. You know the showdown between Jesus and the devil. The temptations of Jesus where the devil said, well, maybe we'll try and get him to trip up by taking away food.

I could go hungry, I could die, I'm okay, I'm not gonna not listen to God. Okay, let me try and get you to tempt and test God. Jesus says, no, nothing doing, I'm not gonna do that.

Then the devil says, all right, I'm just gonna cut to the chase, I'm gonna throw it all at you. And we read that in Matthew chapter four, the devil takes him to a very high mountain and shows him all the kingdoms of the world and all of their glory. And he says, look, you got it all, take it all.

Everything I have, you can have it. And we know what Jesus' response was. Even that's not gonna touch me.

I'm gonna worship God and serve him only. Family of God, do we love and fear God with nothing in return? Or do we want retirement thrown into? Do we want health thrown into? Remember Job who didn't have health for a long time. What do we want? With a love for God.

And the true Christians are the ones who will stack up everything that the world has to offer. Even Christian ministry and things that people call Christian on the one hand and say, you put all of that on one side. I still love God.

I don't need any of that. If it happens, it happens. If it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen.

God is all I need. And I'm gonna say it. Jesus, you are the only thing that matters to me.

And Jesus says he will never leave me nor forsake me. Family, in the last days, it'll be difficult times because men and women will be lovers of self, not lovers of God alone, pretending to have a form of godliness, coming to church, paying their dues, serving, but self, still perched on his altar, on his throne, not taking God's mercy seriously, not worshiping often God because of his great continued mercy, not loving God's word. And when God says, go this way, you go that way.

And when God says adultery, lusting is like adultery, you treat it like adultery. And when God says, she who fears the Lord is valuable, you decide that that's the only metric I'm gonna live by. The last days is upon us.

It's gonna be difficult. It's gonna be difficult to get self off its throne. I plead with you, let us be a group of people who love his mercy, who love his word, and will love him for nothing in return.

Let's pray. Father, we pray with the psalmist that there's only one thing we will ask of the Lord and there's only one thing I will seek. I wanna dwell in your house, God, all of your days, all of my days.

I want to see your beauty, that's it. I wanna meditate on you day and night. I wanna be with your people and I wanna be with you most of all, God.

You have caught my fancy. I will choose nothing else. Father, be with these people, be with us, Lord, as we see you coming right at the door.

Help us to get our robes ready. Help us to get our oil. Whatever we need to do, let us discard sin far away before you come again.

In Jesus' name, amen.

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