

God's Everlasting, Unchanging Love

by T. Austin-Sparks

God's love is an everlasting, timeless, and spaceless love that is beyond human comprehension and is applied to all people through the new covenant.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1, 2 Samuel 1:26, Psalm 50:10, Isaiah 40:15, Isaiah 45:12, Jeremiah 31:3, Matthew 26:28, John 3:16, Ephesians 2:4, Colossians 1:13

Topics: "God's Love", "New Covenant"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes God's everlasting and unchanging love, as declared in Jeremiah 31:3, highlighting that this profound love is extended even in the face of human rebellion and sin. He explores the nature of God's love, describing it as infinite, self-sufficient, and akin to a mother's love, which persists despite our shortcomings. Sparks reassures that this love is not limited to Israel but is available to all through the new covenant established by Jesus Christ. He urges listeners to recognize the depth of this love and its implications for their lives, encouraging a response of gratitude and humility. Ultimately, he calls for a life that reflects this divine love in our actions and relationships.

Transcript

We have been moving round a center and viewing it from different angles, in different relationships. The center is given to us in Eph. 2:4 - "His great love wherewith he loved us."

GOD'S GREAT DECLARATION

We are now coming to look at one of the most amazing statements ever made.

"The Lord appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" or, as the margin gives the alternative rendering, "therefore have I continued lovingkindness unto thee" (Jer. 31:3).

I repeat, that is one of the most astounding statements that has ever been made. To verify that, to realize something of that fact, you need to read all that leads up to it and that follows afterward. That is to say, you need to read the prophecies of Jeremiah throughout, and then to add to them some of the prophecies of other prophets. For the work of the prophet was very largely to point out how far, how terribly and tragically far, those being addressed had gone from God's mind, God's thought, God's will, God's way, and in what a terrible state of hardness of heart and rebellion - and worse than that - they were toward God. All that -

and it is a terrible and dark story - gathers round this statement. "I have loved thee." At the time when they were in the very worst condition that ever they had been or would be in spiritually and morally, it was then He said "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Viewed in its setting, you must agree it is one of the most amazing statements ever made.

"His great love wherewith he loved us." We are baffled and almost rendered silent when we try to fathom and comprehend the word "grace" in reference to the love of God. How great is God's love? Were we to spend our lives trying, we could never utter its depth or content. Yet here is a statement, and we have to do something about it. We have to approach it, to try to grasp something, be it very small, of this incomprehensible love of God, the mystery of it. So I shall adopt the very simplest method of trying to get into this word, just breaking up the statement into its component words.

THE ONE WHO MAKES THE DECLARATION

We will begin then: "I." You notice here the statement is really governed by the words "Thus saith Jehovah" (verse 2). Who is it speaking? To begin with, it is the One whose name is Jehovah. By that name He made Himself known to the Hebrews through Moses. But later that name became so sacred to Israel that they would not use it, and it was mentioned but once in the year, the great day of atonement, by the High Priest, as he went into the Most Holy Place by the High Priest the name was pronounced, so great, so awful, was that name to them. But what does it mean? Jehovah, the unchanging One, the eternal One, the self-existent One, existing not by anybody else's act or power or support, perfectly self-existent - that is Jehovah, that is the One who says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

But look again. It is the name of the One of infinite holiness, whose eyes are too pure to behold iniquity, whose nature is too pure and holy and altogether right to have any association with sin. You see how helpless we are when we try to deal with God and explain Him and define Him. These are statements, but if you and I, apart from some great provision of God to cover our sinfulness, were to come into the presence of that infinitely holy God, we should be shattered beyond repair. The infinitely holy God! It is He who says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

It is the name of infinite majesty, glory, might, dominion, power. He is very terrible in majesty, in glory, in power; and that One says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love."

And still we press in to this name. It is the name of infinite self-sufficiency. From time to time He has found it necessary to state that in various ways. "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee" (Ps. 1:12), He said to them of old. "Every beast... is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 1:10). "I have made the earth, and created man upon it: I, even my hands, have stretched out the heavens" (Isa. 45:12). "The nations are as a drop of a bucket" (Isa. 40:15). "Do I need anything or anyone? Am I, the creator of the universe, in need? Am I suffering want? Am I not utterly and absolutely independent, self-sufficient, the only One in this universe who is self-sufficient?" And that One, out of it all - His holiness, His majesty, His self-sufficiency - says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." It is a mystery. Can you explain that? Can you understand that?

"I have loved"

"I have loved." The very essence of love is "I must have, I cannot do without." Here the word "love" is just the common word that was used in all true human relationships. It is the word used of parents for children, of children for parents, of husband for wife and wife for husband, of friend for friend. Of the classic

instance of the love between David and Jonathan, it says, "Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18:1). "Thy love," said David of Jonathan after his tragic end, "thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:26). That is the word here. Jehovah, infinitely self-sufficient, used that word concerning Israel. As the friend's love for the friend must have the friend, and, as in every other true relationship, true love must have the one loved, must have the companionship, the fellowship, the nearness, so is Jehovah speaking about Israel. "I have LOVED thee." Amazing love!

"I have loved thee"

Ah, but still more inward - "I have loved THEE." Now we are at the end of wonder. At the beginning I pointed out the state of these people. Not only were they in a deplorable state morally and spiritually, deeply in sin; not only were they in this tragic plight; but they were in positive antagonism, rebellion, repudiation, killing the very prophets of the Lord who would tell them of their wrong. "I have loved THEE."

Without anything positive in the way of opposition or antagonism or rebellion or stubbornness on our part, it is still the greatest mystery and wonder that He should love us. But think of this - "thee"! Think again of whom that is said, to whom it applies. "I have loved thee"; and that, moreover, coming at the point where it did and at the time it did.

"An everlasting love"

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love." You can never translate that word "everlasting" into English. It simply means that you have got into the spaceless, boundless realm, you have fallen out of time to where time is no more. You have gone out into that mysterious something where nothing can be taken hold of as tangible, it is all beyond you, beyond your grasp, beyond your calculation, beyond your power to cope with it and bring it into some kind of dimensions. That is the word: beyond you, beyond your time, beyond your world, beyond all your ways of thinking and working. "I have loved thee with an everlasting, timeless, spaceless love." Did you notice the alternative marginal reading to the phrase? "Jehovah appeared of old unto me"? It is, "from afar appeared unto me" - outside of our world altogether. He says, "I have loved you with a love altogether outside your dimensions of time and space."

"I have loved thee with an everlasting love." And strangely, the repetition of the word "love" here adds an extra feature or factor. It is in the feminine, and it means mother-love. "I have loved thee with an everlasting mother-love." Now, mother-love is one of the most mysterious things with which in ordinary human life we have to deal. You cannot always understand mother-love. You may look at a baby and you may see much that is not lovely about the child, but the mother of that child simply adores it. That is mother-love. That is the word the Lord is using here. The world would see everything to the contrary - but the Lord says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting mother-love."

HIS LOVE FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE NEW COVENANT

Well, we are touching the fringe of this thing, but you are perhaps asking a question. You are not gripped yet, because you say, "That may be quite true as to Israel, but can we rightly and properly appropriate that? Can we step into that and say it is ours; that this same One says that to us?" You have only to read on to verse 31 of this same chapter to find your answer.

"The days come, saith Jehovah, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by

the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they break, although I was a husband unto them, saith Jehovah... I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it" (Jer. 31:31-33).

Now do you not know that is taken up in the New Testament, in the letter to the Hebrews, and applied to the Church in this dispensation? Its fulfilment is there said to be not in the Jewish dispensation, but in the New Testament dispensation. That applies to those to whom the gospel of the grace of God has been preached, the new covenant; and it is the new covenant, not in the blood of bulls and goats, but the blood of the Lamb of God, God's Son, who said, in the night in which He was betrayed, when He took the cup - "This is my blood of the new covenant; which is shed for many unto remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Are we in this? Oh yes, it is for us, the people of the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ. Oh, if He could say such a thing to Israel, then if it is possible to say it with fuller meaning and greater strength at all, so He says it to us.

We have so much to confirm this in the New Testament. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16) - that mysterious word, that age-out-lasting life. "His great love wherewith he loved US" - that word was said not to Jews only but to Gentiles, and comes in the letter to the Ephesians, the letter for all men, Jew and Gentile alike. Or again, "who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. 1:13). I could go on piling up Scripture to show that it is the same love as that love in Jeremiah 31:3. It is the same God and it is the same love, and now it has expanded beyond Israel to embrace us.

Listen again then. This same God, no less holy, no less majestic and glorious, no less self-sufficient, says to you, to me, "I have loved thee, I have LOVED THEE with an everlasting love". "His great love wherewith he loved us." Are you impressed, do you believe it?

HIS CONTINUED LOVINGKINDNESS

What then? There follows the second half of the statement - "therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" or "therefore have I continued lovingkindness unto thee." "I have borne with you all this time because I love you; anything could have happened to you, but I have not let it, I have shown you infinite longsuffering and patience, and earnest solicitude for your eternal well-being: because I love you, I have kept you alive, and have brought you to this time and to this place; I have not let you go." Oh, that this might come home to us! We may, all unconsciously be hearing this message now simply because of this infinite love of God which has been preserving us unto this hour to let us know it. You may think it is quite fortuitous that you are hearing it - just one of the chance happenings of life; but if you knew the truth it is this infinite love of God which has held you to this time in relation to the infinite purposes of that love to let you know it. There is nothing casual about it, there is sovereign love here. "Because I have so loved, because, self-sufficient as I am, I cannot do without you" - oh, mystery of Divine love! - "because I so much wanted you I created you, and now at this moment I am drawing you." We cannot take that in, but that is the teaching of the Word of God.

We started these messages by pointing out that behind the universe, behind the mind, the reason, the plan, the design, there is a heart. The universe exists as an answer to that heart. Today that heart in its love is bleeding. It has suffered a great deal of disappointment, deprivation; it has been robbed of its object - the wife has been unfaithful. But the Lord comes out in the presence of it all and says, "I loved you

and I still love you; My love is an everlasting love: therefore I have kept, I have preserved, and I have brought you to this very hour and I am telling you now that this is the position; there is no breach of love on My part."

LOVE PERSISTING THOUGH SPURNED

But Israel went into a great deal of suffering and distress because they did not respond to that love of God thus expressed, and it looked very much as though the everlasting love was lasting no longer. But not so, it has never changed. You see, love has sometimes to change its form of expression, although in itself it does not change, and so we have another side to the revelation of God's ways with wayward and wilful man. Suffering, affliction and adversity to individuals and to nations and to the world is not because of a contradiction of the statement that God so loved the world. It is the only way in which that love stands any chance of getting a response of the kind God wants. God does not want that kind of love that is not love at all because it gets everything that it wants to satiate its own lusts. That is not love. This love of God must make us like itself, it must be after its own kind.

And so, strangely enough, many have come to find the love of God through the dark way of suffering - to discover that God was not their enemy but their friend, when they thought that He was pursuing with the object of destroying them. But I am not going to follow that out just now.

I want to be content now with making that great declaration with which we started, doing the little I can to try to bring it home to you - who it is that says it, what it is that He says, the people to whom He says it, with the assurance that, so far as He is concerned, He will never take another attitude but love, even if it is disappointed love and we ourselves should lose all that that love meant for us. To lose that and to know it would be our hell of hells. There could be no deeper hell than to discover all that was meant for you by infinite love, and to realize that by your own folly and your own stubbornness it has gone beyond your reach forever. What more of a hell can you imagine than that? I think that is the only kind of hell we need contemplate, whatever may be the full truth about it. For any one to wake up and have to say, "Oh, what might have been, if only, if only I had done so and so! If only I had taken the opportunity! It is too late now!" - that is agony of soul, that is misery, that is despair. You see, it is the effect of love, Divine love's immense purposes, and we discover that it is now all impossible because we have foolishly rejected, refused, repudiated, gone our own way, stubbornly said No! to the Divine love. That is the dark side of this, but I am not going on to the dark side now. Listen again, whoever you may be. If you know yourself only a little you must be amazed at this statement, but if it does not come to you as the most wonderful thing that ever was or could be, there is something grievously the matter with you; that such a One should say to such as WE, "I have loved THEE, with an everlasting love." May God Himself bring that home to us with something of its implication, something of its meaning and value, its glory, its wonder. If He should graciously do that, we shall be worshippers for the rest of our lives; there will be something about us that is in the nature of awe and wonder and we shall go softly. The realization of it will smite all our pride to the dust. There is no room for pride here. This will remove all those horrible things - pride, avarice, covetousness, self-interest, worldly ambition - and we shall be very humble, very grateful people, full of a great longing somehow to requite that love, somehow to win for that One His rights. This has been the motive and passion of many who have given themselves in the far places of the earth in a daily suffering for their Lord's sake. Love - a little return for this so great love wherewith He loved us.

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