

Protoevangelium

Today we're thinking about the awesomeness of God's unchanging love for us. Earlier we read the Genesis account of the fall of humanity. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command, and the result was that sin and death entered the world. As they hid in shame, God's response is pivotal in understanding His immutable love. That's a word we don't usually hear – it comes from a Latin word which means unchanging.

God's love never changes. We know this – and that's what immutable means – it's something that never changes. In fact, it's unable to be changed. You can't ever do something that will cause God to stop loving you. He shows us the depths of His love with His wide-open arms on the cross. He was willing to die, rather than spend eternity without humanity.

Well, in Genesis, we see God go through the garden looking for Adam and Eve. He knew where they were – He wants them to own what they've done. He wants them to confess their disobedience. He reaches out to us – to all humanity – even when we're up to our gills in sin and trying to hide from Him. In Genesis, God passes judgment on the serpent – and that judgment contains a promise – what the Church has called the protoevangelium – through the ages. It's the first Gospel. That some day, the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent.

He's promising to send Jesus to rescue us there. See, if we start reading the Old Testament with the intention that we're going to see Jesus there, we will. We'll find Him in the Old Testament – He shows up, over and over. It's a remarkable thing. Even in judgment, God's love is apparent. He promises redemption and victory over sin and Satan through Jesus Christ. This morning I want to take a look at another Old Testament passage, from the Psalms, so we can look for Jesus there. If you have your Bible, or Bible app handy, turn with me to Psalm 138. **Read Psalm 138.**

He Wants Us to Be Like Him

Most Bible scholars agree that Psalm 138 was written by David. Like most of his other psalms, there doesn't seem to be agreement on when he wrote them, as far as what was happening in his life. It's apparent though, that he had already been through some rough times. Psalm 138 is a psalm of praise. Israel praised their God for many things, not least His majestic and awesome power, might, and strength.

They praised God for all the great things He had done – and still does – in creation and in the redemption of His people. Last week we talked some about how the awesomeness of God is so great, that He should rightly get a kind of holy fear from us as His people. He loves us – He loves you – but He loves us so much that He doesn't want us stuck wherever we're at in relation to Him when we first accept being in relationship with Him through the blood of Christ.

Do you understand what I'm trying to say? He doesn't want us to say, "Yes, I believe," and then go on living the same old life from before we knew Him. He expects – He demands – that we change. We are called to be ever becoming more and more

like Him. That's what sanctification is – becoming more and more like the One who saves us, in gratitude for all that He's done, and keeps doing, for us.

David understood this. He says, "I will praise You, Lord, with all my heart; before the 'gods' I will sing Your praise," (Psalm 138:1). My NIV Bible has small g "gods" in quote marks. They're idols. As followers of Jesus Christ, do we do that? Do we praise Him with all our hearts, and before "gods" sing His praise? I don't think we do a very good job of that. In fact, I know we don't.

What's Our First Love?

The church in America has gotten lazy, complacent, and is pursuing idols. No one wants to do anything unless they get paid. I heard a news report last Christmas that the Salvation Army was having to pay people to stand and ring bells for their kettle drives. They couldn't get volunteers. That's unbelievable! It's a real shame.

Scandalous. And so many people have unplugged from church – why? They find other things to do. It's not fun. Maybe the pastor says things they don't like, or don't want to hear. Well, whose problem is that?

Pastors are called to preach the Word of God. And sometimes, people don't like hearing it, because it strikes a raw nerve. The way I see it, if folks don't like what I say, they'll do one of three things. The first, they may catch me after service, or call and tell me they don't agree. That's okay. I value real discussions, and sometimes I need a reality check. Something else they might do, is get ahold of people I answer to, such as the SPRC, or Dr. Wilson. And lastly, they might quit coming altogether – I hope not, but there's a chance it could happen or has already happened.

I'm going to say this today, and you take it however you want. I'm not here to please people – don't get me wrong, I love you all – but I'm not going to sugar-coat things to keep you happy. I'm here to preach the word and to please God. There are a lot of church-going people running around this morning not singing God's praise, because they're too busy praising political idols. They are showing what their first love is by what they say, how they spend their money, and what they spend the majority of their time on. So here's a good self-check we can all do. Think about it this way: do you focus more on campaigning and speaking up in favor of your preferred candidate than you do about Jesus Christ? Do you give more money to the Democrats or Republicans than you do to the Church?

There's some other people running around with a bunch of various flags – for a variety of causes. American flags, rainbow flags, whatever else – the issue they represent has become a small g "god" they're singing praises to. They want a Jesus wrapped in whatever color flag they're waving. Or a Jesus who rides on a donkey – and I don't mean the Palm Sunday one – or He rides on an elephant, that fits their narrative, and will be contained in such a way as they want.

Friends, that's not the same Jesus Christ, Son of God, who died on the cross, and three days later rose to life again that we know and love. That's a small g "god" Jesus, an anti-Christ, because it's something they've made up in their own heads. Instead, they need to sing praise to the real Jesus Christ – the One who died and rose

again. He's the only One who can set them free, and us free, from everything that divides, creates chaos, and causes destruction.

God Gives Us Confidence

What does David do after saying he's going to sing God's praise? "I will bow down toward Your holy temple and will praise Your name for Your unfailing love and Your faithfulness, for You have so exalted Your solemn decree that it surpasses Your fame," (verse 2). In other words, David's going to worship God. God is faithful, and His love is steadfast. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. He never changes. David says, "When I called, You answered me; You greatly emboldened me. May all the kings of the earth praise You, Lord, when they hear what You have decreed. May they sing of the ways of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord is great," (verses 3-5).

What can we infer about what David's telling us in these couple verses? God gives him confidence. Jesus gives us confidence and strength. David comments, "may all the kings of the earth praise You, Lord, when they hear what You have decreed," (verse 4). What do you make of that? How are the kings of the earth going to find out what God has said, or "decreed"? Someone's going to tell them – in this case – David, I suppose. But what about us?

Are we going out and telling "kings of the earth" what God's word says? There are a lot of little princes and princesses running around who haven't heard about what He's done. Some of those little ones may show up here in a couple weeks for VBS. Speaking of VBS, do you know how many volunteers we have who've said they would help?

See friends, if we won't do what God needs us to do, He's going to find other people to do it. It's like that old parable of the talents that Jesus tells in the Gospels. One servant gets ten, another five, and another one. The Master's pleased even with a little growth from the servant who had been given a modest amount – but not the one talent guy. Remember that story? He buried it in the field, and the Master was angry when He returned, because the wicked servant hadn't done anything with it.

I'll not be found a wicked servant when the good Lord returns, and I hope you won't be either. But we've got to start doing something here. Why? David tells us, "Though the Lord is exalted, He looks kindly on the lowly; though lofty, He sees them from afar," (verse 6). Despite His greatness, Almighty God is thoughtful of the lowly – the recipients of the monies that go in those kettles every Christmas – Jesus knows every single one of them by name, and loves them.

God Is Immutable in Love

No matter what our status or our condition may be, God's love reaches us. His care is personal, attentive, and demonstrates His unchanging – His immutable – commitment to His people. David had his share of troubles, we talked about that in detail last week. "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You preserve my life. You stretch out Your hand against the anger of my foes; with Your right hand You save me," (verse 7), the king wrote.

Even when it seems that our lives are falling apart, God is there – He's present. He holds onto us with strong arms, lifting our heads above the waves that threaten to

pull us under because we've taken our eyes off Jesus, like Peter, when he boldly stepped out of the boat during the storm to walk on the water to the God who stills the waves and silences the storm raging all around. The hands of Jesus, pierced for us, preserve – they save – our lives.

When I think of those strong hands of Jesus Christ, the hands I see in my mind's eye, are the hands of my dad. I know that sounds weird. They are rugged, solid, and have a grip I couldn't get out of. Since Dad died seven weeks ago, not a day has gone by that I don't think of him. Many of you have also lost parents. I experience things each day, and think, "if only Dad were here, he'd be able to tell me how to fix it." Last week, Smokey had a tick embedded in his ear – it was tough to get it off him. Dad would have had an easier way than trying to use a blown out match over and over for half an hour with a whimpering dog.

"The Lord will vindicate me; Your love, Lord, endures forever – do not abandon the works of Your hands," (verse 8), is how David closes the psalm. God is faithful – and He will complete His work in us, and through us – if we let Him. His love ensures us that His purposes will be accomplished. He's steadfast. We can count on Him.

God's love is immutable – it's unchanging. And we see that most clearly in Jesus Christ. His sacrificial death and resurrection are the fulfillment of that protoevangelium – that first Gospel, the promise God made to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. Down through history, we can see that God's love isn't subject to fluctuations based on our actions or circumstances. From the promises He makes to Abraham, the Law He gives to Moses, and the redemption fulfilled for all time in Jesus Christ, God's love is a constant thread woven through the ages.

The writer of Hebrews (13:8) tells us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever." God's love for us is unchanging – even when we disappoint Him, which we will – He loves us. Despite the fall of humanity, our frailty, and failings, His love seeks, promises, redeems, and restores. His steadfast love, celebrated in the Psalms, assures us of His omnipresence – His continual presence – and His faithfulness. No matter where we find ourselves, His love reaches out to us, inviting us into a deeper relationship that transforms and redeems. In response, we live in gratitude, praising Him for His steadfast and unchanging love, and doing all that we can to share that love with a world desperately "looking for love in all the wrong places."

Prayer: Unlike earthly kings, You, O Lord, are ever steadfast and faithful. You sent us Your Son, Jesus Christ, to rule over us, not as a tyrant, but as a gentle shepherd. Keep us united and strong in faith, that we may always know Your presence in our lives, and, when You call us home, may we enter Your heavenly kingdom where You live and reign forever. Amen.