



FIRST LOVE

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Graham Cooke - Friday Night, October 5, 2012

There are a couple scriptures that I want to read that have totally captured my heart and intrigued me because those scriptures create a picture in my mind and in my heart about God's intentionality.

Revelation 13:8 - *All who dwell on the earth will worship Him whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb, who was slain from the foundation of the world.*

John 17:20-24 - *Jesus said this, I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one even as You, Father are in Me and I in You; that they also may be in us that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them that they may be one just as We are one. I in them and You in Me that they may be made perfect in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You have given Me may be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.*

Before anything was made, there was the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And the love between the Father and Son was so awesome, so profound that They were compelled to share it with someone. They wanted to create someone - a people group that could stand in the middle between the Father and the Son and be absolutely filled with Their devotion to each Other.

They wanted to create a people group that could occupy the space between the Father and the Son, so that how the Father saw the Son, that people group could experience that. And how

Here is the thing about great love; it's always based upon great freedom.

the Son loved the Father, that people group could experience that. So there would be a people who will become so enraptured by the love that the Father had for the Son and the Son had for the Father that it would change them forever and they would end up, because of that great love, being made in the very image of God.

Here is the thing about great love; it's always based upon great freedom. So the Father did not want a people group who would just be clones of Himself. The great thing about love is it creates in you the power to choose. The power to choose love. The power to become love. So They wanted a people group who would be absolutely free to choose that love or not to choose it. The Father could not conceive of creating a people group who were not free to choose Him – also who would be free not to choose Him. He wanted free will. He wanted real love. He did not want artificial love.

FREE WILL

They knew that when They gave a freedom of choice to the people, that meant that those people were free to not choose to love God. So how do you deal then with a people group who choose not to love God? Now this is the subject of a conversation in Heaven before the world even began. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sitting there talking these things through together. We want to create someone who can absolutely receive everything that We are to each Other and who can be glorified by that love. But We do not want clones, We want people who are free to choose Us. So We give them permission not to choose Us, because that's what free will is.

Free will is permission from God to say “no” to Him.

Here is the brilliant thing about God. *In giving that very real permission to not choose Me, I am going to help all those who don't choose Me, to find Me anyway.*

Free will is permission from God to say “no” to Him.

And so there is a second conversation in Heaven - the first one is: *Let's create a people group who are so enraptured by what We have for each other, by how We see each other, by how We live together who are so absolutely taken with the glory and the Majesty of how We see One another and love One another - Let's create that people group who can receive everything that We want to give them so that We can pour Ourselves into them in such a majestic way that it alters the very personality that they come into this world with. Let's make them absolutely free in every sense of the word.*

What do We do about the ones who do not choose Us?

So there is a second conversation in Heaven where They talk about – *So how do We bless those who don't like Us? How do We bless those who don't choose Us? How do We touch those who say We do not exist and it's all stupidity and foolishness? How do We touch the hearts of people who were committed to not actually walking with Us?*

JESUS, THE SACRIFICIAL LAMB

It is at that point that Jesus says, “For those people at a given point in the history of humanity, I will leave Heaven and lay aside the glory that is Mine – that You gave Me and I will become as one of them and I will live a life without sin and then I will offer Myself as a sacrifice so that those people may find their way back into the place of deepest affection.”

So the Bible says that Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world. What does that mean? It means before Genesis 1:1. It was a done deal in Heaven that Jesus would come and be the Sacrificial Lamb for mankind. Can you imagine that? There is the three of Them, a few million angels and space, just space. And Jesus agrees to come and die for a world that is not even yet been created.

Now that, to me, is absolute intentionality. Before Genesis 1:1, before “let there be light”, Jesus agreed. It was done in Heaven. “I will come at the appointed time and I will lay down My life for all mankind, for all those who don't choose Us, for all those who say We don't exist, for all those who maybe hate Us, for all those who say this is stupid, I will die for all those people. For all those people who chose every wrong thing, I will come and die for those people. For all the depraved, for all the human

traffickers, from all the terrorists, murderers and the rapists, and the thieves and liars, the deceivers, power hungry. For all the abuses of men and women and children, We will come. We will die. I will die for every single one who chose the wrong path deliberately. I will deliberately lay down My life.” And all this before God said, “Let there be light.”

You know what? If you and I were God, and we knew it was going to go that pear shaped, we would have said, “Forget that. Let’s just make another Jupiter.”

THE AFFECTIONS OF GOD

John 17:24-26 - Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. “O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. “And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

There is a place in the affection of God that is so huge, that is so massive, it is almost beyond our comprehension. You are going to need the mind of Christ just to get there in your thinking. You are going to need to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, because I’m telling you now, logic cannot take you there. Reason cannot take you there. Rational cannot take you there. Intellectualism is not clever enough to take you there, but there is a spiritual-based wisdom that can comprehend huge issues such as this.

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WISDOM - THE MIND OF CHRIST

Aren’t you glad that God isn’t logical? Or rational? And that He is much too clever to be an intellectual? All of those things - great though they are - I love to think, but I am not stupid enough to believe that I can comprehend everything about God with my natural mind. We need the mind of Christ to understand everything that God is and all that He wants to be for us.

So we are learning that wisdom is the best way to think. I am really glad because in 40 years of ministry, it has always been about the power gifts. It has always been about the prophetic. It has always been about getting words of knowledge, but I really feel that in these days the gift of wisdom is coming into its own and without wisdom we can't understand half the stuff God gives us.

Wisdom is the party animal of Heaven because it can understand complex things and can put them in simple terms.

FIRST LOVE

Before the foundation of the world there was a love so huge, so vast, it had to be shared. God was hungry for a people group - for His own people group – His own tribe and nation – hungry for a people group that He could share the fullness of His affection with. That He absolutely adored Jesus and wanted someone to share that same love, that He could look at them the way He looks at Jesus, and that they could stand in the midst between the Father and the Son, and that they could receive the love that Jesus had for the Father and the Father had for the sun. It's called ‘first love’.

In the book of Revelation 2, we read this:

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands says this: 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance and that you cannot tolerate evil men and you put to the test those who call themselves Apostles and they are not, then you found them to be false and you have perseverance for My name's sake and have not grown weary, but I have this against you - that you have left your first love.

First love is the love that existed before the world began. First love is the love between the Father and the Son.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT VS. GREAT COMMISSION

I think one of the travesties of our church experience is that we have put the Great Commission ahead of the First Commandment. We have made serving God the goal of everything instead of loving God. The first commandment is, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength." And the second commandment is the great commission – "Love your neighbor as you love yourself".

A part of our God-given experience, a part of our right of being in Christ, is that we are the lovers of God, and it is our responsibility to receive love above all things, and to know the love of God that passes all knowledge - to be filled up

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with that love and to manifest that love every single opportunity. We are to love our enemies, to love those who persecute us, to love those who abuse us - **because love never fails**. And to know a love so profound, so incredible that it changes everything in you.

PERSECUTION

Part of that journey for all of us is to understand the importance of persecution, the importance of having difficult people around your own life, the importance of having people who don't like you as part of your walk in this world, because those are the people you get to practice on. The question on those days becomes, "How do you love when love is not returned?" The short answer is, love doesn't seek a return. Love, loves, for the sake of loving.

We have difficult people around us, really, to teacher us the fruit of the Spirit. You know, the fruit of the Spirit only grows in bad soil. It grows in the soil of the situation. Take kindness – what does kindness grow out of? It grows in the soil of a situation where somebody says something or does something unkind towards you, and in that moment you have a choice. Someone says something unkind and you look them straight back in the eye and say, "Oh yeah, well I know something about you, pal," and then you have blown it. You may as well have a little sign on your forehead, "Please excuse me, I'm having a carnal moment."

When someone says something unkind to you, you think of something really kind to say back because you are Christ like. We are so steeped in the stupidity of the world around us. We are so steeped in the anger and the judgment and the defending of oneself and being offended. We are so steeped in all that kind of behavior that we think that anything outside of that is reality, but you need to understand first love. When God sees us speaking against someone rather than speaking for them, He thinks that's unreal. We justify our behavior – *well, they said this about me*. There is no justification for being the same as anybody else.

If you find it easy to be offended by people it proves one thing - you don't have a relationship with the Comforter. It proves that you don't understand enough about how much God adores you.

I am what I love, not what loves me.

'NEVER FAILING' LOVE

How do you love when love is not returned? Love doesn't seek a return. I am what I love, not what loves me. There is a decision I made a long time ago in very difficult circumstances - *I am what I love, not what loves me*. In other words, I'm choosing love no matter what anybody else is doing. I will not have my life defined by the behavior of somebody else. I want to choose love – I don't say that I do it perfectly all the time, but it is a growing passion in my heart. I want to know what first love really feels like. I want to know what it looks like.

I want to have that encounter with God where I learn to abide in the place of 'love never failing'. I am what I love, not what loves me. You can do what you want, but I want to be committed to way of loving that takes me out of all of that behavior of reaction and judgment, cynicism, anger and bitterness and resentment. Life is too short for that nonsense.

Years ago when I started out in the prophetic, there were about a half a dozen of us in the UK who wanted to do schools of prophecy. Prophecy was very new and no one was sure if they liked it and most people thought it was weird and problem was, we were all a little weird at the time because we had never done this thing before either.

When you do something for the first time you can't make a mistake because you haven't done it before, right? A mistake is when you do something again the second time knowing that it's wrong. That is a mistake. When you do something for the first time you can't make a mistake, you can only learn. So, if you're wise, you will love the learning.

So we were learning. A bunch of people who took it upon themselves - they really thought they had an anointing from God to absolutely destroy our lives and to find every reason to bring us down because they didn't believe what we were doing. There were three guys in particular who just were out to destroy everything that I was attempting to build in the prophetic.

Every time we did an event, they would go to that city six weeks before hand and talk to all the pastors and say to them, "Don't have these guys come to this city. They are demonized. They are not from God. They are deceived and they will lead your people astray." There would be this huge commotion and when the event sometimes was called off because the people were worried - and sometimes it when

on. They would be outside the event with placards with my photograph. I didn't mind the placard, I hated the photograph! I wanted to give them a better photograph.

They would be outside with these placards handing out leaflets saying, "Don't let this man pray for you. Don't look into his eyes. Don't let him lay hands on you." Then they would come into the event and they always sat on the front row right in front of me - notebooks and pencils in the jacket top pocket and they will be taking copious notes of everything I said, and then they would write a newsletter exposing everything that they felt I didn't know - all my mistakes and everything.

This went on for like two years. We called them The Three Stooges. They booked into every event. I prayed. "Lord, please kill them!" He didn't answer that prayer so I modified it to maiming. "Could You break their writing wrists or something?" (Joking.)

Two years this went on. Two years of absolute commotion everywhere. Pastors would call me up and say, "The whole city is in an uproar, I don't know if we can bring you out. They have stirred everybody up and what should we do?" And I went to the Lord and said, "Lord, what should they do?" And the Lord said, "Tell them to put more seats out."

This is when I started to realize that no man can close the door that God wants opened. I learned how to trust the Lord and I would go into these events, you could cut the atmosphere with a knife. In those moments what we were learning is just how to be faithful to what God has called you to – how to be faithful in season and out of season. You're learning how to stand and you are learning how to pray. You're learning how to grow up. You are learning how to be committed. Sometimes a roomful of a thousand people you're learning how to speak to 6 whose hearts are open.

THE SCULPTURE DREAM

But I was agitated by the whole thing. It preoccupied me in prayer endlessly. And then one night I had a dream and in this dream I'm in the Throne Room and I'm sitting on God's lap and our heads are together and we are chatting away, and I love those moments. I love the closeness of how it feels in those dreams. Dreams are just God's way of bypassing all our stuff so He can give us encounters. The thing I like about dreams is that you can wake up and all the things you experienced in the dream, you can have in real life. Some people forget that, I think.

When God gives you a dream, He wants to give you the experience in real life that you had in the dream.

So, I'm in this dream and the Lord says, "Hey, do you want to see something?" And I say, "Yes. Sure." So He gave this command and this angel wheeled in this huge block of marble. It is like 6 feet tall, 4 feet wide, and about 3 feet deep. It was a beautiful piece of stone and the Lord said, "What do you think?" My reply: "It's gorgeous!" And He gives another command and Jesus steps into view and He looks at me, giving me a slow wink because Jesus is endlessly happy.

Jesus goes and digs His finger into the marble and He etches a figure and He steps back and He smiles at me. The Lord says, "Watch this." Three pairs of arms from the elbows to the fingertips – each pair of hand is holding a hammer and a chisel and they start to sculpt a figure from the marble. And the Lord said, "You know, Graham, they will work faster if you encourage them." Being terribly British, I'm

saying, “Okay chaps, all power to your elbow.” And the Lord is looking at me going, “What was that? That was the worst encouragement I have ever heard in My life. The more you encourage them, the faster this thing will get built.”

So I’m shouting, I’m blessing. I end up at one point on the arm of God’s throne, with my left hand on His head for balance and I’m shouting, encouraging, etc. and there is bedlam all over Heaven. This one angel in particular is laying on the floor and he is beating his fists, laughing, and everyone is looking at this thing and we are all cheering and I woke up the next day and I could not speak for a couple of days.

And then, it is finished and it is this beautiful statue. Everything quietens down and the Father looks at me and says, “So what do you think?” I started crying. I said, “That is absolutely beautiful.” He said, “I think so, too. Do you know what it is?” I didn’t have a clue. He said, “That is you. That is how I see you.”

And I looked at it and it is almost like it came alive. I’m crying and I’m looking at it and I say, “That is me?” God said, “Yes, that is what I’m making you into. That is the finished product right there.” I said, “It is beautiful.” He said, “I know. Would you like to thank the sculptors?” And out from behind the statue came The Three Stooges! I looked at them and screamed! I screamed so loudly that I woke myself up! I screamed so loudly that my wife woke and fell out of bed. She wanted to know what was wrong and I was almost incoherent. All I could say was, “Heaven. Stooges. Statue. Me.” And she is looking at me saying, “You are so weird.” I said, “I know, but – Stooges – they are here to make me beautiful.”

GRACE GROWERS

I didn’t get it before, but now I get it. All the people who are against me, actually are really *for* me, they just do not know it. I get up and I am absolutely staggered at the thought that these people who absolutely hate me are actually part of the purpose of God to make me into the man of God that He wants me to be.

That is when I started to learn about Grace Growers. We all have them. You may be married to one.

Revelation changes everything. A few days later I go into the office and my personal assistant looks at me and says, “The Stooges have just booked into your next conference.”

Revelation changes everything.

I said, “Really? Sweet!” And she looks at me like I’m crazy.

I’m driving to the next conference and normally I drive pass the front of the building where the conference is and there are The Stooges with their placards and as I’m driving, I’m saying, “Lord, please let them be there.” I drive past the front and there they are – my boys. My whole attitude has changed. They come and do their normal thing – leave their placards in the back and come and sit in the front. So I come bouncing up to them and say, “Hi boys. How is it going? Can I get you anything? Would you like a cup of tea?” And you can almost feel them mentally going, “He is on drugs.” They are all looking at me deeply suspicious. “Why is he being nice?” It does not matter anymore. It is not about them anymore. It is about how I show up, not about how they show up.

I looked at them and said, “Guys, you know what? You guys are incredibly faithful. Every event I have done for the last two years, you have all been here. I appreciate you taking all these notes – I just think it's brilliant and I just bless you on the journey that you are on.” And you can see them writing the headline of the next newsletter – *He is now taking drugs. Possibly prescription drugs but we don't know for sure.* It does not matter anymore. **I am what I love, not what loves me.**

We are a people group that is distinguished by one thing and one thing only, and one thing only in this world is the absolute love with which we ourselves are loved.

I made a resolution at that time that I would never ever choose an enemy that was human. I only have one enemy and that is the same one that Jesus has and I hate him with a passion that I cannot even articulate.

A guy came up to me a few years after that and said, “I want you to know that I hate you and everything you stand for.” And I am thinking, “How is that working out for you?” And he said, “I am absolutely against your ministry and I am your enemy.” I said, “No, you are not.” He said, “No, trust me, I am.” I said, “Trust me. You are so not my enemy.” And he said, “I am!” And I said, “Dude, you are not.” He said, “I am your enemy!” I said, “Honestly, you are not.” He said, “Why?” And I said, “It is Tuesday. I do not take enemies on a Tuesday. What planet are you living on? He looked at me and made a face and said, “I'll come back tomorrow!” And I said, “Brilliant, because I have a special on Wednesdays.”

Of all the people groups on this world,
we are the ones defined by love.

Here's the thing, of all the people groups on this world, we are the ones defined by love - How we are loved - How we choose to love - and how we choose to love at every single opportunity.

Let me read you this verse again.

John 17:24 Father, I desire that they also whom You have given Me may be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

THE PLACE OF FIRST LOVE

The call to each one of us is to step into the place of first love. What is that place? First love is the space between the Father and the Son and that is where God had put you in Christ – that you occupy the space between the Father and Son. First love. You are designed to be overwhelmed by love. You are designed to have your thinking blown into a place where you can only think from the love of God. You are designed to be overwhelmed, saturated, immersed in the passion that God has for Jesus and the outrageous love that Jesus has for the Father.

Do you want to see what it looks like? Let's give you a visual aid. Is Gary out there? Gary come. You can't be the godfather though, man. You have to be God, the Father. I'm giving you a chance to redeem yourself. Stand right here. I'm glad you got rid of those sunglasses and that really strange hat. (Gary and his wife received the offering earlier and he played like he was the godfather coming to take the offering when he was supposed to be like God, our Father. It was a funny skit between he and his wife.)

Mr. Hoyt. Doesn't he look elegant? He looks like James Bond with a Bible. (Graham stands Tony Hoyt where he is facing towards Gary who is representing God, the Father.)

This is the love that existed before the world began. The Father and the Son. Both of Them absolutely involved with each other. Both of Them loving each other, seeing the best about one another and the passion and the affection and the love is so real and so strong and so powerful - it is actually overwhelming to Both of Them so They feel like They have to have someone to share this love with. They wanted to create a people group that eventually will become the Bride of Christ.

So I'm going to ask Rick – you are going to be the Holy Spirit. Doesn't he look like the Holy Spirit? He looks like a genius. So now you have the Three of Them - the love of the Father and the Son and you have the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's job is to go out into the world and find the Bride - find the Beloved of God and to bring her to the place where she can stand in the affection between the Father and the Son.

Rick, as the Holy Spirit, I want you to go and get Theresa. (Rick brings Theresa and places her in the space between Tony – playing the Son, and Gary – playing the Father.) This is the place that we occupied between the Father and the Son and it is our job in this world to be the Beloved. So the affection between the Father and the Son is the way that the Father looks at the Son - she, the Beloved, gets in the middle of that. The way the Son looks at the Father - she gets in the middle of that. And the Holy Spirit is here just to make her stay in that place. The Holy Spirit is to teach her how to abide in that place.

This (pointing at Theresa in the middle) is you. When God says you left your first love what He means is you left the place of the deepest affection that I have for the Son and the Son has for Me. And the Holy Spirit loves the role of teaching us how to abide – how to stay in that place of being the Beloved so that our lives are mirrored by how God feels about us. There is an anointing upon us to be the Beloved. It is your prime responsibility in this world to be loved by God and to receive that love in the fullest way possible. And the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are absolutely committed to you learning the ways of love - learning how to be the Beloved and They are the Ones who say, "There is no situation, there is no circumstance that could ever separate you from the love that the Father has for the Son and the Son has for the Father."

It is your prime responsibility in this world to be loved by God and to receive that love in the fullest way possible.

YOU ARE THE BELOVED OF GOD

You cannot be separated from the love of God. It is utterly impossible. It doesn't matter what people are doing or what people are saying. It does not matter what's happening against you. It does not matter if you are universally disliked. It doesn't matter if you're being persecuted. Nothing can separate you from the love of God.

And to *know the love of God that passes all knowledge* and to know that when you are under pressure and to know that when you are being persecuted and when you are being disliked and hated and rejected, yet the Father and the Son will hold you in that place and you can receive in those moments

the deepest affection of the heart of God. You are the Beloved of God. That is your role in the Earth – to be loved.

Your role is to be the Beloved of God. The thing of prime importance in your life is:

- that you learn how to receive the love of God for yourself,
- that you are filled up to all the fullness of God's love,
- that you learn how to occupy the space and
- know that it belongs to you and that everything that is happening in your life is to establish love in you:
 - as a way of life.
 - as a mindset.
 - as a heart thing - that all your emotions are pressed through that place of being the Beloved.

It's not our job just to tell the world that God loves them. The world needs to see you being loved by God. When the world sees you being loved by God, they will want to be loved by God, too. We have become really good at telling people that God loves them, but behaving towards those people as though He doesn't. That isn't authentic. The world doesn't need to hear only that they are loved by God; the world needs to see what that love looks like. They need to see you living in the affections of God. They need to see you being confident and being trusting. They need to see you experiencing and encountering the love of God. They need to see your life being consistent. They need to see that God's love never fails. They need to see you being absolutely linked, inseparable. They need to see you so attached to love that it creates a longing in their own heart. I want to be loved like that, too.

The world doesn't need to hear only that they are loved by God; the world needs to see what that love looks like.

They need to see you choosing love above all things. I am what I love, not what loves me. The world responds or reacts, but often there is very little consistency. We are consistent, no matter what people's behavior is, because we have made choices to be filled with the love of God.

First love - the love that existed before the world began. The love of the Father for the Son - the same love that made Jesus decide, "I will come and be the sacrificial Lamb to restore people to first love." It is in your DNA Beloved to be loved by God in such a radical way that everything about you is changed - that you are safe in the love of God, yet you are going to be persecuted. You are going to have enemies. The world will be against you, but Jesus said, "Hey, cheer up, I've overcome the world."

LOVE IS A CHOICE

And there are days and times when there is no happy ending to some of your circumstances. You are going to be wounded. You are going to be persecuted. You are going to be hated. And those are very real things.

I knocked around Asia for, I don't know, 13 years or so and you know, you can't go into India that has over 300 million gods and talk about the One God and not have a few people annoyed. I have been attacked. I have been beaten up. I was left for dead on one occasion.

Here is the thing, those are not happy experiences, but you have to go back. Why? Because the love of Christ controls us and you have choices to make about how you show up and who you are going to be. It is your absolute privilege to be made rich in love - to be perfected by love - to have all fear driven out of you because the love of God for you is stronger than any fear of man. This is our reality. This is who we are. Love never fails.

THE EXPECTATION OF BEING LOVED BY GOD

You are the Beloved of God. You are the Beloved of God and it is critical that the world sees the love of God in action - that they see how we love one another - they see how we are loved by God. We are the Beloved of God. We occupied the space between the Father and the Son. That is a very real place. That you understand and that you experience the affection of God – the passion of God for you. That it becomes a real and tangible thing – it is not a concept. It is a real and tangible experience. That you feel the kiss of God. That you feel the breath of God. That you know the touch of God. That you know the Presence of God. And that you know that He wants to make that as real and as tangible as possible. That we don't consider that the love of God is just conceptual, but it is actually real - it is tangible – you can feel it and you can know it.

More than that, He wants you to have an expectation of it – that the passion that He has for you – that you have that same passion. He loves to connect. He loves to touch our lives. He loves to breathe on us, to brood over us, to walk with us. He never leaves us nor forsakes us. He loves hanging out with us.

You are designed to be overwhelmed by the love of God. This is what Jesus died for – so that you could experience the same love with the Father that He does.

So let me read this passage for you again from John 17. “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one even as You, Father are in Me and I in You; that they also may be in Us that the world may believe that You sent Me.” The world will believe in God when they see you living in your rightful place. When they feel the Presence of God when you walk by. And when you enter their life – when you speak to them – there is some kind of blessing or benediction that flows out of you that touches people.

You are designed to be overwhelmed by the love of God.

“And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them that they may be one just as We are one. I in them and You in Me that they may be made perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.” Everything is ‘so the world may know.’ God has set you up to be loved so wonderfully that the world around you will catch the overflow.

“Father I desire that they also whom You have given Me be with Me where I am so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. Oh righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You and these have known that You have sent Me and I have made Your name known to them and will make it known to the love with which You loved Me may be in them and I in them.”

RESTORED TO FIRST LOVE

It is important for us to understand that we are caught up in the relationship between the Father and the Son and is important for us to be restored to first love. The tragedy of building church without any sense of the Kingdom is that we have no sense of the Majesty of the love with which we are loved. We have put the great commission ahead of the first commandment. We are busy producing servants when God wants sons. The church is not majored on our relationship with God as the substance of all things. But you know what? That is changing.

It is changing and there is a leadership emerging in the church in America that really is hungry for intimacy with God. It is hungry for first love. And there are churches developing across this country that are really pursuing the Presence of God and are pursuing the love of God in every way possible.

We are busy producing servants when God wants sons.

It is our right to be loved by God in the way that Jesus is loved. It is our role in the earth to be the Beloved and I think, all else is secondary. All else flows out of that place of love - that place of affection - that place of passion.

It is my assignment here this weekend to say that you are being radically pursued by love by a God who will not give in until you come and stand and occupy the place that was set aside for you before the foundation of the world - that you occupy the place of first love and that you know what it means. You have experiences and encounters of it. That it fills your thinking. It fills your perception of yourself. It comes out of your language. Your whole action towards other people is to love – is to love - is to love. And we learn how to be love. We learn the ways of love.

REACTIVE VS. RESPONSIVE LOVE

Love is never reactive, it is always responsive. We learn how to be the Beloved and we learn how to love other people. We love others even as we love ourselves. Each one of us comes to that place where you know that you are so radically loved, you actually really like yourself. And you love yourself and you revel in the love of God. Every time you speak, someone is going to fall in love with Jesus. Every time you do something, even in the face of provocation, love flows out of you.

Love is never reactive, it is always responsive.

This family in India had four daughters, and I knew one of the daughters from when she was two – a gorgeous kid. When she was 15, she was gang raped by four men - 15 years old – and the last man who was raping her had his face scorched in a fire. As he was getting up off her, she stretched out her hand, touched his cheek and said, “Be healed in Jesus’ name.” And he was. That's what we are talking about.

In the world she would have every reason to hate him. But in the Kingdom, there isn't one because Jesus died for that individual. At 15, she was so consumed by the love of the Father – she was a real worship. I said to her, “How did you do that?” Because I wanted to know what her answer was - and she said, “I knew that it would be his greatest opportunity to receive a touch from God. How could I deny him that moment?” That's what we're talking about. Anyone can love the way the world loves. It

is not all that great, but to love as Jesus loves? To give yourself to the purpose of love? That is what we are here for.

PERSECUTION

When you choose love, you leave all that pettiness behind - the anger - the resentment – the whole victim thing. It is a pleasure being persecuted because there is a blessing on those days that is absolutely outrageous. Blessed are you when men persecute you. When men say all manner of evil things about you for My name’s sake - for the Spirit of God and of glory rests on you.

I’m thankful that I’ve been persecuted – that I still am – that I still get hate mail – some really vile stuff – really, honestly who gives a rip? In those moments, if you react against those things, you miss out on what God wants to be for you.

When I was being seriously persecuted over several years, the Lord taught me how to dance. He came into my room and said, “Why don’t you stop praying like that? Stop praying like a victim. Why don’t we just dance? Because the spirit of God and of glory rests on you. Don’t you think that I wouldn’t make it worth your while to be persecuted? What if I could use all that persecution to bring you into a place of such radical love that you would be absolutely delighted by what people were saying against you? Let’s dance. Let’s dance.”

The Spirit of God and of Glory rests on you. You know, the enemy was created to serve the purposes of God. Nothing has changed. Nothing has changed! That is just so funny. And the thing is, he can't do anything about it. He can't do anything about it. When you actually stand in the place of God’s affection things have to work towards you. Yeah, you’re going to get wounded. You are going to get persecuted, but out of those moments, something so profound and glorious will come.

When you actually stand in the place of God’s affection things have to work towards you.

We are a people group who care more about the affections of God than anything else. That is in your DNA. And in the time that is coming, we are going to be seriously persecuted and the beginnings of it are all around us. The spirit of the age is about tolerance and everyone wants to make us like them. So we are going to come into a time in this country when Christians will go to prison for what they believe. There will be a persecution and we are all going to have to choose the ways of love.

It is time we got started. It is not just about that. It is about the Father looking at you saying, “I want you living in this space between Me and Jesus. I want you to feel - I want you to feel in your body everything I feel about Him.” It is about Jesus looking at you saying, “I wanted you to feel in your heart everything I feel about the Father.” And it is about the Holy Spirit saying to you, “I’m going to make sure that you don’t wiggle out of that space. I’m going to teach you how to abide in first love so that you become absolutely conquered, completely overwhelmed by the love of God that passes all knowledge that it fills you and it changes you.” First love.

Let's pray.

Father, I thank You that the passion that You have for us comes out of Your kindness towards us in Christ and that kindness began long before the Earth was formed. When you formed the Earth You had us in mind and when Jesus went to the cross, He had us in mind. The restoration of first love. A people group whose hearts would be constantly filled, overwhelmed, encounter after encounter, experience after experience, tangible Presence, real love, majestic, overwhelming, overpowering, beyond our comprehension. And you feel it still - in your heart towards each other. First love.

Lord Jesus, I thank You, that before the foundation of the world, You agreed to come and die so that we could be restored to first love – the love that existed before the world began - that we have a part to play in the affection of the Father to the Son, and the Son to the Father, and that the Holy Spirit is our helper to empower us to receive love everlasting – a love that never fails. A love that makes our life inseparable from Your's - a love that binds us to everything that You are – and all that You are passionate about.

Father, I pray in the name of Jesus for all those listening in this auditorium, all those up listening online streaming, all those who those who will listen to CDs months and years ahead. I pray for all of us that we would have radical encounters with love – so profound, so huge, so majestic that we will be turned into different men and different women and that the world around us will see that love in such huge proportions that people will come and say, “Could I be loved like that, too?” That we would be Your visual aid of the affection of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father. So, Holy Spirit, I ask that You would draw us into that place- that You would not give up on any one of us - that You would compel us to be loved outrageously for Jesus' sake that the world may know that God loves them because of the love which we have with You. For Jesus' sake, Father, amen.