

Covenant Love

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon (renewal of wedding vows service)
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 17th Oct 2010

Intro-

- We have rejoiced in witnessing vows of love spoken today by Dawne and Adrian. There is a beautiful picture in the bible in Ecclesiastes which says 'a threefold cord is not easily broken'. Sir Cliff Richard refers to this in one of his songs 'You and me and Jesus'. The point is, with God on our side we can learn to love one another and build a strong and healthy marriage together that will stand the test of time.
- So today we will look at a passage of the Bible for inspiration in building not just strong marriages, but strong relationships based on the way God loves us.

Read Deut 7:6-9

Love is a choice rather than a feeling

- God's love for us is not dependant upon us, but upon Him- v8 'because the Lord loves you'
- Context- Israel had just been rescued by God out of slavery in the land of Egypt. They knew God loved them and this could have gone to their heads, thinking they were greater than the other nations, but in Deut 7:7 God makes it clear He loves them simply because He loves them- a special treasure. 'I'm His favourite'
- God loves us because that's who He is- God is love.
- Perfect love casts out fear- there is a security in knowing you are loved.
- God's love for us is not based on our performance, or appearance
- **Illustration-** Wrong concepts of love based on Hollywood films. My friend's list of attributes of the perfect wife God had for him- Blonde hair. Perfect body. French accent. Backpack. Highly intelligent.
- **Application-** and the perfect man/woman. Love is a choice rather than a feeling. Many think 'fallen out of love' because emotions change from day to day, but love is a choice, not a feeling

Love keeps it's promises

- God keeps His promises- v8 'because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers'
- President of Israel has repeatedly said he wants to 'wipe Israel off the face of this earth'. Hitler tried to remove all Jews from the earth. However, the Jews will never cease to be a people on this earth because of the promise God made to Abraham. God keeps His promises. That's why the Exodus happened. That's why the Jews have returned to Israel. They have more trouble to go through, but God will look after them.
- 'A covenant, in its most general sense, is a solemn promise to engage in or refrain from a specified action'. - Wikipedia. Can refer to conditions on a loan or in law particularly relating to land. Marriage is a covenant where 2 people agree to live as one family and to love one another 'for better or worse, richer or poorer..' etc. Ring as a sign of the covenant.
- Covenant of peace- cut an animal in half and walk between the pieces- 'may this happen to me if I don't keep my side of the bargain and protect you'.
- Covenant of works- 'do this and I will bless you'. New Covenant- based on trusting the perfect work of Christ and being transformed by it- a covenant of grace- undeserved favour.

- **Hesed-** word used in v9 for 'mercy'= steadfast love, loyalty, faithfulness=covenant love- a sticky love that won't let go (like the man stuck to the aeroplane with glue). 'Give thanks to the Lord for He is good- His love (hesed) endures forever'. i.e. He stays loyal forever to those He is in relationship with. End of Psalm 23- 'Surely goodness and mercy (hesed) shall follow me all the days of my life'- the hound of heaven (religious poem by Francis Thompson in 1893)= God's love pursuing us like a hound- love will find a way. Tolkien said about the poem 'The name is strange. It startles one at first. It is so bold, so new, so fearless. It does not attract, rather the reverse. But when one reads the poem this strangeness disappears. The meaning is understood. As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and unperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace. And though in sin or in human love, away from God it seeks to hide itself, Divine grace follows after, unwearingly follows ever after, till the soul feels its pressure forcing it to turn to Him alone in that never ending pursuit.'
- **Illustration- Loyalty of dogs.**
In 1925, Professor Ueno Elizaburo walked every day to the station to take the train to his job at what is now known as Tokyo University. His dog Hachiko accompanied him every day to the station. Of course, he could not go with the Professor to his job but every day at 3:00, when the Professor returned to the station, Hachiko was waiting faithfully at the gates for him, come rain or shine. On May 21 of that year, Professor Ueno died of a stroke whilst at work. Hachiko was at the station that day, waiting for his master to come home. On this day he waited, and waited. Did he know something was wrong? I often wonder if he knew in his mind that his master would not return. But did this stop Hachiko from going to the station everyday? The answer is a resounding no. Every day, for nearly 10 years, Hachiko went to Shibuya station at 3:00 and sat in the same spot he always sat in, waiting. He would wait until the station closed. Professor Ueno's former gardner and the stationmaster understood what the dog was doing and fed him and gave him shelter. Soon word spread of this loyal dog. The Japanese culture is focused on family and loyalty. Hachiko was seen as a prime example of what humans should aspire to. People began travelling to see him, to feed him, or just to touch his head for luck. On March 7th, 1934, Hachiko was found dead on the platform where he had waited for the Professor for so long. He had continued his pilgrimage, even when old age and arthritis began to make it more and more difficult. Hachiko's death made the papers in Japan nationwide and a day of mourning was declared. Contributions from mourners all over were sent in and a statue was erected in memory of Hachiko by famed sculptor Andeo Teru - placed in the exact same spot where Hachiko had waited all those years. The statue was taken down and melted for the war effort to make weapons. The amazing thing is, after the war Andeo's son, Takeshi made another statue, which is in the same spot and stands to this day. Hachiko can also be seen stuffed in Japan's National Museum.
- Jesus promised to all who respond to His call- 'I am with you to the very end of the age'
- **Application-** What are we like at keeping our promises? How faithful are we? Have we failed to do some things we pledged to do? Have we got side-tracked by the pressures in life from doing the things that are the most important to us- e.g. time with spouse, family? Are we cherishing the things dearest to us, or getting absorbed by work/hobbies?

Love is expressed by action

- God proves His love with action. v8 '(because He loves you).. the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage from the hand of Pharaoh'. The Exodus was the expression of God's love to Israel- He rescued them from slavery and oppression because He loved them.
- The cross was God's ultimate expression of love to mankind. 'For God so loved the world He gave His only Son'- the cross is the ultimate expression of love. 'Lord how much do you love me?'- 'This much'- (stretches out hands and dies).
- Extreme- 'more than words'- words are good and necessary, but they need to be accompanied by action.
- My problems with commitment- had a non-Christian attitude to engagement. Commitment is the practical expression of love.
- Marriage does not seem to be as popular today as it has previously been in Western culture. Part is the fear associated with a consumer culture- 'what if I make a mistake, or if something better comes along?'.
"Marriage rates lowest since 1862. Thu Feb 11, 2010 (Reuters) - Marriage rates in England and Wales have fallen to their lowest level since records began in 1862 as a rising population increasingly shuns wedlock, government statisticians said . The Office of National Statistics said a total of 232,990 couples tied the knot in

2008, down from 235,370 in 2007, with the number of marriages at their lowest since 1895. Both Labour and the Conservatives have made the issue of marriage and the family a key election battleground. The marriage rate, which the ONS said was the most important figure because it takes account of population changes, fell for a fourth consecutive year. Both the marriage rate and the number of marriages have been in long-term decline since 1980, the ONS said, adding that over the last decade both men and women have been waiting longer to marry. It said over last 10 years the average age men marry increased by nearly 5-1/2 years. For women it had increased by just 4-1/2 years.

- In what ways have you responded to God's love in your life? Have you made a decision to commit to Him? What about expressing love to others? Are you holding back in some way to a full expression of commitment to others? What practical ways can you express your love to those around you?

Summary

- **Love is a decision**
- **Love keeps it's promises**
- **Love is expressed by action**

Application

- Prayerfully consider God's love and your response to it today. If you really appreciate his love, how do you show it? Consider your relationships. Do you base too much on feelings? Are you keeping your promises and taking your responsibilities seriously? In what practical ways are you expressing sincere love to God and those around you?

Powerpoint: *Adrian & Dawne's wedding photos.*