



We have now entered the second week of Advent, and if you weren't here last week, let me remind you that each week approaching Christmas, we will be going through the traditional themes of Christmas. In each sermon, we will see how that theme is seen in the Old Testament. Then we'll discover how Jesus' first advent (his first coming to this earth fulfilled the Old Testament's longing. Then we'll see how that theme encourages us as we anticipate Jesus coming again in his second advent. So, last week, we looked at the theme of hope. We saw how through Adam and Eve's sin, hope was lost; but almost immediately after their sin, God promised hope to come through the seed of the woman. Throughout Israel's history, we see how people of faith hoped in the Lord, anticipated this One to come, and trusted God would fulfill his promise. Then we saw that for us as Christians today, we are called to this steadfast assurance and anticipation, too. Since Jesus has come, and is coming again, Hebrews tells Christians to commune with the Lord regularly and to commune with fellow believers until Jesus comes again. Hope was lost. Hope was promised. Hope came. Hope is coming again!

In this first week, we see the truth we are going to see each week: **Advent reminds us that God keeps his promises.** Now we move into the theme of "love." What is love? When I look at the Google Oxford Languages dictionary definition of love, we see this: **"1. feel deep affection for (someone). 2. feel a deep romantic or sexual attachment to (someone)."** I was personally disheartened to see this definition. All it had with it was deep feeling. While I don't discount deep feeling, it seems in our culture today, we define everything based on feelings. If I have a sensual attraction, then I must have love. Or, if I like something very much, that must mean I love it. But that can't be all there is to love. I've come alongside many people with marriages falling apart, where the spouse who has been pursuing sin will say they love their spouse so much, but when the rubber meets the road, they often or always choose their sin. Do they really *love* their spouse or do they just have strong feelings of attachment?

Even as I say this, I know some of you might hear this and then you'll go to the other extreme. You'll say something like, "Yeah, love isn't about feelings! It's about commitment!" So, you just grit your teeth and endure, but you have minimal desires for certain people or maybe even for the Lord. But do you really love the Lord if you don't like him? I think the Christmas song, "O come, let us adore him," is on to something! Loves involves both commitment and desire.

Many of you with younger children are probably familiar with *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. In that storybook Bible, we're given a definition for God's love. If you've read the stories, you'll probably be able to even say it with me. It's **"God's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love."** To be more precise, I'll read from a Hebrew dictionary on this word for one of the words for love: "desire. . . , zeal, love. . . , kindness, benevolence. The sense is: **an unfailing kind of love, kindness, or goodness; often used of God's love that is related to faithfulness to his covenant.** While there are other terms for love, this is the love that God continually reminds his people that he has for them; so, we're going to focus on this kind of love.

What we have embedded into this Hebrew word for love, and even the Greek word for agape, is delight and commitment. And it's not that God delights in us *if* we can give him something he likes. He simply loves because he loves us. He delights in us because he delights in us. We aren't "loved" by him because he wants to use us. He works through us because he loves us! This is the idea of love, and God's love is intended to flow from him to us into this world. So, today, the main idea is: **God's love sustained his people and pointed forward to Love coming in the flesh, who grants people God's love to be shared to the world for all eternity future.** This is a *very long* main idea this week; so, like last week, I'm going to break it down, and then we'll culminate with communion this morning. So, let's start with:

God's love sustained his people and pointed forward to Love. A few years ago, I was slowly reading through Genesis, and for some reason, when I was reading the story of creation, my emotions and awe were elevated as I thought about how majestic the creation must have been – and even thinking through how beautiful the Garden of Eden is described as. No sin. No brokenness. Just unrestrained, perfect growth and multiplication of all that was made. Beautiful stones. Beautiful metals. Life-sustaining rivers and perfect food. Then Adam and Eve live in glorious innocence. No victimization. No power-plays. No sin. That time, when I read the creation, I longed to know what that must have been like. And as I thought of it, I saw God's grace and love. Behold what manner of love that God made all of this, and called Adam and Eve to enjoy this creation and image him forth as rulers under his rule.

We don't know how long it took for Eve and Adam to rebel, but they did. Eve longed for the fruit from the forbidden tree because she thought it would give her what she needed. Isn't that the essence of all temptation? We "can't believe" that God would keep something from us that we want to badly. We believe we're missing out. So, instead of trusting God's goodness and love, we trust ourselves. Adam and Eve trust themselves, and immediately fear rushes in, and they lose their innocence. They realize their nakedness, and they sew fig leaves for themselves. I'm reminded of 1 John 4:18 that says, ". . . **perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.**"¹ Adam and Eve had experienced the perfection of love, but now, the awareness and communion with perfect love had been lost. Why? Because they rejected perfect love. Therefore, they experienced fear. They were facing punishment.

Yet, as many of us know, while God did punish, he also gave a promise of hope. And the foundation of that promise of hope – that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent, destroying death and sin – the foundation of it is love. Now, just because Adam and Eve were given hope, and God showed love, doesn't mean everything was better. In actuality, many people after them trampled on God's love. They didn't consider it. They continued to trust themselves and reject God's love. We go from Adam and Eve's children: Cain and Abel. Cain murders his brother out of jealousy. We move further in Genesis, reading about Lamech who rejoiced in his power to get revenge. Then, by the time we get to Noah's day, we read this description: ⁵The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. ⁶And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them."²

While the word "love" isn't in these verses, the idea is. When we read that God was *sorry* that he made humanity. That word for sorry refers to consoling oneself and having empathy. God saw the wickedness

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:18.

² [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 6:5–7.

of humanity, and he was sorrowful for human beings. Why? They had rejected the One who is Life himself. They were pursuing death. And so the story continues. Even after the flood, the people continue in sin, but Genesis holds out hope that God is faithful to his promises and loves his people.

Remember last week that I said that as Moses writes Genesis, he seems really interested in genealogy? Do you remember why? Answer: because he's tracing the line from where the serpent-crusher is going to come. The serpent-crusher is the seed of the woman. That means, a woman in Adam's lineage is going to give birth to the rescuer and future perfect Ruler of a renewed creation. Then, we get to Noah. It's coming from Noah. Then we get to Abraham. The child is coming from Abraham. Abraham becomes an example of faith and patience, as we talked about last week. He also is a pointer, through his own life, of the future Ruler who will one day rescue all. The first usage of the word for steadfast love or faithfulness given in Genesis, is actually in the life of Abraham, regarding his nephew Lot. Lot lives in Sodom. He dwells with the people who embrace all types of sinfulness, and Abraham hears that God is going to punish the people of Sodom. Abraham prays for God to rescue any few righteous people who might be in the city. God does. He shows mercy to Lot. Lot is a picture of someone caught in sin and drifting, and where Lot deserves to be punished, God cares about his soul. And so Lot himself acknowledges this: **Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life.**³ The word "kindness" is the word for love. How can God show this kind of love to a rebel? But we've seen God doing this already in Genesis. Through Abraham's seed all the nations will be blessed. Lot himself is blessed. He's experienced God's love in saving his life. As we move through the story of Abraham, the next time we come to this word for steadfast love is when Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son, Isaac. Clearly Abraham isn't the Rescuer. And Isaac isn't either. We need the seed of the woman. Isaac needs a wife. So, Abraham's servant prays to the Lord that God would show and not forsake his steadfast love to his master Abraham. Four times! Why steadfast love? Because the promise of God's rescue comes through Abraham's lineage. So, what we see by these first usages of the word in Genesis is that God loves his creation. He delights in rescuing them and he will rescue them on the basis of his steadfast love and in bringing forth the serpent-crusher someday.

As we continue in the story of Genesis and then move into Exodus, we come to a familiar passage for us in Exodus 34: **"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."**⁴ The essential character of God is steadfast love and judgment. In all he does, he reveals his mercy through judgment. And so, we get to the songbook of Israel, and discover there is over 100 instances where the word for "steadfast love" shows up. Do you think God wants his people to know his steadfast love? Do you think he wants people to turn from fear and turn to the Lord in faith? Absolutely!

There's one psalm that mentions this word 26 times. One psalm. If you're a person who doesn't like repetition in songs, you might not like this one. Just kidding. I hope you love it. If you have your Bibles, please turn to Psalm 136. The psalm starts with: **Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.** ² **Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever.** ³ **Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever. . . .** ⁵

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ge 19:19.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 34:6–7.

⁵ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:1–3.

The psalm begins simply by declaring God’s character. But notice the word “for.” Give thanks to the Lord. Why? Because he is good. And why is he good? Because his steadfast love endures forever. God is good *because of his steadfast love*. So, give thanks to the God who is over all idols and over all rulers of the world. Why? Because unlike rulers who can die and idols who can’t do anything, God has a steadfast love!

Then the psalm gets more personal for the humanity and also the nation of Israel. It goes on to say in verse 4-6: **4 to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever; 5 to him who by understanding made the heavens, for his steadfast love endures forever; 6 to him who spread out the earth above the waters, for his steadfast love endures forever. . .**⁶ We begin with God’s power in creation. No one else has created. He’s the uncreated Creator! And his creation isn’t to reveal how demanding or mean he is. We rejoice because with all this power, he is the God of steadfast love that endures forever. The psalm continues to speak of creation, and then we get to verse 10-11 to read, **10 to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt, for his steadfast love endures forever; 11 and brought Israel out from among them, for his steadfast love endures forever. . .**⁷ The psalm continues to speak of God rescuing Israel from Egypt and rescuing them through the Red Sea. Then the psalm moves beyond the wilderness wanderings and into when Israel entered the Promised Land: **17 to him who struck down great kings, for his steadfast love endures forever. . .**⁸

What we see in this psalm is that God’s steadfast love is foundational in all he does. In other words, **God’s love sustained his people**. And this psalm ends by reminding us of God’s steadfast love continuing – thus pointing to the reality that his love will come. God will keep his promise. Notice that the psalm traces not only God’s creation, but God’s salvation of Israel. Even though the wilderness wanderings were long, and the people complained, God’s steadfast love was there. Even though there were difficulties and disobedience, God’s steadfast love was there. Now, the psalm ends with: **It is he who remembered us in our low estate, for his steadfast love endures forever; 24 and rescued us from our foes, for his steadfast love endures forever; 25 he who gives food to all flesh, for his steadfast love endures forever. 26 Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.**⁹

Savor this, Ventura! He remembered Israel’s low estate. He rescued them from their enemies. He fed them. So, the psalmist writes, “Give thanks to the God of heaven, for his steadfast love endures forever.” The implication is that it continues to today and will continue on! Keep in mind this was to be a song that the Israelites were to sing *always*. We continue to have this songbook even today! Whether Israel is under King David or in a divided kingdom or exiled under Babylon or back in Israel without God’s presence in the Temple; God’s steadfast love endures forever. And the reality of God’s steadfast love was to sustain the people as they hoped in the serpent-crusher and Rescuer to come!

Then, 2,000 years ago, Love came. John 3:16 puts it this way: **16 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.**¹⁰ God revealed his steadfast love most clearly by sending his great pleasure into the

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:4–6.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:10–11.

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:17.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ps 136:23–26.

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Jn 3:16–17.

world: his Son. And he did this so that anyone who would believe on Jesus – meaning, anyone who would no longer trust themselves and what they think is best, like Adam and Eve – would not die, but have eternal life. How can they have eternal life? Because God’s love is steadfast and endures forever. That means, the eternal life is based in eternal love. So, John continues that God didn’t send Jesus to this world to condemn it. The world’s already condemned. Instead, he sent Jesus to save people! Did you know that? Jesus came to live the life Adam didn’t live. He’s the Serpent-Crusher because while Satan attacked Jesus on the cross, Jesus crushed Satan through his death and resurrection. In his death, he took the punishment for our sins, and in his resurrection, he conquered death! The serpent is crushed! And, on the cross, Jesus cried out, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” So often in the Old Testament, forgiveness and steadfast love went together. Jesus cried out in love. Do you know this love? Has your heart been melted and moved by this Savior who came 2,000 years ago to put God’s love on display? Do you have his steadfast love or do you live sewing your own fig leaves and trying to do life on your own?

If you follow Jesus, then you could be thinking, “Ok, how does Christmas Love apply to my life?” This leads to the second part of the main point: **who grants people God’s love to share in the world for all eternity future.** As we live the life he’s given us, and look forward to Jesus (Love) returning again, I think we should contemplate 1 John 4:9-11: ⁹**In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.** ¹⁰**In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** ¹¹**Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**¹¹ John is here simply reiterating what I just stated. The love of God was made manifest among us. How was it on display? Through Jesus. And Jesus satisfied the justice of God on the cross. Then John said God’s love is further emphasized because God didn’t love us because we loved him. He loved us first, most and best! Therefore, John says, since God loved us in this way, we should love one another.

Do you understand the implications of Christmas Love? Because Love came in the flesh, and if you have been saved by Jesus, then you have been given the privilege to fellowship with God and to fellowship with other believers. This is our eternity! True, genuine, good fellowship that won’t stop here, but go on forever in beauty and joy. It’s even better than what Eden could have been because God doesn’t show up on occasions to walk with us, but someday, we will forever be with him in his presence. And all fear will be gone. Did you know that? No sin of today, the past, or the future will haunt you. John goes on in 1 John 4 to say, ¹³**By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.”** Then he adds, ¹⁶**So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.** ¹⁷**By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world.** ¹⁸**There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.** ¹⁹**We love because he first loved us.”**¹²

There’s so much in these verses, but I hope you see that instead of possessing fear of judgment, all who trust Jesus now have God’s love abiding in them. Because we don’t have the jealousy like Cain and because we don’t revel in trusting ourselves and elevating ourselves like Lamech or others in history, we are now free to love like God has loved us. Fear is gone from us. In its place is God the Spirit. He perfects

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:9–11.

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 4:13, 15–19.

us in knowing God's love, and then we love others – not for what they do for us or give us – we love because God has loved us with a steadfast love.

So, Ventura, give thanks! Rejoice. Give thanks. God's steadfast love undergirds every aspect of your life – just like it did for the nation of Israel. Even if you feel you're in a wilderness or you've been disobedient or you've felt discouraged or if you're encouraged and overjoyed. Whatever the circumstances, they don't define God's love. Instead, **God's steadfast love ought to secure you in all of life. Christian, you have his love and you can look forward with confidence, knowing the Spirit will perfect God's love in you until the day that Love comes again in all his glory, and we experience and live out his perfect love for all eternity future! Truly, God's love sustained his people and pointed forward to Love coming in the flesh, who grants people God's love to be shared to the world for all eternity future.**