

God Is Love — Love Is God

I love this quote . . . the bottom ,too. I don't know if you saw it. I want to read it to you, because it ties right into what I want to say to you this morning. This quote is from Bishop K. H. Ting, a bishop from China, a Christian Bishop, and he says, “Today, it seems to me that to confess that Christ is God -like is not half so important as to affirm that God is Christ-like, and that Christ-like love is the way God runs the cosmos.” So when you think of God . . .wonder what God's like . . . think of Jesus Christ.

What the world needs more than anything else, right now, probably always did, is that truth that God is love. And I want you to change your theology a little bit today, I think, because a lot of people need some modification. Now, this isn't going to be radical. It may be radical, but many of us have grown up with the notion, and the teaching, and the understanding of the power of God, right? We sing it all the time. We have an awesome God. God is so awesome.

And conventional thinking that most of us carry around, when we think of conventional awesomeness of God, is something in the realm of muscle power—of that nature. Strong in the conventional sense. Many of us have grown up with words like omnipotent, omnipresent, unchanging.

Now I would like you to take those power concepts of God, and set them to the side. They're not untrue, but I don't think they serve a good purpose, as they may have in the past, and maybe they will in the future; set them to the side. You don't have to wipe him out, that they are not central to your thinking about God, that he's stronger than any other God, or stronger than a dictator— of that conventional kind of thing. That's human nature that has infiltrated our concept of God for thousands of years.

I'd like to read a few verses to you, Bible verses, and you've all heard them. Y'all know them, but I want you to think of God as you experience God in these verses. This is from Exodus 20:23 and 24; ‘The people groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help went up to God. God heard their groaning and remembered his promise, and was concerned.’ You all know that verse. That's God. Hear that? God heard their groaning, and remembered, and was concerned, and you know what happened? The exodus happened; one of the great events of history; the exodus happened. Why did it happen? Because God heard the people's cries and groans.

Here's the second one from Genesis 21:17. ‘God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to his mother. Do not be afraid. God has heard the boy crying. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand.; The boy wasn't praying, wasn't crying to God. God heard the boy crying, and responded. Okay. Hear that?’

Shift your thinking. This is central to who God is, who we want God to be in our thinking and our realization—this is what Jesus Christ is about. Why did Jesus come to this world? Why did God send Jesus Christ? In my opinion, God heard the cries of lost people. God realized the despair, the directionlessness, the anger and hatred in people's lives, and he sent Jesus Christ to show and teach and lead and live love, to respond to the needs of people. Lot of times we think, if you ask smart people, ‘What's the greatest event in human history that we know?’ They will say, ‘The fall of man, that destroyed humanity so badly.’ That is not the biggest event. The biggest event is Jesus Christ. It has already revolutionized the world so radically. It has put love into this world in such a radically exciting and wonderful way; the development of ideas and discovery of remedies and solutions and piece—it all comes from Jesus.

A couple more verses. Think this is what God is like. Let me say first, before that, before I read another one. You know, almost instinctively, when a tragedy happens, people cry, “Why?” People cry, “Why?” Now on the one hand, that can be a very legitimate cry of despair, but I think it is also for many people an

idea about God—that they are crying out to God, saying, “Why did you do this to me?” I would like to change that. I would like to have us stop crying. “Why?” As if God did that to you. We'll leave that in mystery. We'll set this aside with omnipotence and all this.

Because what we read about God in the Bible, and we've overlooked it too much, God heard the baby crying. God heard the groaning. When tragedy hits us, I want us to cry, “Thank you Jesus, for being with me. Lord, help me. I need you.” And not go into the why, as if there is some somebody doing this to you, and you've got to figure out what the purpose is.

God will be there; God will be there. This is what these verses talk about. God is there. He hears our cries. He hears our groans. That's what God wants us to know about him. And when we talk about God, it is Jesus.

Here's another one that is so exciting. Remember King Hezekiah? He was ill and at the point of death, and the Prophet said to him, “This is what the Lord says. ‘Put your house in order. You're going to die. You will not recover.’” Not that God was doing it, but he knew what was happening to him. And Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, and he prayed, and he cried. He wept. Now Isaiah had left the room and he was going downstairs through the temple. Before Isaiah was out of the temple, God said to Isaiah, “Go back.” So he goes back, and he says to his Hezekiah, “Here's what God says, ‘I have heard your prayers and I've seen your tears. You will live.’” That's the God of scripture. He was touched by the tears. God was bothered by Hezekiah's tears, and said, ‘Okay, we'll change that.’ That's the God of scripture that we want to know and follow and trust and celebrate.

A couple more. This is from Psalm 145. “The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, rich in love, good to all. He has compassion on all he has made. The Lord is faithful to his promises, loving toward all he has made. The Lord upholds all those who fall, and lifts all who are knocked down.” Stop saying why—just open your arms. The Lord is there when you were knocked down, and he's lifting us, holding us, weeping with us. There's so many more.

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus (and we're getting close to this next week, Holy week) “Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet. You should do as I have done for you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Now here's the other awesome part of all of this. Set aside that power stuff. What is real power? Throughout all of history, religions have posed a powerful God who was scary, and all of religion was about pleasing, and placating, and keeping that God from hurting you; bring sacrifices, behave a certain way, so that God doesn't hurt you, because that God is so powerful.

The God of scripture that we celebrate, his power is made perfect in weakness. There is real power, the capacity of all mighty God to hear a baby crying, and to respond. That is power. The power to be weak, the ability to be weak. It is not in how muscular you are, how many you can destroy or hurt and scare. The power of God that we know and that we celebrate is the power to become small and identify with people and hear their cries.

And the exciting thing about that is, you know, if the power was conventional power, and we were called by Jesus to help to prove the power of God, show your muscles, show your strength, show your dominance, show your authority. If that was the power that God wanted us to emulate, most of us couldn't do much. Most of us couldn't be very good examples of God. I think the strongest thing I ever did, that was really powerful—when I was in the National Guard, we had a four- man-carry gun. Four men had to

carry it, and I showed those guys how strong I was. I put that gun, a 75 millimeter recoilless on my shoulder, and I ran down Company Street with it, all by myself. That's how tough I was. Didn't help anybody!

Last week I talked to a young lady whose grandma had died. I said, "It's hard to lose a grandma." That was real strength. The last few weeks I've been visiting a young couple whose five-year-old little child died in the dentist's chair. I can't fix that.; I can't make it better. But I can show up. That's the most powerful thing I can do. And every one of us can show that kind of power. That's the kind of power that God really wants us to tell about him. The power to be there with other people, the power to see other people, and to hear their cries. And that's not just people who are in hospitals. They, too. We are all the walking wounded, aren't we? And every one of us needs those smiles we've been talking about, those interests, the touch, and that is God coming through us, and every one of us has the capacity to show the real power of God, which is the power to be with people, to care about people, to be able to reach out and take interest and show interest. See that is the power of God.

And I hope, if you need to, that's your theology will start shifting in that direction. And when you sing in church or wherever, what an awesome God we have, that it is not muscles, it is not omnipotence, but it's the power to be like Jesus, to die for others and we can all die for others. Whenever you inconvenience yourself, whenever you bother to break out of your comfort zone to say something that you don't ordinarily say, or to greet somebody, or to visit somebody, or to write somebody a card, that isn't like you. I am absolutely sure that's of the species of Jesus dying for us; it is dying for others. It is a form of power that we have the capacity for and every one of us has the capacity for that. None of you can carry 75 millimeter rifle on your shoulder. I can't either, anymore. And it never does any good. I used to try to show off how strong I was; it never helped anybody, but this kind of weakness, being powerful enough to be weak. We can all do that and that's God. That's Jesus. That's us. That's being the light of the world.

And that's what this is about and that's what we hope and pray that you will carry home, carry wherever you go. Because we are all part of it and we can all do it. And it's all just God, Jesus coming through us ,and every bit you do, it's giving people tastes of God. It's giving birth to God when you start doing some of this.

So I'd like to close with a prayer, and then we'll go on to the next thing.

Thank you lord for your awesome power. The power to die for us, the capacity to hurt when we are hurting, to be bothered and upset by our wounds and our hurts and our griefs and our sorrows. We thank you that you are there with us. You will never leave us or forsake us. And when it happens to the least of us, it happens to you and you're, they're rebuilding, strengthening, lifting us, walking with us, weeping with us.

I pray, oh Lord, that each of us, no matter how young or how old, we'll show that kind of weak strength everywhere we go. In Jesus name. Amen.