

Fil-Am Community Church

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THE MIRACLE OF LOVE

Selected Verses

Good morning and welcome to Fil-Am Church. Many of you have been with us the past three weeks and I hope the series has been enlightening and inspiring to you. We have been walking through a series connected with the movie *Miracles from Heaven* and focusing on the ways we see God's miraculous hand in our lives. Today we'll be wrapping up this series with a message that hits us all right in the heart and gives us hope and assurance no matter what we are facing in our everyday lives.

BTW, there's no truth to the rumor that the reason I'm promoting this move is that my wife appears in the movie, at least, her namesake, Annabel. That's the 10-year girl in the movie with the life-threatening disease. But, there is truth to the rumor that the Beam family in the movie attend a Southern Baptist church just like us. That's not mentioned in the film though. I'm not sure whether that's even mentioned in the book. But Christy Beam, Annabel's mom, mentioned that when they were being interviewed one time at the Life Today program. The interviewer thought that they were a conservative Southern Baptist church that doesn't believe in modern-day miracles. He was surprised. Anyway, the interview is very interesting. Mother and daughter shared a few more details about their experience which you'll find fascinating. If you're interested, the internet address for the interview can be found in the bottom of your outlines.

We'll begin with a clip from the movie. To set it up just a bit in case you haven't been with us in recent weeks, *Miracles from Heaven* is based on the true story of the Beam family in Texas. I don't want to give too much away if you haven't seen the movie yet. But in this scene we see the mom, Christy, and her middle daughter, Anna. Anna is suffering from a mysterious life-threatening intestinal disorder that struck out of nowhere. It baffled doctors for months just to figure out what it is. Her body is not processing food. She is in tremendous pain, and she is bloating more and more every day. Her mother, Christy, is doing everything she can to try to help her, and nothing is working. As you can imagine, it's a parent's worst nightmare. At this point in the story, everyone is trying to figure out what's going on and why and how they can handle this terrible situation. Let's watch.

VIDEO: Looking in Mirror—God Loves You

I can relate to this mother, Christy Beam. There are many things I don't know this morning. Many questions I cannot answer for you. For some of you, maybe that sounds like a strange thing to hear in a church. But like the mom in this clip from *Miracles from Heaven*, I want you to hear one thing today:

God. Loves. You.

God loves you. Whatever your week held. Whatever is on your heart and mind today. Whatever difficulty or tragedy you are wrestling with. Wherever you are on your journey of faith. Whether you feel like you love Him or not. God loves you.

When we face the painful realities of life, this can sometimes seem like a trite and shallow answer. "God loves you" can seem more like a passing "bless her heart." But the truth of these three words, God loves you, is the most earth-shattering, life-changing truth in all the universe. The fact that God loves you is the deepest truth you can know. It changes everything.

Christy, the mom in this clip, is not minimizing her daughter's struggle. She is not pushing away an important question—she is answering it with an even greater, deeper, and more important truth—the truth of God's infinite, boundless love.

That love is a perfect and unchanging love. But boy, can our perceptions of God's love change with the immediate circumstances of our lives in this broken, pain-filled, sin-filled world. The difficulties of our lives are a constant interference with the message and understanding of God's love for us. It's kind of like when our Wi-Fi goes out. The information on the Internet doesn't go away. Its existence isn't any less real or true—not that you can believe everything you see on the Internet, but you get my point. It's just that our immediate reality gets disconnected from the signal that gives us real-time access. It's the same with us spiritually when we allow our problems and pains to seemingly cut our connection to God.

So what do we do when that happens? What happens when you don't feel that God loves you? What do you do when you question God's love?

1. Look to the Cross

First, we must look to the cross. When the challenges of life cause us to doubt God's love, the cross stands as a powerful symbol of God's love. The cross is a reminder of the ultimate expression of love—the place where the God of the universe spread His arms wide and died in our place so that we could live. There is no greater sacrifice. There is no greater love.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This is perhaps the most well-known verse in the Bible. If you've only memorized one verse in your whole life, this might be it. Even people who would never step foot in a church know this verse. It's the one that sports fans write on posters and paint across their bodies. You might have learned it as a child.

You probably also learned a lot of similar songs as a kid. God's love is also the theme of so many of the first songs we sing as children. "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." "Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world."

It's just sad that some people can talk and even sing about the cross and yet never know the power of it. One big news that hugged the headlines last week was the sudden death of a music icon, Prince, due to drug overdose according to some reports. He was considered to be one of the world's musical genius, someone who wrote hits after hits like "When Doves Cry", "Purple Rain," and "Let's Go Crazy." He was even one of my favorites when I was in college. But did you know he wrote a song called "The Cross"? If you look at the lyrics, you'd think he was a Christian. Actually, he was a Jehovah's Witness. Some of his songs have a religious theme. Anyway, here's an excerpt from his song "The Cross":

We all have our problems
Some big, some are small
Soon all of our problems
Will be taken by the cross
Black day, stormy night
No love, no hope in sight
Don't cry for he is coming
Don't die without knowing the cross

Even Prince, as complicated as he was, knew the cross can save. However, because of tragedies he suffered early in life – his two-week old child suddenly died of a disease, then his wife suffered a miscarriage when she was pregnant with their second child – he became so devastated he took his eyes off the cross. He never really realized the power of the cross.

If he only continued to look on the cross then his life could have taken a different turn. Because the cross is the greatest symbol of God's love.

You look to the cross when you don't feel God's love. Then, you can also

2. **Look to God's Nature**

As we remember the Cross, the ultimate act of love, we are also reminded that God's love was not just a one-time event. In fact, not only do we have his act of love as a demonstration of love, we know from Scripture that God Himself *is* love. Love is not something God has or does. It's not just the way He acts toward us. It's not a core value or a character trait. It is His very nature. God *is* love. First John 4:16 tells us that clearly: "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them."

It's also important for us to remember that what is perhaps most amazing of all is that God's love is intimate. God's love is personal. God doesn't just love the world. He didn't just die for all people. He loves *you!* He loves me. He loves us as individuals. He loves you so much He knows how many hairs are on your head or what's left of it. "And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

(Matthew 10:30). He knows your every thought and action. The psalmist says in Psalm 139, "You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me." (Psalm 139:1-5). And God knows you by name. "I have summoned you by name; you are mine." (Isaiah 43:1).

We often read the Bible as individual stories. We divide up the verses. We study a passage. We sing songs about a biblical hero. We teach our children the lessons of truth. And there is value in doing that. But sometimes we forget that really, the Bible is all one story—the story of God's love for us.

Every good love story is one of unending love and relentless pursuit. And the story of God's love for us is exactly that kind of love story. In fact, it is the ultimate love story of all time.

Throughout all of history, throughout all the moments of our lives, the one unchanging force is God's love. Our circumstances change. Our emotions change. Our relationships change. Even our beliefs change. But God's love never changes. James 1:17 says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." And Hebrews 13:8 echoes that truth: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

Therefore, we don't trust God just to do something in our lives. We trust God because of who He is and always has been. We can place our trust in what He has already done, and what He continues to do—restoring and reconciling the world to Himself through love.

And when we open our hearts to that big story, God's love provides what we need. Because in times when you feel like you're unloved

3. Look to What His Love Provides

a. God's Love Provides Comfort

What is the first thing a parent does when a child comes running to them hurt? While Band-Aids or ice packs or x-rays may be in store, the very first thing parents do is wrap their arms around the child and comfort the one they love. When we come to God with the pain of our lives, that is what His love provides for us as well—comfort.

Years ago, I read the story of this woman whose husband, serving as a soldier in Vietnam, was ambushed by the enemy and killed. In church, she was so distraught and asked God why it happened.

She had many questions and she admitted that she was losing hope and felt like God was very distant, like he didn't care about her hurt. Then, as she looked to her left, across the aisle, was a friend of hers who smiled at her and at that moment, she felt a presence, and then an indescribable peace that filled her being. Actually, she felt like someone was hugging her and her heart was filled with joy. She knew at that moment that it was God letting her know that he really did care and she was comforted.

God's love provides comfort because it is safe. It is a haven when we are hurting. We don't have to fix everything and quit crying before we can come to God. He, in His love, welcomes us, and His perfect love, as 1 John 4:18 says, "drives out fear."

And not only is it safe, God's love is secure. There is nothing that can move or remove it, nothing that can defeat or replace it. Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We can come to God without fear, knowing we are safe and secure, and be comforted by His love.

b. God's Love Provides Hope

You see, suffering is one of the main things that causes us to doubt God's love. But like a light in the midst of darkness, God's love provides hope in the midst of our suffering and doubt.

Romans 5:3-8 says, "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Our hope is not in ourselves. God didn't wait for us to get our act together—He knew we were hopeless. As this passage says, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Ephesians 2:4-5 reminds us of the same thing: “But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

So our hope is not in something that might or might not happen—it is in the love that has already been given. It is a hope that will not disappoint. It will not put us to shame. God's love provides hope that is rooted in His amazing grace, and that hope will one day be proven more powerful, more longer-lasting, more true and triumphant than any of our present problems and pains.

Love is God's trademark. It is who He is. And as His followers, sharing God's love with others gives us purpose in everything we do.

There was a time I thought God didn't love me anymore. I thought he turned his back from me. Many of you already know my story of how I became a backslidden Christian, I went back to my old ways, being so stubborn, and left Christianity altogether, becoming an agnostic and an atheist eventually. Until God, because he is a good God, wooed me back to himself. But it was a long, gradual process. And I told you bits and pieces of what God did to draw me back to him. A few weeks back, I narrated the story of my encounter with a little boy in Russia during my missionary days and how that changed my life.

Basically, God met me in a miraculous way in Russia. There were several circumstances wherein he told me, “I care for you.”

Like the time my right shoulder was really hurting because I was the one who carried the group's guitar which was in a heavy guitar case. And we walked great distances as we traveled from one school to another. One morning, when we out were for ministry, I thought, "I need a message today. If only Nanay Monet were here." Of course, I didn't know Nanay Monet yet at the time. My future wife was only in high school.

Anyway, that afternoon, when we arrived at the youth hostel where we were staying, I was met by Dmitri, our 15-year old interpreter who became a friend of mine. He came with his brother and introduced him to me. Dmitri said, "Rolly, this is Sergei, my brother. He's a doctor." I shook his hands and smiled. Then Sergei said, "How are you, Rolly?" I said, "I'm good". But what Sergei next totally floored me. "Do you need a massage?" He asked that out of nowhere. I didn't tell anyone about my body aches. It turned out that Sergei was a professional masseuse. And you know what, he would see me twice and sometimes thrice a week to give me a back massage. And when my co-missionaries saw that, they said, "Rolly, you're a bum."

There were other instances like that in which God would just surprise me. God would send someone my way, a little child, a teenager, an old person, who would attend to my need and for every person that he sent, I felt like God was saying, "Rolly, I love you." I felt it deep in my heart. It was as if he was massaging my heart to make it soft and pliable again, transforming it so I would begin to fall in love with him again. And that's exactly what happened. The rest is history. The reason I'm back to serving God is because of the great love he showered me.

Friend, God loves you. And that love is miraculous—it defies explanation by natural means. It transcends the limitations of our world. It calls us and carries us to so much more in Christ. My prayer today is that you will know His love beyond any shadow of a doubt. If you sense God's love for the first time today, accept it.

Let God's love change your life for eternity. If you are being reminded of His love today, let it wash over you and cover every part of your life. Let His love provide you with comfort, hope, and purpose.

I pray for each one of you, as the apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesians: "That you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:17-19).