

THE STORY OF GOD

THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE, BUT FULLY EXPERIENCED GOD

05 – 26 SEPTEMBER 2021 PREACHING SERIES

THE LOVABLE GOD

INSPIRING AND AFFECTIONATE GOD – WEEK 3 (19-26 SEPTEMBER 2021)

God's love is amazing. God does not just love creation, but God can be loved by creation. This love is not just based on the fact that God has created, but also on the fact that God is a relational God. There is reciprocity with God. God has not just given life to creation, but God finds life in creation. The Hebrew writers have expressed this notion in various ways. Even when we cross over to the New Testament, we find the same – Jesus accepts love as we see Jesus dining with sinners, his feet being cleaned by Mary even to the point of using her hair to wipe them (John 12:3). There is also the legend of Veronica who wipes the blood on Jesus' face in his moments of utter vulnerability.



Isaiah 6 vision

“1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. 2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. 4 And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.”

This amazing vision of Isaiah is another indication of how God allows creation to love God back. The words of affirmation used by the one of the Seraphims is just so beautiful for a lover. In the African Traditions, a poem is sung not only to the respected and revered, but also to the adorable. Fathers would sing poems to their children. My father had a poem for me too that he would recite

every time he wants to show his affection towards me. It was a poem that would also teach me about who I will become. It is a poem that raised the urgency for me to become a respected, productive and responsible man. The Seraphims show this affection towards God and praise God, because God is lovable.

REFLECTION

What does it mean for you to love God? How have you expressed your love for God?

THE GIFTS IN THE GENESIS

Scripture reference Genesis Chapter 4

Abel and Cain – Notice how the Hebrew writers have illustrated God as someone who receives gifts without asking. The two sons of Adam see it fit to give offerings to God without God asking for them. Love is a gift and not a reward. Love becomes deeper when offered than demanded. The fact that God struggles with Cain's gift is not an indication of God being fussy, but the Hebrew writer highlights that the gift must come from the heart and not because of a ritual.

REFLECTION

In what ways can you sincerely bless God with your life, not as a sense of duty, but deep within you show appreciation to God?

Noah's Sacrifice – Noah did not just build an ark, but an altar too (Genesis 8:20). Noah proceeded to make a sacrifice that pleased God. Again, we do not hear God instructing Noah, but Noah takes the initiative and does something for God as a gift. God is pleased when we take an initiative to show love and appreciation to God.

REFLECTION

What initiatives have you taken to respond back to God's love for you?

GOD IS APPROACHABLE

Scripture reference Genesis Chapter 3

The Walk in the Garden – The lovability of God can also be seen in the God approaching humanity in the Garden of Eden. God searches for the people God had created. God remembers creation out of love. This is the nurturing presence of God that teaches humanity the significance of loving by embracing others. Yes, lovability leads to disappointments and hurts. Such lovability overlooks the risk, but looks for opportunities to connect. Adam and Eve come out naked and it is God who then saves them from their embarrassment and shame and weaves them clothes from the skin.

REFLECTION

How has God pursued you in search of your love for God? How has this made you feel?

Scripture reference Genesis Chapter 18

Abraham pleads for Sodom – Genesis 18 takes us to the heart of God that is open to being engaged. Abraham does the unthinkable and makes a case for the righteous in Sodom. God does not dismiss him, but takes Abraham seriously. God acknowledges the point Abraham makes and makes a promise. Often, we think it is God who points things to us, but we learn from this account of Genesis 18 that God is open to being engaged by humanity. It can be that God is loving to the extent of being open to humanity having deep conversations with God, even about the plans God has for creation. This God is a listening God.

REFLECTION

How have you seen God's love for others through your prayers?

Scripture reference Genesis Chapter 24

Worshiped God – We hear from Genesis that not only was God given physical gifts, but beautiful words and gestures that symbolized how lovable God is. In Chapter 24 we are told of moments of prayer (Gen. 24:12). Prayer is an integral part of worshipping God. We can express our emotions to God as the servant of Abraham shares his anxiety with God about the future. This prayer is laced with supplication (a prayer of personal need, plea or request) in Gen 24:14.

The moment progresses from prayer to worshipping God in Gen. 24:26. God is receptive of our adoration as in Gen. 24:27. As the servant converses with Laban, the brother to Rebecca, there is a testimony shared in Gen. 24: 35-48. It is this testimony that leads to Laban and Bethuel to respond by also honouring God. From now on we hear a couple of testimonies about the lovely work God has done.

REFLECTION

How have you seen worship as your act of love for God? How has this enriched your life?

THE COVENANTAL GOD

Scripture reference Genesis Chapter 8 and 9

Covenant with Noah – There are gigantic swings in Genesis. God creates and blesses humanity with the best. Soon afterwards there is lack of appreciation from humanity as they forget about God for a moment and things go terribly wrong. God makes a promise to Cain even though Cain has done a terrible act (Genesis 4:15). The wickedness grows until Noah becomes the only righteous person (Chapter 6). Then there are floods and then soon after that God makes a promise that God cannot turn against, listen to the phrase “never again”. This promise is made in Chapter 8: 21-22. By the time you read Chapter 9, God seals the covenant with a sign of a rainbow as a reminder of God’s promise not only to Noah, but to humanity in future.

REFLECTION

Are there any promises you can think of about your life that God could have made? How does this notion of God making promises that last enhance your faith?

Scripture reference Genesis Chapter 15

Covenant with Abraham – There are various promises God is making to Abram (who will later be Abraham) in Chapter 15. The first is about the descendants (Genesis 15: 5). Notice the interaction between Abram and God in verse 6. It is a sign that God is lovable. A God who is pleased with the reaction of Abram is a lovable God.

REFLECTION

How much trust do you have in God? What does it mean for you to have such trust?

Scripture reference Genesis Chapter 15

The second is the land that God will give to Abram in verse 7. There is a series of events with this second promise God is making with Abram. Abram begins to question God. This does not stop God from making the covenant though. God instead uses the creation to illustrate how God will protect Abram and his children. The animals are cut up, but Abram protects them from the vultures. These promises do not come easily, not without strife and commitment.

REFLECTION

What do you think of God using the animals to illustrate the protection God will give to the children of Abraham? How has God protected you from the dangers of this life?

The strange aspect of the covenantal relationship happens even when Abram is sleeping. It is almost the repetition of Adam and Eve when God put Adam to sleep and did an amazing work during Adam's sleep. In this chapter, Abram goes to sleep, and God continues God's work even as Abram is not awake, but aware of what God is doing. God makes a third promise in succession – "I will punish the nation that enslaves them, and when they leave that foreign land, they will take great wealth with them." (Genesis 15: 14)

REFLECTION

How has God worked in your life even though you had not been fully aware of this work that God has been doing in your life?

Scripture reference Genesis Chapter 17

The third aspect of this covenantal relationship takes a different step to the one with Noah when the covenant was sealed with a sign in the sky. Genesis 17 tells us that the seal and sign of this covenant will not be up and out there, but in human beings. God keeps on reminding Abram of the covenant God has made with Abram. This time God says, first, the name of Abram will change to Abraham. It is a sign that Abram will carry in him forever, every day and all

the time. The change of name will not only be known to Abram, but to all those who know Abram. When they remember who he was, they would know that things would later change as his name has changed. God's covenant brings hope for a different future.

REFLECTION

Has any aspect or area of your life ever been changed by God? How has this made you feel about God?

The limitation with this is that one day Abraham will die. God will though continue with the promise made to Abraham as God calls it an everlasting covenant (17:7). The promise is now extended to the descendants. They too will have an opportunity to celebrate God's goodness towards them. Such is a loveable God – lovable beyond just an individual, but for generations to come.

REFLECTION

How can you respond to the promises that last long after you have received them from God? How do you think this happens in our lives?

The second sign and seal of carrying this covenant in them is brought through the notion of circumcision in chapter 17 verses 11 and 12. Every first-born male shall be circumcised including those of the slaves and foreigners, for as long as they are in the household of the sons of Abraham.

REFLECTION

What is our mark given to us by God that reminds us of God's love for us? How can we use this mark to love God back?

There comes another sign, Sarai is now going to be known as Sarah. The extension of what God is doing with Abram touches the lives of all who share life with Abraham.

REFLECTION

How does this indiscriminatory love of God make you feel? How can you respond in this same way in your life?

CONCLUSION

We often define our relationship with God as God loving us and we do not realize that we too can love God back and God is pleased. Scripture tells us that we love because God first loved us (1 John 4:19) God teaches us to love. Jesus also teaches us this truth, "Love the Lord God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind..." (Luke 10:27). It is a beautiful way of participating in this amazing love of God for us to learn to love God back. It is in the loving of God that we learn to live as God's children. Our humanity is embedded in this ability to love as being human is being made in the Image of God. Anything less than this makes us less human.

REFLECTION TIME

Ponder this story of God each day this week.

PERSONAL QUESTIONS

1. God loves us and how do we love God?
2. God welcomes gifts from us, what gifts can you offer God?
3. Looking back at what God has done for you; what response does this call for from you towards God?
4. God makes promises. Are we in any position to make promises to God?
5. God's covenant is made by God without us asking for it. It is an invitation. What invitations that are life giving has God made for you?
6. Baptism is one of the marks we carry symbolizing God's immense love for us. What does your own baptism mean to you?

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important for us to love God back?
2. What are some of the reasons people struggle to give back to God?
3. How is worship important in the life of a disciple?
4. What are some of the important aspects for you that make worship meaningful? How can you be part of enabling others to worship God?
5. What does witnessing mean for you? In this day of people believing that all that matters is your relationship with God, how can this be translated to moments of God working in all of us and so we must share what God is doing?
6. With so much struggle and pain in the world, is it still fair to talk about God making promises and why?
7. How can people see the presence of God in us?