

Faith Hope and Love Sermon 8th Jan 2017

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:1 – 14:1

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit,

Introduction

This morning I traditionally talk about our Motto text for the year.

- This year I have chosen a very well-known verse
- 1 Corinthians 13:13
- *“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”*

A motto text is intended to impart a desire for ourselves over the coming year

- This desire can be both as individuals and as a church family.
- It should say something about who we want to be
- Where we want to go
- And how we want to achieve it

Hopefully this is not just my desire

- But a vision or hope shared by us all.
- The trouble with a text like this one
- It is so well-known and so broad I can't imagine anyone really disagreeing.
- So, I really need to pin down exactly what I am trying to take from this.

I think, for me, the essential point is 'God First'

- About our most ardent desire being for Jesus
- Last week was New Year's Day
- And we talked about looking back and looking forward

Specifically, in the evening we talked about 'Who do you think you are'

- Looking back at our history
- Discovering our identity
- And then looking at our Identity in Christ

In the morning, I shared about a talk at Hannah's school presentation

- The gist of the talk was to encourage the Girls as they move on in life
- To value themselves
- And to take time to find out who they are
- And I do understand the point she was making
- And self-esteem is very important, and very lacking among today's youth.
- But, I am convinced the true aim of life is not to find out who you are
- But to find out who God is.

True purpose, meaning and self-worth are not found by looking inside

- Or by looking back
- But by looking up
- Our source and life should be based on Jesus first.
- Our ultimate trust should be in Him and our Hope in his return.
- Everything else needs to be seen in perspective with this.

My intention, this morning is to look at faith, hope and love separately

- It is the perfect text really for a good Baptist three-point sermon
- But I actually found it difficult
- They are so intertwined
- So much overlap in the various ideas

Love implies hope and trust

- We have faith and hope in those we love
- As we read in verse 6
"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

It seems so many of the passages about faith mention hope and love

- For example, Romans 5: 1-4
"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ 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."

Faith

What is faith?

- We are told in Hebrews 11:1

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see”

Richard Dawkins has suggested this means faith is a belief without, or despite of, evidence.

- This is not true, and rather dishonest
- Faith is trust and confidence in what we do know extended to that which we don't
- Particularly our trust and confidence in a person

So, although we may not have direct evidence or facts.

- We believe because of our knowledge and experience of the person
- For example,
- If my wife tells me something
- I believe it is true
- I may have no corroborating evidence
- But my experience is that my wife is honest
- And I have faith in her and trust her,
- And therefore, I believe it to be true

That is where Richard Dawkins and his atheist companions miss the point entirely

- For them faith is about verifiable truths
- And of course, these are important
- And I do hope to preach on the nature of truth in the near future

But for us, faith in God is about relationship

- It is not about proving the existence of God
- But trusting in the God we are learning to know.
- As we come to know Him better
- Then our experience gives us more support or evidence for our faith
- That is our witness

But as Paul points out in the passage above

- Our knowledge is limited
- We do not fully understand
- Nor can we ever expect to fully comprehend the mind of God
- Verses 9-12

For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

So faith is also about growing closer to God

- Knowing him better

I have come up with a little acronym to think about Faith

Following
 Accepting
 intentional
 Trusting
 Hoping

Following

Faith is really about following

- If we say we believe in God and don't do anything about it
- Then our faith is pretty meaningless
- To be real, faith has to be a doing word
- It has to be about following Jesus
- About discipleship - About learning obedience
- Learning to trust Him as we do what he says.

James explains this in his letter

- Saying in chapter 2: 14-17

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Accepting

What I mean by this is faith allows us to accept the things we cannot understand

- As we have noted we only see ‘as a dim reflection’
- And when things go wrong we can begin to question God

This is the problem many people struggle with

- What has happened is not good
- Therefore, God cannot be good because he allowed it to happen
- Faith, however, looks through the lens of trusting God is good
- Therefore, I may not understand what has happened
- But God will bring good out of it

This reminds me of a story I once heard

- 200 years ago, in in a remote Austrian town on Christmas Eve
- The organ breaks down. Mice have chewed the bellows
- The priest is in despair – what can be done at such late notice
- Why did God allow it at such an important time?

But the Musician leads the Christmas service on his guitar

- With a song written that very night because he had no organ to play the normal carols
- And so, the much loved carol ‘Silent Night’ was written,

It is accepting faith that allows us to hold on during times of trial and testing

- In romans 8:28 we read
“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”
- This doesn't mean only good things happen
- But, by faith we can trust God will bring good out of all that does happen

The Prophet Isaiah reminds us (Chap. 7:9)

- *“If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”*

Intentional

By intentional I mean it is a matter of choice

- Faith is something we can choose to do
- It is not a feeling or an emotion
- It is a choice to act on what we know God to be
- Rather than how we feel or even desire things to be.

Faith can sometimes be with gritted teeth

- That does not make it weak faith
- Just real faith.

Trusting

This follows on from what I've already been saying

- Trust is what we call the choice to believe God
- It is about confidence in him first, over and above the facts as we see them

A great example of this is the moving story of the centurion who approached Jesus

- We read the story in Matthew 8:5-10

When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. ‘Lord,’ he said, ‘my servant lies at home paralysed, suffering terribly.’

Jesus said to him, ‘Shall I come and heal him?’

The centurion replied, ‘Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. ⁹ For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, “Go,” and he goes; and that one, “Come,” and he comes. I say to my servant, “Do this,” and he does it.

¹⁰ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, ‘Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

Hope

Finally, Faith is about Hope

- Hope is the natural result of faith
- We hope in God because we have faith in Him.
- We read in Colossians 1:22-23

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

Hope

This, of course leads on to Hope

- I want to define it this morning as
- **Holding On (to) Promises Expectantly**

Not a vague wish

- But an imminent expectation
- The Hope that inspires us to action
- The athlete who hopes for a medal
- The lover who buy a ring in the hope of a yes

It is the hope that derives from faith

- The athlete trusts in his ability and training
- The lover in the woman he loves
- He has spent time with her come to know her
- So, when he 'pops the question' his hope is founded on that relationship.

Similarly, with God, our hope is based on faith in a God we have come to know

- That is why it can be expectant
- The more we know God
- The more certain we are of Him
- As we read in Hebrews 11:1 earlier.

"Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see"

But we can become impatient in our hope

- And It is faith that gives us patience in our hope
- We read in Romans 8:23-25

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In some ways, the nativity story is all about hope for a messiah

- God had not spoken to the Israelites for over 400 years
- It would not be surprising if, for some, their expectation had waned
- That was the problem Zechariah, John the Baptists father had.
- But others, like Mary and Simeon had not lost the desire and hope for God to move
- We read about Simeon in Luke 2:25-32

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ *'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*
³⁰ *For my eyes have seen your salvation,*
³¹ *which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:*
³² *a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.'*

Love

The word love has many meanings

- There is brotherly love, romantic love or parental love.
- We can talk of loving something that brings us pleasure or inspiration
- We love music or sport.
- Or you might say to me "I loved your sermon" meaning it inspired you in some way.

In Ancient Greek, there were different words for different types of love

1. Eros – romantic, sexual love
2. Phileo – affection for person or thing
 - Where we get the suffix 'phile' from
 - As in Anglophile, lover of the English
3. Stogee – love for a dependent – e.g. Parental love or love within a family
4. Agape – selfless love

And it is agape that Paul is talking about here.

- I can't define it better than Paul does when writing to the Corinthians (1Cor. 13:4-6)
Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonour others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love is the underlying principle that puts everything else into context

- This again is what Paul is talking about in 1 Corinthians 13
If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Our actions, even our faith actions become worthless if not motivated by love

- Love for God and love for each other
- When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment
Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

The essence of the gospel is John 3:16

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.

Conclusion

This seems a good place to conclude

- With God's love for us
- His unconditional faithful love for us
- The love that is the basis for our faith and hope in Him

Romans 5: 1- 11 Peace and hope

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we¹ have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And 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.

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Amen