

2-14-2024 - The Greatest Love of All

There are many great love stories. “**The Notebook**” – the story of Allie, from a wealthy S.C. family. Her family doesn’t approve of Noah, separates them. Allie chooses to love Noah over the love of another wealthy man, Lon. And in the end, when Allie suffers from dementia, Noah chooses her. They die together.

There is “**Love Story**.” Wealthy Harvard law student Oliver Barrett IV meets Jenny Cavilleri, a middle-class girl studying music at Radcliffe. Love at first sight. But, again, family protests try to stop that love. Over his father’s objections, Oliver marries Jenny. Their happy love crashes when Jenny has a terminal illness. Dies.

Classics. “**Romeo and Juliet**” - a tragic love story about the romance between two Italian youths from feuding families: Capulet & Montague. Both die.

That same “star-crossed lovers” theme is in **West Side Story**.

"**Pride & Prejudice**," Jane Austen. Timeless tale of Elizabeth Bennet & Mr. Darcy. He has pride, she has prejudice; 1st impressions aren’t always right. Again, there is Lady Catherine, trying to keep Elizabeth from accepting Mr. Darcy's proposal.

Tonight - another love story. Even greater. True story. **Bible**. God’s love for all. Just like these other love stories, things try to separate us from that love.

People pressure.

- “Love Story” - Oliver’s father refused to support him if he chose Jenny; we’ll have people who refuse us if we choose faith.
 - o **John 15:18** – “If the world hates you, understand that it hated Me first.”
- Sometimes, God’s people separate us. Hypocrites. Fake. Unloving.
 - o Inconsistent C-tians. Truth: all imperfect. Struggle w/consistency.
 - Best batting avg - **.354**, 2nd, Marlins. 35%
 - o Moses - killed. David - affair. Noah – wine. Samson – a mess.
 - o Tho we fail, God’s love never does.
 - **Psm. 117:2** – “For his unfailing love for us is powerful; the LORD’s faithfulness endures forever.”

Life’s problems. Not signs that God doesn’t love us. Enemy: liar.

- o “In the world you'll have trouble, but be courageous—I've overcome the world!" – **John 16:33**

In this **love story** told in the **Bible**, God demonstrates His love over & over.

Focus: **Adam & Eve**. Sewn garments of animal skin (fig leaves, ha!)

- It's the beginning of God **blessing** us **even tho** we sin/disobey
 - o Blessings we don't deserve. The **beginning of grace**.
- Adam & Eve are also the beginning of our **journey back to love**.
 - o **A loving act of God**: leaving Eden, cherubim & flaming sword.
 - o Might eat of the tree of life, live forever in the consequences of sin.
 - God's desire is for us to have eternal life with Him. Not be separated from Him. So . . . God sent us Jesus.
 - "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." – **John 3:16**
 - Jesus said (**John 17:3**) – "This is eternal life: to know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you sent."

In this Great Love story, God wants us to know Him ... know His love.

Jesus showed us who God is: **God is love**.

- And God's love is **Unending. Unconditional. Unchanging**.
Unfathomable. We don't earn it. Good enough. He **Chooses**.

If we truly know God – that He is Love - we can't help but love Him back.

- His kindness draws us to Him, leads us to repentance. (**Rom. 2:4**)
- The reason God is so good & merciful is so we will turn to Him.

And b/c we know Him, we love Him & worship Him. . . then God loves us more.

"How great is God's love for all who worship him? Greater than the distance between heaven and earth!" – **Psm. 103:11**

- As high as the sky is above the earth – that's how much God loves us.
- Can't **calculate** it . . . can't **cut** it off . . . can't **cancel** it or **disconnect it**.
 - o **Rom. 8:39** assures us – "nothing will ever be able to separate us from the love of God."
- Unlike other love stories, death doesn't stop this love. Doesn't separate us & God. **Death brings us together**, in His presence.

Growing up, one way I knew I was loved by my father was his **presence**. Matters.

- Our Heavenly Father is always with us.
 - o God called **Moses** to lead His people & said, "I will be with you"
 - o When **Joshua** succeeded Moses, he was reassured: God "will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." **Deut. 31:8**

- God said to **Jacob**, return home & “I will be with you”
- **David**: even when walking thru the dark valleys, God is with us.
Psalm 23:4 – “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”
- Jesus said to the disciples, “Go make disciples of all nations . . . I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” **Matt. 28:20**
 - No matter where we go, **God is with us.**
- “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and the rivers will not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, and the flame will not burn you.” – **Isa. 43:2**
- This is a **love story that never ends, never fades. Lifetime love.**
 - “I will be your God throughout your lifetime— until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.” – **Isa. 46:4**
 - God’s love is real. True. Forever. Won’t Let us go.
 - His love is the greatest love . . . greatest reward.

Song of the week: Keith & Kristyn Getty, Dana Masters - O Love That Will Not Let Me Go