

26 Tevet, 5775 (17/1/15) **Aggressive, Redemptive Love: Non Negotiable Love** J. M. Terrett

Vayera And I appeared When Push Comes to Shove He remains in Control

Torah: Exodus 6:2-9:35 (the Beginning of the cosmic battle)

(1) **6:9: Thus spoke Moses to the Children of Israel, but the anguish and the cruelty of their bondage prevented them from listening to him.** They were in a tight fix that was only getting worse because of the spiritual conflict which was raging around them and for them. We must learn not to let our circumstances, be they ever so bad or ever so good, prevent us from listening to the Word of King. He is L-RD and His Kingdom is coming and we are called to seek it daily, no matter what is going in our lives or in the world around us.

(2) **7:1: YHVH spoke to Moses: behold I will make you G-d for Pharaoh; and Aaron, your brother, shall be your prophet.** Another example of literary, poetic language. Pharaoh claimed to be the incarnation of the biggest Egyptian G-d, but through the implementation of the plagues, instead of a fanciful lie, Pharaoh was going to have to admit that Moses and Aaron really spoke for the true G-d and that Pharaoh was just a man. Do you know who you are and whom you serve? Do you know who G-d is and what He is like according to His Word.

(3) **8:4: Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said: pray to YHVH so that He would remove the frogs from me and from my people; and I will let the people go so that they offer sacrifices to YHVH.** Under duress Pharaoh made a promise which he did not intend to keep. G-d works in our lives in various forms and at various times until we are ready to keep the promises He wants us to make. Spiritual maturity and spiritual wholeness come from first believing in G-d through His Word and then in doing what He calls us to do. Has G-d got your faithful obedience or do you need to be pushed and shoved some more?

(4) **9:14: For, this time, I will send all my plagues against your heart, against your servants and against your people in order that you would know that none is like Me upon the earth.** Over a full year there was a mighty spiritual battle between the false gods of Egypt and the true G-d of the Heavens and the Earth. Pharaoh was warned that there was more to come and that it would keep coming until he had no choice but to cave in to the Word of G-d. He is in final charge of everything, is He in final charge of you? Have you caved yet?

Haftarah: Ezek. 28:25-29:21 (How the mighty are about to fall)

(5) **29:9: The country of Egypt shall become a solitude and a wilderness. They shall know that I am YHVH, because he has said: the river is mine and it is I who has made it.** The Nile is a mighty river which makes Egypt a fertile country, but it is not something which they made or have control over, even with their mighty Aswan dam. Even our breath belongs to Him and we need to give Him credit and not let our lives turn into a solitude and a wilderness because we think what we have and what we do are finally ours. We need to push and shove until we are prepared to surrender to Him and walk His way, not ours.

(6) **29:20: As a reward for the service they have done against Tyre, I will give them the country of Egypt; for they have worked for Me.** In a very real way G-d is in final charge over all the nations of the earth and He can use the ignorant and the unrighteous to fulfil His purposes and all the scheming and the horrors do not succeed because of the plans and

strength of men, but only because He allows it and actually uses the unrighteous nations to fulfil His will, no matter what president Putin thinks he is doing!

Brit Chadashah: Rev. 16:1-21 (the final cosmic plagues)

(7) **16:15: Behold I come as a thief, blessed is the one who watches and who keeps his garments in order that he would not walk naked and his shame would not be seen.**

In the midst of the cosmic plagues which strike our planet as we move towards the coming kingdom, the most important thing is not to be spiritually naked or surprised by the King when He comes. If your spirituality is in order, you are fine no matter what else is going on, because when push comes to shove He is in control of your life and will look after you.

(Patti p. 177) **Ps. 46** Jewish Hero: Je suis Charlie

Sermon: Second winter series: Aggressive, Redemptive Love: Love is Non Negotiable

As we pass the half way mark in our mighty Canadian winter, I want to change gears a little bit and talk about something which is dear to my hippy heart: love. Not the kind of sensual, silly love which gives you a warm fuzzy feeling, because this kind of attachment is not reliable and is often very selfish. The kind of love which the Bible calls us to experience and to guard is far deeper and tougher and has nothing to do with our circumstances or our feelings.

It is the same kind of love which the L-rd loves us with, even with a full knowledge of our pride and fears and folly and with a full knowledge of what we are capable of, both for good and for evil. I want to spend the time from now until Passover looking at the kind of love He has for us and at the kind of love we are to have for each other, even though our series we will only ever be able to scratch the surface of this love, which is the mightiest theme in the Bible.

I want to explore what the Bible says about love and also correct false and flawed ideas which our society is trying to foist upon us about spiritual love. It is the pillar upon which every other aspect of our spirituality rests and it is the glue which holds our community together and which even holds our souls together. It needs to be the one final non negotiable of our lives.

Now before we get into our passage this week and talk about this non negotiable love, I want to talk to you about some of the limits of human language, in English as well as in Greek and even Hebrew. Many books have been written about our need for **agape** love because neither brotherly love or sexual love - or any other kind of love will do. It is only the love of G-d which is worth our attention no matter which word we use to describe it.

I agree wholeheartedly with this, but it is never a question of a particular word or phrase in any language.

The New Testament uses two words to describe spiritual love: agape and phileo and scholars say we need to move beyond phileo (brotherly) love and get to agape, which is godly love. The problem is that the two words are used interchangeably in koine (common) Greek and it is never a question of demeaning brotherly love as inferior and saying that agape love is superior. Probably the most extensive discussion of the kind of love we are called to pursue is found in two places in the Bible: Exodus 34:5-7 (slow to anger and compassionate) and I Corinthians 13 (aggressive redemptive love).

I will not play with words and make you feel inferior if you are not fluent in new Testament Greek or Old Testament Hebrew. They are the languages, along with Aramaic, which G-d used to communicate His truth to us because they were the languages which our people spoke when they came into contact with the G-d of eternity. But we can develop a more than adequate, full understanding of love as we read the Holy Scriptures in our own languages.

So let me take you to my first passage: I Cor. 13:1-3: ***When I shall speak with the languages of men and angels, if I do not have love, I am a resonating cymbal or a clang ing cymbal. And if I should have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and even when I shall have all faith to be able to transport the mountains and I have not love, I am nothing. And when I distribute all my goods to feed the poor, and even when I deliver up my body to be burned, if I have not love, it does me no good.***

From my title, the first thing I want to say about the aggressive redemptive love which we are called to is that it is non negotiable. This means it is both the bottom line and the top of the line. Without it we have nothing and are nothing and with it we have everything.

This does not mean that languages are not important. This does not mean that prophecy and knowledge and mysteries should be ignored or even downplayed. This does not mean that great faith is not an important and extremely useful. This does not mean that we should not care for the poor and it certainly does not demean the wonderful privilege of martyrdom.

In good literary style, the Holy Spirit is using the apostle Paul to make a comparison and contrast statement about love. We should never feel that the gifts of the Spirit are ever in competition with each other. We should never feel that we can select one or two gifts and ignore the rest. What is being said here is that love is so essential, that without it, all that we do and all that we are and that all that we have is less than useful - it is nothing and it profits us nothing. It is true that all we need is love - spiritual love and not its carnal counterpart.

Wow, if love is so essential, why do we not concentrate on it to the exclusion of all else? I am glad you asked this question, because love never exists in a vacuum which consumes all of our time and energy so that we have neither the time nor the energy for anything else. Love gives us the strength and the desire and the perseverance to look at all the folly and failure of life and indeed of ourselves and never leaves us feeling powerless, lost or fatally and irreparably broken. Love persistently cuts to the chase to repeatedly show us what matters. We are going to be spending several shabbats looking at what this love looks like and how it functions, but this morning, I wanted to establish the primacy, the supremacy of love. Said another way, until you love someone you do not know them and if you ever cease to love them (forgive them, cherish them), you cease to know them and you cease to know G-d. Until you can see someone the way G-d sees them, you really do not see them at all.

The same applies to ourselves. Until we love ourselves, we really do not know who we are and it is this flawed self knowledge and this flawed social knowledge which cripples people and which cripples our society and chains us to hatred and violence and greed. People in our world do not really know who they are because there is no real, redemptive love in their lives.

You see, with G-d's love, the more you get to know someone, with all of their flaws and all of

their giftings, the more you love them and appreciate them. The same goes for each of us and all of us as we get to know one another and as we learn to live and work together. Some people have the false idea that once you really understand and get to know a person, the less you will love them because we all have clay feet. We all have a downside. We are all flawed.

This applies to your rabbi too. I am an energetic person who speaks well and loves to laugh and to tell stories, but I am also not perfect. And who we are cannot please everyone and we will all sometimes mess up and grate each other the wrong way, but this does not diminish nor cripple our love because true love is not the result of some positive performance review that we have to strive to achieve. It is not something you need to earn and struggle to keep.

However, love is also not just an across the board acceptance of everyone and everything, it is a highly focused appreciation of people over and above their performance and does not depend on people possessing something which makes them loveable or cute. Carnal love depends on performance markers and on great effort to function. G-d's love is not that weak.

Spiritual love functions on a higher plane and is never a competition and it is not some kind of affection we give or withhold from people until they perform according to our expectations. Without spiritual love, we have nothing and are really nothing. With spiritual love, we have all that we need and we can really see others and ourselves for who we really are. Do you see?

With spiritual love we are set free to flourish and achieve to the maximum of our gifting because we are set free from needing to perform in order to be loved and accepted. The Corinthian community was struggling with moral failure and carnal competition and was way out of control spiritually and was self destructing as they turned on each other and tried to prove that they were the best and the most powerful. Their services turned into brawls and when they observed the L-rd's Table they were drunk and full of negative judgment like some kind of competitive "king of the castle" game. They were competing against one another rather than working with one another. They failed to see that without love they were spiritually bankrupt and that all of their efforts were ineffective and even extremely counter productive.

As we grow and welcome newcomers into our midst and as we really get to know one another may we keep spiritual love as the non negotiable upon which our fellowship is based.