

LOVE CAN BE DANGEROUS

(Preached at First Baptist Church, Decatur, Georgia)
(Sunday Evening, December 6, 1959)

This past week the ladies, in particular, and the church in general have been engaged in a week of prayer for world missions. The stated theme has been: "O God, we pray for all mankind." I sincerely hope that this week has made an impact upon the life of our church because I feel that its dominant emphasis is true to the very heart of the Christian faith. We do have a universal gospel and all mankind is involved in the scope of our concern. And yet, even though I feel this conviction with all the depth of my own being, I feel that it is only fair as your under-shepherd that I come tonight and say that such an idea can be dangerous in the world in which we live. If we intend to pray for all mankind, if we intend to let our love flow forth freely and openly to everyone in this world, then what we are doing might well become a costly endeavor. This may sound very strange to you because we usually think of and associate "love" with gentleness and with kindness. But, believe me, at certain times and in certain places, love can be dangerous.

I say this because I have pondered long the life of Jesus Christ. Here by all odds was the perfect flower of humanity; here was the finest expression of what mankind ought to be; and yet in the very prime of his life, at the age of thirty-three years, he was stricken down by an angry mob and was taken to a cross and crucified. Why was so wonderful a person to meet such a violent death so early in his life? I think I know the answer. The reason that Jesus died was because he loved all mankind. He refused to restrict his love to any particular person or any particular group. Therefore his greatest fault was not that he loved too little; His greatest fault was that

He loved too much. - - All of us are familiar with the theological implications of the fact that Jesus died because He loved us. I have heard from the time of my earliest remembrance that Jesus went to the cross because of His great love for my soul. This was the reason that He hung upon the tree. And yet do you realize that that which is a familiar theological axiom is also a statement of historical fact? Jesus went to the cross because he loved too freely, He loved too inclusively; He loved too widely. Yes, you cannot escape the conclusion that that which condemned Jesus Christ was the fact that He loved all mankind. And you must remember that the world in which Jesus lived was a world that was tragically divided into warring factions. Here we had men building barriers among themselves; here we had men retreating off into little groups, huddling off isolated and separated from other people, and engaged in bitter conflict one with the other. In the day of Jesus there were races and classes - - there were all kinds of parties and cliques contending against each other and always fighting and always seeking the destruction of their opponents. And into this tragically fragmented world stepped Perfect Love - - a love that refused to recognize the barriers that men had erected - - a love that flowed forth to all mankind with equal concern. And when this one came who was perfectly loving, who refused to restrict His love in any way or any fashion, these warring factions, these men dealing in deadly conflict, could not bear the sight of unrestricted love and so they stood up and cut it to the ground. Yes, in hard, cold, actual fact - - Jesus died not because He loved too little but because He loved too much. Watch Him as He moved through His life. As Jesus walked in the days of His flesh among men, He lived as if it made no difference at all what race a man came from. That woman who was standing by Jacob's Well, a Samaritan by nature, was almost overcome when Jesus, a Jew, spoke to her; and when she realized that He really cared for her sordid life, she was stunned beyond expression. She had lived in a world of racial hatred; she thought that all Jews hated all Samaritans and all Samaritans hated all Jews; the only world she knew was a world of racial conflict. And here came Perfect Love. Here came one for whom race was unimportant - - who a man's physical ancestors were, the color of his skin, the texture of his hair, the slant of his eyes, these things made no difference because men, all men, were made in

the image of God. Here was love leaping over the man-made barrier and flowing out to all people. And don't think that this fact enhanced the popularity of Jesus. I should imagine that the Jewish Supremacists - - I can imagine that the Citizens' Councils of Jerusalem - - began to think to themselves, "Here is a man who does not deserve to live - - a "do-gooder" - - He loves the wrong race of people;" because a love that knows no racial barriers, in this world, is bound to arouse hate.

Notice again that as Jesus lived He made no distinction whatsoever between the classes of men. You see Him moving around day by day, mixing with every conceivable level of the social strata. - - Why, there he is talking to the young ruler, reputed to be one of the richest men in all of Palestine. - - But look, he walked right down the street and talked to the blind beggar. - - Why, there He is talking to Nicodemus, one of the most learned, tolerant men of that day. - - But there He is with Mary, a woman of the streets. Who they were on the social register made no difference at all to Perfect Love let loose in this world. In the literal sense of the word, To Jesus, everybody was "somebody." There were no tracks in His heart, and therefore, no right side and no wrong side. Men might class people "here," and "here," and "here," but not our Lord; men were made in the image of God. They were children of the same Father and therefore they were truly brothers and sisters to Him. - - And don't think this fact went unnoticed in Jerusalem. The "right" people, the socially-accepted folks, began to notice this indiscriminate socializing - - this going around with the "trash of the streets," and it began to add increasing fuel to the flame of their hatred of His unrestricted love.

But notice again, as Jesus walked around He freely associated with sinful people. This was the straw that broke the camel's back! He could ignore race; he could ignore class; but here He comes living with the "riff-raff," talking to out-and-out sinful people, and being seen in their very presence, even eating in their homes. - - A woman was brought to Him who had been caught in the terrible act

of adultery. Instead of stomping on her in righteous hate, He said something about "He that is without sin, cast the first stone." He even went to that despicable, thieving Zacchaeus and asked him if He could go home and sit down at the table with him. The evil people seemed to flock to Him, and He flowed out to them in unrestricted love. And this was blasphemy - - to think, Jesus claimed to be religious ^{then} and/as-sociated with people that you never saw inside a synagogue, the people of the streets. And I can imagine that some indignant Pharisee stood up in the Council and said, "It is impossible to be for God and not be against sinners. And this man who is so openly fond of sinners cannot be anything but a dangerous person. He needs to be done away with." And so because He had the indiscretion to love the folks who needed a physician most, they hated Him all the more. And so He walks through life --- race makes no difference; class makes no difference; sinner is still the object of His concern --- and because He loved them all, He died on the Cross. Therefore I think I am on sound historical ground when I say to you tonight that love can be dangerous. There are times and places that this very out-going emotion which refuses to restrict itself can make a person into a dangerous one and a person who is bound to arouse suspicion and bound to arouse hate. Our Lord met His death not because He loved too little but because He loved too much.

But what about us today who call ourselves "followers of Jesus?" Well, let's be frank. The world we live in tonight in 1959 is just as tragically divided as was the world in the day of Christ. We have our pressure groups; we have our contending parties; we have people breathing hate and violence and daring you to extend your love to all mankind. Therefore as it was dangerous in His day, let's admit it, love is still dangerous in 1959. But what are we going to do? What are we who are followers of Jesus going to do in this dilemma? --- Well, it seems to me that the issue is pretty clear-cut. You are either going to retreat into one of these pressure groups and restrict your love to one race, or one class, or one set of "religious people," or in the daring fashion of Jesus, you are going to open your love to all mankind and refuse to shut anybody out. It seems to me that these are the alterna-

tives that have to be faced. And let me remind you that neither one of them is an easy alternative. If you choose the first, the way of limited love, the price you pay is open denial that God loves all mankind; if you choose the second alternative, the way of unlimited love, the price you pay is the real possibility of having to suffer. — And you say, "Well, that's a hard decision." You say, "I want to believe that God loves all mankind, but I don't want to have to pay any price; I don't want to have to suffer." Well, my friends, I don't want to suffer, either. And I dare say if you had asked our Lord before He went to Gethsemane, He would have said, "I don't want to suffer, either," But there comes a time when you are either willing to suffer for what you believe is true, or you simply acquiesce and "sell out" to the other side. — So here we are, the "followers" of Jesus — we either dare to say, "God loves all mankind, and I'll pay the price for believing it," or we will retreat into the other camp and say, "He really just loves one group, one class, one race." — It never has been easy to be a real Christian, and this is true in 1959.

Tragically enough, for the last twenty-five years, the American church has been so anxious to get people to join its membership that we have "watered-down" the demands and talked about nothing but what people will get out of religion; we have ignored the cost of real, crusading, Christian experience. — Remember, my friends, at the heart of the Christian faith is a Cross. And on that cross our Lord had to die rather than to admit that the Truth which motivated Him and by which He lived was a falsehood. And Christianity has always moved forward through the suffering of its people. Before you can wear the crown, you have to bear the cross; the cross which was His end is the cross that He gives to His followers and dares them to follow after Him with the same kind of courage which characterized His life. Therefore, to those of us who live in our day with its tremendous problems and tremendous pressures, I simply remind you that our Lord was willing to die rather than to reject the fact that God loves every one of us. And if we truly believe that, we must be willing to pay the price, and stand, and "having stood all, to remain standing."

One of the most dramatic incidents in the history of this country took place back in 1836, when the Mexican hordes were about to over-run the Alamo. If you have read the history of that deed you will know that inside this little garrison there were 140 Texas and other kinds of soldiers, huddled together against (4000) four thousand entrenched Mexicans under the command of General Santa Anna. And as they looked out and saw this horde about to besiege them and about to over-run them, that valiant little group of men in the Alamo realized that the time had come, that a decision had to be made. So Colonel William Travis who was in command of the group called the straggling one hundred and forty together and simply laid before them the realities of the case, saying that there were the men ready to kill them; it was time either to fight to the death or to evacuate and retreat. In a moment of high drama he pulled from his scabbard his sword and he drew a line across the dirt floor of the garrison. And then he said, "Gentlemen, I am staying with the Alamo until the end. Those who will stand with me, step across the line and be over here." — One by one the sound of men moving across the room was heard. — Here came Davy Crockett, the famous Indian fighter — there was Jim Bowie, already racked with pneumonia and with typhoid and confined to a cot, but he asked that his cot be lifted over the line that he might die with the valiant ones — only one man stole out to escape and thus, to disgrace — the other men stayed through thirteen days of siege until, there, in March of 1836, those who had stepped across the line were all dead. And am I overdramatizing the situation when I say that in 1959, Jesus Christ is stepping into the garrison of your soul, drawing a line across "the dirt floor there", and saying, "The time has come that you must either live as I lived in this world, and thus love as I loved — all mankind — or retreat into the night and admit that it is a myth. Because, friend, he who is not for me is against me."

It seems to me that in our day the line has already been drawn. The only question remaining is this, "Which side are you on?"