

**“It Starts With Love”**  
**By Brother Parrish Lee**  
**Sunday, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

It is wonderful—and great and awesome—to be able to see the people who have made it to 2014, with smiles on their faces, their eyes are open, and the countenance of your cheeks, and the goodness of the Lord is about your life. That is a miracle. That is something that we can never, ever take for granted. Amen.

The theme of the month, saints, comes from the conference that we had, not two years ago, it was four years ago, actually—Pastor Paine shared something with me that was so enlightening, so incredible, and I think the message was for everybody, but it was delivered to me. So, the theme of the month is, “It Starts With Love.” Our Scripture for the month is from John 13:35: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” If you have love one to another, all men will know that you are a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, if you have love one to another.

Giving honor to that same God who is the giver and deliverer and savior and protector, restorer, the healer, the magnificent One—giving honor to Him, before we go another step, another word: giving honor to Him first and foremost. Giving honor to those who have gone before us, to our founding pastor, he and his family, our pastor—our bishop—Pastor Paine, in Virginia, he and his family, to Pastor Wilson, to Brother Kenneth and his family, to those who have stood in this place to be a protector, to be an instrument of God’s peace, to listen to Him, and do the utmost of their ability that it might be that God’s people would be enriched; giving honor to them. And, giving honor to all of y’all, to all of y’all who come, and show up, and say, “God, bring me something in my life to bring me closer to You, and make me better for You. After all, this time, it’s not about me, it’s about You—it’s about me getting closer to You.” Amen.

Having said that, our Scripture for today, we’re going to go to the Book of Ezekiel:

**Ezekiel 16:3-12**      *And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto Jerusalem; Thy birth and thy nativity is of the land of Canaan; thy father was an Amorite, and thy mother an Hittite. And as for thy nativity, in the day thou wast born thy navel was not cut, neither wast thou washed in water to supple thee; thou wast not salted at all, nor swaddled at all. None eye pitied thee, to do any of these unto thee, to have compassion upon thee; but thou wast cast out in the open field, to the lothing of thy person, in the day that thou wast. And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live. I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: thy breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou wast naked and bare. Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine. Then washed I thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood from thee, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also with broidered work, and shod thee with badgers' skin, and I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. I decked thee also with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands, and a chain on thy neck. And I put a jewel on thy forehead, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head.*

If you could bow your heads with me for just a second. Oh, God, we thank You for bringing us through another year. We thank You for the grace and the mercy and the peace that passeth all understanding that You freely give unto us, Almighty God. God, at this point, we thank You for a chance to come before You and worship You; to sing songs of praise to extol You, to let the world know that we know that You are the one true and wise God. Not being ashamed in any multi-piece at all, in any iota, in any atom's worth, but just to come before You and say, "Thank You." Lord, at this point, we ask that, as You have blessed us already, that You would add a blessing to Your Word, as we go through it, that it would accomplish, as Your Word says, exactly as You sent it to do and not return unto You void, that we might be benefitted by it, oh God, that we might be encouraged, and built up, and strengthened by it. That the chaff, and the hindering things are turned away, and the things which need to be strengthened in our lives are done, so that we are built up to be a more perfect and ready servant before You. We thank You, and we praise You, and everyone said, amen.

### It Starts with Being Loved by God.

So here we are in the book of Ezekiel, chapter 16. As we go through this, we take a look and we see God's relationship with his people. Yes, this is to tell us that it starts with love, and if we could see it as God sees it, we would see His people started out in Eden. As they started out in the garden, God showered them with love and he continues on this path, and He sees His people how that He called them, he called them through Abraham, and Isaac, and He called them through Jacob. He sees His people as they were following God to the best of their ability and they wound up being numerous, and they wound up being in captivity in Egypt. He sees His people in Egypt, and He hears them as they cry out, and He says that he is going to deliver them, and He saw the deliverance that He was going to give His people. When God sees, He doesn't have to wait through time; He sees it all at once. He saw them when they were in the land of Canaan, and he saw them as they were led by Joshua and they were conquering the land. God saw His people when they were having kings and prophets that would come and talk to Him. He saw their good, and He saw their bad. If we turn to the book of Jeremiah, God explains to them this relationship. He says, "I am married to you." (Jeremiah 3:14) "This is a special relationship for Me. I am married to you. I have that special kind of love where I choose and I bestow it, as a man to his wife, or a wife to her husband. I have that kind of love for you." We come here and we see in the book of Ezekiel how God tells them, "I saw you. I saw you when no eye pitied you. I saw you when you were touched and wrapped up in your own blood. I saw you when you needed help. I saw you when you couldn't do anything for yourself. I, the Lord, saw you, and I had pity on you. Why? because I love you, that's why. I love you. I, the Lord, I got you, and I pulled you closer to me. Your cord wasn't cut, but I cut that cord. You were in your own blood, but I, the Lord, got some water, and I washed you when nobody else would wash you. I, the Lord, I decorated you. I anointed you, I put oil on you, to make your skin, to make your appearance beautiful. I gave you clothes and when your covering wasn't enough, I put My own skirt around you that we would enter into a covenant." Yeah, this is that real special, personal kind of love. Then earrings: "I anointed your ears, yes, and I, the Lord, treated you more special than any of the other people that were around. I, the Lord, I did this for you, because I wanted to show you that it started with Me loving you. I gave you jewels to put on you, that would make you stand out, because you are the one who is the apple of My eye." You might say, "Well, that was fine for them, way back then, all those people in Israel and Jerusalem, and for all those places over there," but, it wouldn't take much to bring this all the way down to 2014, and see how special God has treated us. When we were wrapped up in our sins, Christ came and He died for us. When we were wrapped up, and we didn't know where to turn, and didn't have an answer for our sins, He gave us a water to be washed by, baptized in His name. When we needed some anointing to be freshened and made new, yeah, He anointed us, not just with oil, but with His Holy Ghost to make us special, to make us stand out. Yes, he made us special with those jewels when he put special things in every single person—treat you like there's nobody like you. "I love you, and I love you, and I love you, and I love you, and I love you, and I love you... When I put on you,

I put on you special, personal—nobody has it like you do—just you! Because you are the apple of my eye.” So it started out with God loving us. Yes, God loving His people, Old Testament through the New Testament, because, you see, God’s love just continues to multiply and flow. You might say it starts out kind of small—no, you receive it kind of small, because God’s love is just this ever flowing thing—the Bible says that He’s loved us with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3)—it’s just a matter of how much you can contain. Has anybody ever—I’ve seen a few—that you have experienced the love of God so much that it wells your eyes up with tears? You know that if you open your mouth, you’re just going to boo-hoo—and not a boo-hoo of degradation and sorrow, but a boo-hoo of joy and amazement that He can love you like that. Anybody know that just a touch—that is a personal kind of love.

### It Continues with Love for God.

**Ezekiel 16:8** *Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.*

Did you know that God looks and sees times in our lives when He wants us to show love back to Him. Yes, there are times when he looks to be able to receive love back. You know, in any relationship, in any relationship at all, there is some sort of degree of love. Husbands have love to their wives (if it’s an amiable relationship) and wives having a love for their husbands, and there’s always—I’ve heard people say, “You know what? My wife was really crazy about me, so I gave in,” or, “That guy, he chased me all over the place, until I let him catch me.” In other words, “Maybe they love me more than I love them, but we kind of got on the same page, it started slowly equalizing out.” Sometimes you hear people talking about, “I need more love added to our relationship, because it seems like the love has gone out,” but, in any relationship, there is an amount of love—there is an amount of love bestowed, there is an amount of love that is shared. Between brothers and sisters, between parents and children, between children and parents. There is an amount of the list love that is shared on the job, if you have co-workers, some sort of an amount—even if it’s only the amount that, “I’m going to stay away from you so that I don’t have to slap you.” There is some degree of love going on. There is a degree of love with your friends. You know, there are some people that are closer friends than others. They want to get along with this one a whole lot, and maybe that one, well, they’re a friend, but they’re not the close, close, close friend—they’re not my homey, they’re not my boy, they’re not my girl. That one, we’ve got this understanding—this love kind of flows kind of free, kind of strong, and kind of real. But you? you know I love you, but don’t call me after nine o’clock, because, you know, that love kind of runs out now and then. So, in any relationship, there is a certain degree of love. Now, this love, you give it first, because you love them, because you got some sort of an affect, because you have some sort of care, some sort of affection. So, it’s the one gives first, but you always look for some sort of response. You always look for something to come back. You might give them a gift, “Because I love you and I want you to have it, but I’m waiting for you to say, ‘Thank you.’ I’m waiting for you to act like you’re happy that I gave you something. I love you, but make sure that you show me that you know that I love you.” Love. Love, somebody starts it off. Somebody does. Well, God started this off, and God looks for a response. He looks for us to say, “Thank You, Great God in Heaven! If nobody else saw what You did for me, I saw it, and I give you glory and praise and honor. I thank You.” God doesn’t ask you to, well, “I put so much love on the scene,” He doesn’t ask you, “You see how much I’ve done for you, you see how much? Try that on for size, and what are you going to give me

back?” Somebody said, “Oh, everybody’s talking about that great love of God,” and I remember having that conversation, You can’t out give God, so why even try? You can’t give Him as much as He gives you, so whatever you’ve got is enough.” Well, the truth of the matter is, no, you cannot out give God, in fact, you can’t even match what God has done for you. God doesn’t say to give what He has given; He doesn’t say, “Give what I have,” He say, “Give what you have. Give me your love. My love is boundless—My love spans the universe. Your love just needs to reach me.”

### It Also Continues With Us Loving Ourselves.

It has to have me loving myself, so that I make the best decisions for me. I need to make the best decisions for me, so I may obtain the best reward for me. Now, I’m not talking about stealing, and I’m not talking about cheating people. No, I’m not talking about an earthly love; I’m not talking about a selfish love, where you cut people off, but I’m talking about a Godly love, where something is going to build and continue, forever, and ever, and ever. You know, you look at what the Lord Jesus did for us, and you look at the path that He had—how much did He really expect back from that kind of investment? The world would say that He was a fool. He gave up everything, for what? for who? That’s why the world misses the point. He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) The world cannot even see the glory that He has for us. So, it starts with love by God, it continues with love for God, it also continues with us loving ourselves,

### It Has to Start with Love for Others: Both the Loveable and the Unlovable

Some time ago, I got Newsweek magazine. It has this really great article—it was right on the front page, I was really surprised—it said, “God and Gangs.” Well, you’ve got my attention. There’s a picture of an African-American preacher on the cover, so, let’s read this article. And I did. The article says that there was this preacher, and what this preacher did, he was closing up his church on Sunday, after the service had gone on, and it was somewhere around late afternoon. He was closing up his church, and he said there was a gang-banger that came over to meet him. The gang-banger, drug pusher came over and asked him, “I bet you really think you’re doing something around here, don’t you?” And the preacher looked at him and said, “Well, yes, I do,” so the pusher told him, “Meet me back here on Tuesday.” The preacher said, “Hey, I’m up for that challenge.” So the preacher came back on Tuesday. Tuesday morning, the gang-banger said, “Hey, look, I’ve got something to show you.” So, now the church doors are locked, and the gang-banger takes the preacher round the neighborhood. As he takes him round the neighborhood, he says, “You see that little boy over there? That little boy needs a pair of shoes; where are you? You’re nowhere to be found. Watch this.” And the pusher walks over and gives the boy money for some shoes. You know, rubs him upside the head, gives him a little bump. The boy smiles, and goes his way. He says, “You’re nowhere around. I win.” They go a little further in the neighborhood, and he sees a woman. He says, “See that woman over there? That woman needs some groceries. Where you at? It’s Tuesday. You’re nowhere around.” So the pusher walks over and she’s all sad, and kind of teary-eyed, and he listens to her, and gives her some money. She starts exclaiming, and she’s all happy, and she gives him a hug, and then she goes on, on her way to the store. He says, “I win again.” He walks little further in the neighborhood, and he says, “You see that guy on the steps? He can’t pay his mortgage, he can’t

pay his rent, you know? Where you at? You're nowhere around; it's Tuesday." He walks over to the guy, and the guy doesn't even want to talk to him, but after he listens to him a little bit, he listens to the gang-banger, and they talk a little bit, and he says, "Okay," and the gang-banger gives him some money, and now the guy is able to pay his rent. He turns back to the preacher, and says, "I win again. So, what are you really doing?" The article goes on to say how that preacher changed his life. It changed his life, because he saw that what he had amounted to, for all his preaching, and for all his singing, what he really had was what we call Sunday love. A Sunday love, or, you could say, a conditional love. As long as it's happening between these certain hours on Sunday morning, I'm your man; I'm your boy, but, after I lock them doors, don't call me—leave a message on my answering machine, and I'll get back to you during working hours. A Sunday, conditional type of love; so our love has to be for others. The preacher went on to say, "I realized that only came to worship, and I leave to serve." He does a bigger ministry outside the church, where they would come and they would go have centers for unwed mothers and have a soup kitchen where they could help feed people, and they listened to people and did counseling. He said, "This had to change my life because I realized that the love of God is like that it can't be held to Sunday only."

As we look at this, we can see that, even in the time of the Lord, a lot of this was the case. Back then, they had the religious sect of people that would dress up and look all nice and do certain things, but, their love was restricted to: "You've got to follow these guidelines if you're going to get anything out of me." Then what would happen is that the Lord came. The Lord didn't run up to the Temple and tell the Pharisees, "Yeah, I'm here now. Come and worship and serve Me. You know, you're the main ones; you've been keeping it all to yourselves." No, the Lord went to the people who weren't esteemed so highly. The Lord went to people that were forgotten. If we were to look at the church world today, we can see that, it was supposed to be that when the Lord came, as it said often, the Lord came to show them how to love the sinner and hate the sin. But, you know, the church world a lot of times gets that all mixed up; you've got to start and loving the sin and hating the sinner. Missing the point of the thing. And, you know, I've got to be honest about something: you see the Pharisees, and they liked to dress real good. This is a great suit; I love this suit. You see, the Pharisees and how they liked to have long-winded speeches, and talk about what they have done. Saints, you know the truth of the matter is me, I would make a good Pharisee. I would. There have been times in my life when God has had to say to me—I couldn't hear it—but God has had to say to me, "Parrish, yes, except your righteousness exceed that of the Pharisees, ye shall in no wise—and I'm talking to you, Parrish"—and you know what? God is able to pour in love in so that I'm able to see and I say, "Oh, please God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" And God is quick to come and restore. But I know that I wouldn't be the only one in that case. I see Pharisees all the time. I see Pharisees that want to judge, because the truth of the matter is that when you come to something like this, religion makes you compare righteousness, but God causes you to love. God says that mercy rejoices over judgment (James 2:13). Religion will bring you judgment. Religion will make you judge and judge, but God's mercy rejoices over judgment, and we call that the Lord Jesus Christ.

**John 14:27** *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

He actually gives us a key here, saints, He says, "Not only is My peace not like the world gives; neither is My long suffering, neither is My patience, and neither is My love. I have

something that is so different from everything that the world has to offer, and Mine is nice and eternal.

**James 1:27** *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

So, pure religion and undefiled is to take it out and to minister. If we were to go to, as Pastor Paine says, to the next verse, which would be the verse before it:

**James 1:26** *If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.*

So we have these treasures in earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7)

### What Happens When I Run out of love?

Generally people don't like to freely give up their love, because love is something, when you have it, it's so personal and so special to you, it's precious, and you don't want to give it to someone who might not treat it as special and precious you do. Somebody else might not put the care and affection to it that you would, and that you know it deserves. So, we're more reluctant to give that up so freely, unless we know for sure that it's going to be reciprocated, we know it's going to be given back, we know it's going to be treated wonderfully well. When that does happen, that you give it and it's not treated well, what an enormous amount of hurt. You know, we don't have to go far—we don't even have to go far in this building—to see people who have been hurt, who have been touched. Things that have happened that you wonder, “Why? why? why? why? why?” Well, that's what makes this all the more incredible that our Lord and Savior came, and He went through this path, and He gave out that same love. He knew He was going to suffer for that. He knew that there were going to be people who wouldn't treat the love that He gave as special as He did. So why in the world? because He loved us. Because He loved us. So, I made that point to show that if you have ever been in a case where you have poured out your love to somebody, and it was trampled on, not treated well, it was discarded, or not treated as wholly affectionately as you wanted it to be, and you suffered hurt for that? You're in good company.

So, what happens when you run out of love? When it happens over and over and you're like, “I'm at the end of my rope with this person, with this situation, with this group of people...” When it happens over and over... What happens when I do run out of love?

**Ephesians 4:7** *But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*

So what happens when you start running out of that love? “God, I need another measure. Lord, I need another measure.” The truth of the matter is, God has already set the stage. That stage is in our hearts, and on our jobs. That stage could be at cafeteria table, it could be at a gas station. That stage is sometimes at our family dinner table. That stage is in the morning when we go to work. That stage is every place I shake a hand or I see someone. God has given us a

stage that the light of His presence, and the light that He's given us, we can shine it all around, because we are like that city that is set on a hill (Matthew 5:14). We are the light of the world.

**John 13:35** *By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*

