

## Love For a Lifetime...and Beyond

I am writing these words on a jet to Atlanta. In a couple of hours I shall be laying eyes for the first time on Christopher Logan Matthews. He is our sixth grandchild, second son of Jared and Heather. Gramma is already there. I find myself anxiously waiting not only to meet my new grandson, but also to see the girl of my dreams, my wife. She went a week ago to be there for Heather. Although I have been as busy as a long-tailed cat in a room full of rocking chairs, I have missed her. I have traveled out to preach all our life. I've never gotten used to not being in her presence; I miss my wife now more than ever when we are away. We have a love for a lifetime; that was more than a deal – that was the covenant. My heart truly goes out to those who have not known what we have known now for thirty-four years.

Our church is full of “lifers.” I was taken to the airport by one of our fine deacons, Doug Prazak. He and his dear wife have been married for thirty-eight years. As he told me of the things and planning they do together I saw the inextricable link of love for a lifetime. Last night in the Deacon's Meeting, I was observing the happiness that exudes from our Chairman of the Board of Deacons. I know a secret behind his smile – the Lord is the greater part of the secret and yes, one of the purest expressions of that love is evidenced in his life with his queen. They have nearly sailed the seven seas together in their retirement years and amidst some health challenges, they are setting their sails for the sunset. Who can be around Ottis and Joan Young without seeing the love and admiration they have for one another as they stand in the back of our auditorium greeting the folks. I look over to one side of the sanctuary and I see David and Judy Bertrand at times looking like they slightly cuddle. Nearby them I see Butch and Cathy Barron. Why, he has no compunction against putting his arm around her like newlyweds. I had lunch last week with Lt. Col. Cain and he couldn't stop talking about Beverly. Patti Corn sings a special in church and she begins to talk about the love she has for Jesus and Kruger and the “lifers” in Christchurch begin to get misty-eyed. At least, I think they did - it was hard to see through my tears. Saturday I shall have the privilege of renewing the wedding vows of Joe and Lavelle Shelton as they celebrate their golden anniversary – fifty years as husband and wife! I love to hear Joe tell of how he fought hard to win the girl of his dreams. I look just in front of me and see those two kids from the greatest generation, Charlie and Jeanette Josephson. They've been married over sixty-two years and she still carries the picture of her World War II hero. He's forever her knight in shining armor and she is his princess. I have actually seen them “smooch.” We were blessed for a few years to behold the love of the Thomases. I would see them sit so dignified through the services and so in love. It was a touching sight to see him take care of Ruby when she lapsed into Alzheimer's. Brother Thomas became critically ill, but how sweet to see him leave his hospital bed, pulling his oxygen behind him to stand over the bed of the woman he loved, meticulously taking care of her. I visited Ruby yesterday after prayer, I knew in my heart it would not be long before she passed into glory. Last night at about 9:30 I received a phone call from Ruby's granddaughter; the matriarch had passed. I can see her dear husband standing with Jesus on the other side to welcome his love for a lifetime and now beyond.

We had the privilege of having Dr. and Mrs. James Rushing this past weekend at Christchurch. As I fellowshiped with them, I was aware of another lifetime of love. We reminisced old preacher friends now gone. I want to bring to your attention one of the most stirring love stories I know. In the conversation with the Rushings, we mentioned one of the greatest preacher's in the twentieth century, Dr. J. Harold Smith. When Dr. Smith was in the fourth grade he saw a little girl come walking down the road from school. Looking through the doors in their community general store, he asked, who is that girl? That little one? He was told Myrtice. He met her that year and by the fifth grade he was walking her home from school every day. One day, the fifth grade teacher asked J. Harold to stay after school and dust the erasers. He apologetically said to Myrtice, “I'm sorry I can't walk you home today; I have to dust the erasers.” Myrtice replied, “That's okay, I'll be walking just as slow as I can.” The young Smith dusted the erasers as fast as he could, then he moved as fast as he could to catch up with her and

finish walking her home. Moving through history, J. Harold Smith went to college then medical school and the day he graduated and was awarded his doctor's license, he surrendered to preach. He never practiced medicine, but he certainly became a soul doctor. Who will ever forget his majestic, thunderous preaching and his most famous sermon, "God's Three Deadlines"? But perhaps his greatest legacy is not his phenomenal ministry as much as his phenomenal marriage. Myrtice became Dr. Smith's wife and they lived, laughed and loved for a lifetime.

When Mrs. Smith was dying, Dr. Smith was visibly shaken. Mrs. Smith said, "Now J. Harold, you remember what I told you!" He said "What? When?" She said, "When we were in the fifth grade...you know...I'll be walking just as slow as I can." She died shortly after this. Within the first year of her death, Dr. Smith suffered fourteen strokes. In less than another year he was gone. Just before he died, Dr. Rushing was visiting him and asked, "Dr. Smith, you've been so healthy. What seems to be the problem?" J. Harold Smith said, "Jim, I been walking as fast as I can for two years." In just a few days, Dr. J. Harold Smith caught up. Love for a lifetime and beyond!

### **1. Time merges with eternity with love for a lifetime.**

*"And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her"* (Genesis 29:20). Time is never wasted when you are waiting for or living with the love of your life. In the case of a happy marriage, time really does fly when you are having a good time.

### **2. Trials are overcompensated with the love for a lifetime.**

*"Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith"* (Proverbs 15:17). A stalled ox was the measure of a rich man. If you have plenty of steak from your corn-fed ox in the stall, plenty of material possessions, plenty of money, but no love, it is torture. The comparison of a dinner of herbs with love is saying, if you have little or nothing but love, you can have a great measure of happiness.

### **3. Heaven becomes sweeter when the love for a lifetime goes there.**

When David lost his little baby, in his grief he uttered a truth of reconnecting with those we love when he said, *"...can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me"* (II Samuel 12:23). I recall when Dr. Robert G. Lee was about to go to Heaven. I was told Dr. Lee had spotted some old preacher friends, and he was looking for his wife. Many a saint has looked over into the great cloud of witnesses and seen loved ones waiting for them there. Yes, the love for a lifetime goes beyond the grave.

-Pastor Pope-

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