

Date: July 12, 2009

Title: God Must Really Love Me

---

Scripture: 1Thessalonians 1: 4-9

**1 Thessalonians 1:4-10 (NLT)** <sup>4</sup>We know, dear brothers and sisters, that God loves you and has chosen you to be his own people. <sup>5</sup>For when we brought you the Good News, it was not only with words but also with power, for the Holy Spirit gave you full assurance that what we said was true. And you know of our concern for you from the way we lived when we were with you. <sup>6</sup>So you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you. In this way, you imitated both us and the Lord. <sup>7</sup>As a result, you have become an example to all the believers in Greece—throughout both Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup>And now the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God. We don't need to tell them about it, <sup>9</sup>for they keep talking about the wonderful welcome you gave us and how you turned away from idols to serve the living and true God.

**Hebrews 12:24 (NLT)** You have come to Jesus, the one who mediates the new covenant between God and people, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks of forgiveness instead of crying out for vengeance like the blood of Abel.

---

This morning I am beginning a sort of series that considers messages that we receive from our culture. I think it will be interesting to look at some of the theological messages our culture gives us and then compare that with what the biblical message. Today I am using a Country Western Song and next week I will be using a Pop Song and the week after that I think I will use a Contemporary Christian song.

Listen to the first song written and performed by Craig Morgan:

**God Must Really Love Me by Craig Morgan**

*There's been times I've let my faith run thin  
Not been the man I should have been  
After all the trouble I've been in, I'da gave up on me  
I've lived hard and I've lived fast  
Lost things I will never get back  
Cause someone to look past all of that  
God must really love me*

*When I look at the miracles around me  
At the way that I live and the way He forgives*

*I know He's up there smiling down on me  
And I believe the only reason why  
I'm still alive is  
God must really love me*

*Wake up and feel you by my side  
The perfect girl, the perfect time  
And see the way our future shines  
God must really love me*

*When I look at the miracles around me  
At the dream that I live and the gift that he gives  
I know he's up there smiling down on me  
And I believe the only reason why  
I get to live this life is God must really love me*

*When I showed the worst, He saw the best  
He pulled the world right off my chest  
Every day I wake up I feel blessed*

*Yeah, I feel so blessed  
God must really love me  
God must really love me  
God must really love me*

If we assume that Craig Morgan is singing this song about himself it seems pretty clear that Craig believes that God *really* loves him. He states this seven times in the song and the title says it too. So the rest of the song is a presentation of the reasons he is convinced that God really loves him. What I would like to suggest is that some of the reasons are in line with our faith and some are not so much. Oh, I think it's a good song, but I just want to look closely at what he is saying to see where it lines up with our faith and where it might lead us a little askew.

In the song, there seem to be four themes that run through the lyrics. The first theme considers God's forgiveness. Craig states that his life has not been perfect. He has been in trouble; he has been less than completely faithful; and still, God forgives and continues to love him.

I think that is one that I would go along with. Our Book of Hebrews scripture speaks of God's forgiveness. The author says that indeed God forgives those who come to Christ Jesus. The author says that the blood that is sprinkled from Christ cries out for forgiveness unlike the blood of Abel which cried out for vengeance when Abel was murdered by his brother.

Do you remember that story? It is the story way back in Genesis, chapter 4 that tells us of the conflict between the brothers Cain and Abel. These two sons of Adam and Eve both made an offering to God, but God only accepted Abel's offering. We don't know exactly why this was the case, but Cain was angry enough with this that he lured Abel out into the fields and then murdered him. The scripture says that God came looking for Cain and asked where Abel was. Cain tries to deflect God's condemnation by saying, *I don't know where he is. Am I my brother's keeper?* To which God replies: **Genesis 4:10 (NLT)** "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground!"

The author of Hebrews says that Abel's blood was crying out to God for vengeance and he contrasts the blood of Abel with the blood of Christ, which calls out for forgiveness. This would seem to suggest to me that as Christians we understand the whole notion of God's forgiveness to be bound up with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. It is because of Christ's blood that we are able to count on the forgiveness of God. Even though Craig Morgan doesn't mention Christ, I am willing to give him the benefit of the doubt that he knows God forgives him because he knows something about the message of Christ.

The second theme seems to consider God's grace. He says, *When I showed the worst, He saw the best – He pulled the world right off my chest.* I'm not sure of a precise scripture that expresses this, but certainly, Jesus continued to nurture and coax his disciples even though they frequently made mistakes and did and said things that Jesus

had to correct or confront. In scripture we read of many instances where people showed the worst and God or Jesus saw the best. And when we know that God is looking at our best, and inviting us to live from our best selves, the problems we face don't seem so insurmountable.

Do you know that feeling of having the world on your chest? Some times life just seems to be overwhelming. We feel like there are just too many things going on in our lives and we wonder how we will ever be able to cope with the stress and strain. I'm convinced that for the most part this *world sitting on my chest* feeling is caused by shame and obligations we put upon ourselves to make sure that everyone including God knows that we are worthy of love. When we realize that God loves us no matter what, we can respond to life from a clear space without the added weight of guilt and shame.

The third theme I see in this song that I really like is the theme of Gratitude. He sings, *Every day I wake up I feel blessed*. And the stated reason for this feeling of blessing is because God really loves him. This is one of the most important things any person can come to understand about life. When we really get it on a deep level that God, the creator of all that we see and experience really loves us unconditionally, and desires to bless us in a personal relationship, then we can't help but to feel blessed. This idea of gratitude is reinforced when the Morgan says, *I believe the only reason why I'm still alive is God must really love me*. We see that he has correctly identified the reason for his very existence and believes that it is because of God and God's irrepressible love that he is still alive.

The fourth theme is one I want to challenge just a bit. Morgan sings, *Wake up and feel you by my side - The perfect girl, the perfect time - And see the way our future shines - God must really love me*. Now, that line has a nice poetic flow to it but the problem I have with this is that Craig Morgan seems to be saying that the material blessings in his life are evidence of God's love.

Now, I will agree that we should recognize that all of our blessings, material and otherwise, come from God. We sing as much when we sing, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow." I think it is great when we wake up and look at our lives and realize, "You know, I am really blessed!" I also believe that it's great for us to thank God for those blessings. But if we use our material blessing as a measure of God's love, what are we to think when life doesn't seem to go so well for us? What will he think if he wakes up and his life is really hard? What if the woman he thought would be the perfect girl turns out to be less than perfect or the man she thought would be perfect is not so perfect after all? What if the future doesn't look so bright because of illness, unemployment or some other calamity? Does this mean that God doesn't really love me?

Let me read just one little section from our Thessalonians scripture: *you received the message with joy from the Holy Spirit in spite of the severe suffering it brought you.* Paul seems to be suggesting that these people living in Thessalonica received the message of Christ and rather than creating a world of material blessing for them, it created severe challenges for them; and still, they received the message of Christ with joy.

Paul begins his letter affirming that God really loves the Thessalonian church. But the reasons Paul gives for knowing this has more to do with how he has seen the spirit of God at work in the lives of those people and how that spirit has been evident throughout the entire region. The picture I get is of a group of people who have heard the message of Christ and have taken that message to heart – not just when things are going great, but they have taken that assurance of God’s love and incorporated it into their lives in such a way as to become famous for it. Paul says that *the word of the Lord is ringing out from you to people everywhere, even beyond Macedonia and Achaia, for wherever we go we find people telling us about your faith in God.* God must really have loved the Thessalonians.

And you know what else? I think that God must really love the Fountain First United Methodists too.

- It seems that God must love us because we rely upon God’s forgiveness as assured through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. While others are crying out for vengeance, we are doing all we can to show God’s love to each other, to our community and to the world. We are far from perfect and yet God has promised us that if we will rely upon the spilled blood of Jesus to redeem us, God will be faithful to see us through every challenge.
- God must really love us because we do show our worst at times and without fail, God sees not just our failures or our flaws, but God sees what an incredible force for the good we can be.
- God must really love us because we know how to say thank you to God. We recognize that the blessings that we receive from the one who creates all blessings are not to be taken for granted but to be appreciated and out of a profound sense of gratitude we do thank God for those blessings.
- God must really love us because we see the Holy Spirit of God active in the life of our church. We see God’s Spirit in the enthusiasm of singing children after 4 days of vacation bible school. We see God’s Spirit in the efforts to grow and provide local produce to our community through our garden and our farmer’s market. We experience God’s Spirit in the worship services that continue to touch people’s lives and offer us a place to connect with God.

God must really love you and me as well. We don’t look for God’s material rewards to verify that love. We look to our scripture and to the relationship that God offers to each one of us to as hard evidence.

The 2nd chorus of the song says *When I look at the miracles around me - At the dream that I live and the gift that he gives - I know he's up there smiling down on me - And I believe the only reason why - I get to live this life is God must really love me.*

The only reason we get to live this life is because God really loves us; not because of what we have done or because of who we are but because God **is** love. It is simply God's nature to love. And more than anything else, God wants to share that love with us and wants us to share it with each other.

Oh, I think there is no doubt about it; God must really love Craig Morgan. But God must also love you, Louise; and you, Dianna; and you, Bob; and you, Frank and of course; God must really love me, also. Amen.