

Wasted Love

Series: *Love*

Matthew 4:23

Pastor Groeschel

Hey, I'm so glad to have all of you with us today, at all of our LifeChurches and our network churches. We love you guys so much. Those of you on the other side of computer screens, at Church Online, in countries all over the world, you are a part of our extended family, and I've got great news for you today. We've got an amazing guest speaker back to share God's Word with us.

Now, before I introduce him, I've got to tell you that next week is one of the best weeks. All year long, to reach out to people that normally wouldn't go to church, and to bring them, next week we're starting the first week of *At the Movies*, where we take really popular movies, and we pull messages out of the movies, and teach Scripture, in a way that really engages people in a very emotionally, and deep, and spiritual way. So, I want you to think, who do you know that wouldn't normally come to church, and bring them next week, as we start *At the Movies*.

Today, though, we have back one of my very good friends, the pastor of City Church in Seattle, truly one of the most gifted communicators. This guy has an ability to hear from God, and to communicate God's Word in a way that just inspires, challenges,

convicts, and transforms. Even more so, what I love about him is that he truly, deeply loves God. He's a great husband. He's a great dad. He's a great friend to me, and to our church. Would you show love and honor to our good friend, Pastor Judah Smith?

Pastor Smith

Are you good, church? Happy to be alive, it's a good day to be in church. It is a good day to be in LifeChurch. Do you love LifeChurch? Hey, I've been in church my whole life. It doesn't get any better than LifeChurch. And I trust that you're praying for your pastor, as you love him, and ...

Make sure that you don't let church just be somewhere you attend. It's a community we do life in. Jump in, get involved, and we're blessed. We're blessed to have friends, relationships. We're not isolated. We're in love with life, in love with people, and in love with God, and ...

Well, I'm excited to extend, from last week – we talked about love. I want to talk, again, about the love of God, and as I said last week, you're going to be encouraged. That's the goal. That's the point, that you be encouraged today.

If you feel discouraged, or you feel down, you came, maybe, worried or anxious, or stressed, I really believe you're going to leave today just full of God's love for you, with

a sense that God's going to turn your situation and your circumstance around. God's faithful.

And maybe you're here today, and you came just really difficult, weighed down by some situation in your life – maybe a sickness, maybe a financial crisis. I believe in a God who can save, deliver, provide. God is faithful, and God is going to help you right here, right now. Do you believe that? And you're happy? All right.

Go with me to Matthew chapter 4. If you don't have your Bible today, that's no problem at all; I'm going to read it to you – Matthew chapter 4, and we're going to go to verse 23. I'm definitely one of those guys – I believe the Bible is God's Word; it's God's story, God's narrative to us, humanity, and I believe the Book is mostly about God, God's extraordinary love for humanity, and we're going to do our best to make sense of that together.

Matthew chapter 4, and verse 23 ... Speaking of Jesus now, it says: “**23** [Now] He went [through] all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” I want to underscore that in your reading. We're just going to try to unpack just a portion of this sentence. Let's read it again: “He went ... healing every disease and every affliction among the people.”

I'm going to stop, just right there. I want to title this message "Wasted Love," "Wasted Love." Would you pray with me?

Jesus, we love You so much because You first loved us. And in these moments, in these brief moments, as we approach Your Book, we don't just want information; we want more of You. We thank You for Your grace. Thank You for Your love. God, please let the SuperSonics come back to Seattle. Hear my cry, Lord. Thank You that I didn't marry anybody ugly. In Jesus' name, and everybody said ...

Got to thank Him while you can! Come on, church!

We talked about marriage a little bit last week, so let's just continue talking about marriage. I didn't know, early on in marriage, there are certain words you should stay away from in marriage. Right? *Never* – never say *never*. *Always* – never say *always*. And last, but not least, *fat* – never say *fat*. Three words you never say in marriage – *never*, *always*, and *fat*.

Now, the reason that I was taught, in premarital counseling – that's where I learned everything I know about marriage – is that you avoid those words because marriage is about appreciating wherever you are in the moment, the season you're in, and not inflicting the past on your spouse, presently.

Now, I'm famous, okay? Look, I have issues. I have some broken golf clubs to prove that, and some broken tennis rackets, but don't judge me. I'm a work in progress, just like you. Thanks for being so quiet. I feel that judgment all of a sudden. I got very uncomfortable. God bless. God bless.

I'm the guy that's kind of emotional – I don't know if you can tell that, but I'm the expander in the marriage. Chelsea's the condenser. Do you know what I mean by that? You're either one or the other, in communication and marriage. Like, I'm always expanding. I'm the guy that's – you know, when Chelsea's like – Chelsea always has to say, “So, are you saying ...?” And when she gets it right, I say it again, because I'm so excited that she understands what I'm saying.

Do you know what I mean by the “expander”? I'm emotional; I like to talk. Like, I stop talking only when absolutely necessary. Chelsea's the condenser: She starts talking only when absolutely necessary. We make a great tandem. Have you ever seen two expanders get married? God can't even help you. No, I'm just kidding!

So, I tend to just start talking, and when things get emotional in marriage, I say stuff like, “You always do that!” And they say you can't do that in a marriage, you can't do that in a relationship, because what you're doing is, you are taking the past, and you are inflicting it on the present. And that makes for a bad relationship, because the whole idea is forgiveness. It's kind a theme.

And you can't say, "You never ...". Again, that's past stuff. Let the past be the past, right? I sound like such a great counselor right now. Let the past be the past. *Never, always*, and then I just throw in *fat* because you know that's never, ever, ever okay.

Now, I'm not great at this, but this brings us to a point about God, which I think is absolutely extraordinary. God – not only does He never inflict our past on us, but wait, God has this ability – it's called "foreknowledge." He knows your future. He knows your future. So, God is so gracious, and so loving, not only will He not inflict your past on your present, He won't inflict your future on your present.

Now, that's extraordinary to me. I don't know about you, but when I get a sense or a suspicion about someone, I can't even handle it – a sense that they might do something. I'm like, "Hey, hey, hey, hey ...". Right?

But God – think about how extensive and extraordinary His love is, His love for you. His love is so present. And that's what I want to talk about for a moment. God's love is present.

Now, this brings us to Jesus, and this healing that He does, recorded in Matthew's Gospel. I want to read it again to you – Matthew chapter 23: "He went [about] ... healing every disease and every affliction among the people."

I remember reading that. I thought, *Every? Every?* Yeah, every. Every single sick person ... It didn't say "deserving sick people." It didn't say "good sick people." It certainly didn't say "righteous sick people" – every sick person – "every disease and every affliction among the people."

Wait a second. I started thinking about this. So, He healed hands that would hit. He healed eyes that would lust. He healed feet that would run away. I said, "God, this ... You've really got to start utilizing this foreknowledge a little bit more efficiently. You –" Right?

I mean, if I was God, I'd be, "All right, please line up right here. Anybody wants to be healed – everybody line up. All right. You want to be healed? Oh, I bet you do! You want those legs to be healed, don't you? But I know what you're going to do with those legs, so I won't heal you. Move along little buddy. Okay, you want to heal those eyes? I don't think so." This is what I would do. How many are grateful that you and I are not God?

I want you to think about this. Jesus heals bad people. He heals people who will use the miracle to do bad things.

Which brings us to another portion of Scripture, in Luke's Gospel, and maybe you've heard of it. But these guys have leprosy, and there's exactly 10 of them. They're pleading with Jesus. Jesus heals all 10 of the guys with leprosy.

Now, He knows the percentage of which will be grateful and thankful for His healing, and that percentage is one guy – ten percent. Is that the correct percentage? Ten percent. I took pre-algebra for three years, but the third year ... the third year I got an "A." I cheated. Don't judge me, okay? [Unintelligible, 11:09] Ten percent ...

Can we be honest? If you've got ten people in front of you, and you know only one of them is going to acknowledge, be grateful, are you going to heal all ten? You probably would. Not me! I'd be like, "Oh, y'all want to be healed? I'll bet you do! Guess what? Only he's going to be healed. You ask why. Because I know what I'm doing. You guys are ungrateful, self-serving ..." He said, "You're healed." He didn't take away the healing.

He heals bad people. We talked, last week, about God loving bad people. He takes it to another level: He heals bad people. He heals bad people who will take their healing and do bad things! God, what is motivating this? What kind of love is this?

Now, this brings us back to our passage we talked about last week, because we didn't go into the portion where Jesus is compelled by the note that he's written. He comes

back down the road, several miles – and by the way, He’s late, in the story. He waits two more days, down the road, and on the fourth day comes, and He heals Lazarus.

Most people believe the reason He did this – and I tend to agree – is because the Jews believed that by the fourth day, there was no hope for resurrection. This was their custom. By the fourth day, they would bury the body. It would be officially over. I believe Jesus waited for the fourth day, so that they knew that He had the power over life and death.

Now, something very odd unfolds before Jesus heals Lazarus. Now, some of you are familiar with Scripture, and you know where I’m going, but it is odd. He comes down the road – why is He coming? Well, He’s going to heal Lazarus. And when He gets there, He cries.

I remember thinking, “You know, maybe I’m not smart enough to understand this, but I’m pretty sure” – obviously, I had the luxury of reading on, but – “Boy, Jesus You’re going to heal, so why are You wasting this emotion? Did You not know?”

This is mysterious. This is the shortest verse in the New Testament narrative, right? “Jesus wept.” Come on, if you went to Christian school – “You need to memorize one verse in the New Testament.” Done! Right? I did that. But, “Jesus wept.”

Why? Why did He weep? Do I know for sure? Maybe not, but I've got a hunch. Why did He weep? If He knows He's going to heal Lazarus, why did He weep? Did He waste His tears? Did Jesus waste His healing power on bad people who would use their healing to do bad things? Did Jesus waste His power on nine lepers?

Now, logically – I'll be honest – I kind of would answer “yeah,” “maybe.” Wait, wait a second. God doesn't waste anything. That would be acting inconsistently with the contents of His character. Nothing about God is wasteful. God is, by definition, purposeful at all times. Everything He does is completely intentional. There are no, “Ooops!” or, “Oh, no,” with God.

So, Jesus cries. Why? What's the message here?

I started talking to God, and looking through other Scriptures. And I don't know why I want to know so bad, but I'm just looking at this all by myself, in my Bible, and I'm thinking, *I want to know why You cried*. And it dawned on me – because God's love is always now.

I want you to think about that: God's love is always – consider the self-control of this love. God's love is always now. Here's how I explain it. If I was God – “That's ridiculous!” Bear with me. If I was God, and I knew that at 42, you were going to do something so ridiculously dumb, at 27 I would be mad at you, and I would be right.

So, you wake up on your 27th birthday, go, “Good morning, God,” and my response would be, “Hi.” “God, is that You?” “Sure.” “God, why are You – It’s my birthday today!” “I know.” “Did I – did I do something?” “Oh, yeah, you did.” “What was it?” “Oh, it’s not what you’ve done, it’s what you’re going to do!” “Well, what do You mean?” “It’s when you’re 42.” “But God, I’m 27 today.” “Yeah, but I’m God, and I know what you’re going to do! So, stop arguing with Me.” “But I’ll try really hard. Tell me what it is, and I won’t do it!” “No, it doesn’t work like that. I know what you’re going to do. That’s what makes me God! So, today, on your twenty-seventh birthday, I am mad at you because of what you’re going to do at 42.”

And by the way, that would be justified. Would it not? Would anyone contest that? Would anyone argue that God knows what you’re going to do when you’re 42? Some of you are like, *Uh, I used to be 42*. God knows what you’re going to do at 92. He – how many of you hope you get to 92? Holla at your boy. All right, so ... But God knows what you’re going to do.

I cannot steward that knowledge, just in case you’re wondering. I don’t know about you, but if I knew, I’m going to be mad now. What kind of love is this?

God, You know Lazarus, in moments, is going to be healed. But let me ask you something. Does that lessen the pain that Mary and Martha are in, in that moment? Is the pain not real?

Isn't that interesting! Jesus doesn't walk up and go, "Oh, Mary, Martha, stop it. I'm here now. Come on, Lazarus is going to be fine. Come on, buddy, come on up." Mary and Martha are like, "Oh, sorry. Yeah, no, we're good. The tears weren't real. We just – yeah, we knew You'd come. Yeah."

Who is this God who knows He's going to save Lazarus, but before He does, has such extraordinary empathy and love for the pain of humanity that He takes time to cry? And God can't fake tears. He cries with Mary and Martha. Whoa!

This God is extraordinary. He heals bad people, He blesses bad people, and even when He knows – I don't mean to be too – in any way belittle grief, and belittle people's desire to be empathetic when we're in grief. My dad passed away about six, seven years ago – excuse me, it's been only four years. But – and he was my hero, right?

He was pastor in the church in Seattle, and I was planning to be his youth pastor, like, forever. Right? If your dad started a church and planted a church, you usually never want to pastor a church. Right? It's like, adults are mean. I want to hang with young people, because you can tell them what to do. So, youth pastoring was, like, the best role, ever.

And then, I was the best man in my buddy's wedding, and I got a phone call during wedding pictures that Dad said, "Son, they've given me a diagnosis of multiple myeloma.

Jesus is my healer. Believe He can heal me.” Went through a five-year journey with absolutely no inkling of cancer.

By the sixth year things deteriorated fast. I was in the pulpit most Sundays, and before I knew it, my hero – to be honest, not only my dad, but my best friend, was gone.

And I remember the first Sunday, man, like it was yesterday. I was standing in front of 5,000 people. They’re looking at me like, “We miss your dad.” And I’m looking at them like, “So do I.” And they’re looking back like, “You’re not as good as your dad.” And I’m like, “Shut up.” We weren’t healthy. We were all hurting, kind of looking at each other, and ...

I preached for, like, three, four weeks, and spent all the sermons I had, and I was kind of like, *Well, that was good while it lasted.* And a miraculous journey began to unfold.

But people would come to me during the journey and say, “Hey, you’re going to see him in heaven.” And I appreciate their heart, I really do, but I kind of figured that out a while ago. But I’m not in heaven. I’m going to be, and I’m looking forward to it, frankly. I’d like to be down here a little bit longer. I really like my wife, and we’re having a lot of fun. But, “You’re going to see him in heaven,” they’d say. Yeah, I will, but I really wish I could see him now. And my tears were not because I’ll never see him again; my tears were, how many years until I get to see him again? And the pain’s real.

God is ever-present. Do you realize how extraordinary our God is? He understands. You've got to love that verse: He remembers we're dust. He gets our plight. He gets that we really don't get eternity. And in these moments, the Resurrection has changed everything, and we will be in eternity together, and we have the hope of heaven, and we ought to hold on to eternal life, and heaven ought to be a major theme of our existence on this planet, and yet, the only context we really have ever experienced with our five senses is this trouble planet.

And when our loved ones are gone, even though we are only separated temporarily, the pain is real, and it's deep, and it's challenging, and there is a lot of pain. And Jesus comes to Mary and Martha and says, "Let's cry. Let's just cry."

And I ran into that verse in Romans – I think it's Romans 12:14 or 15, or it might be Romans 12:14 and 15, but it's in the Book of Romans. And it says, "Weep with those who weep. Laugh with those who laugh." And I remember seeing that Scripture, and if you grew up in church, it's just kind of like, "Come on, we're going to love people. Weep with those who weep."

But that's God. That's God. He knows everything, and yet, He'll weep with you now because His love is present, and His love is now, and His love is here, and His love is available. God does not inflict your past on you. *God, You're amazing.* And He won't

inflict your future on you. He'll love you now. He'll heal you now, minister to you now, be with you now.

Is He wasting His power? Is He wasting these tears? No. That's God. That's God's extraordinary love.

Oh, you go through 1 Corinthians 13 – and I urge you to go through that great love chapter. And I remember reading 1 Corinthians 13 – and forgive me for referencing growing up as a pastor's kid so much, but I used to think 1 Corinthians 13 was kind of about me and my love for God. And I realized that 1 Corinthians 13 is – it's describing God's love. It's a description of the height, the width, the length, and the depth of our God's love.

And God's love never fails. God's love is faithful. God's love is constant, and God's love is today. God's love is now. You don't have to worry about carry-over. You don't have to worry about Him reaching into your future, and bringing it back to your past. You are, by definition, free to enjoy God today, right now, in this moment.

I love that Scripture, in 1 John. It says “Perfected – perfect love casts out all fear.” “Perfect love” – perfected, finished, accomplished love ...

God perfected and finished His great act of love for all of humanity, and now, if we will be caught up and preoccupied with what He has done for humanity, it will completely eradicate and remove all fear. This is crazy, but as God followers, we have been given license to never fear again.

And the fear of God is better said to be the awe of God. We are in awe, because fear has been removed – fear of future, fear of repeating our past. Whom the Son sets free today is free right now, in this moment, completely, today. You are completely and utterly free. You don't have to anticipate anything wicked and evil. You have been set free to anticipate good things.

Will challenging times come? Will there be difficult times? Life is difficult on this planet, and it has a way of doing that. But we have been set free by the love of God. Perfect love casts out all fear. Part of fear is the expectation of bad things tomorrow.

You can rest easy in the love of God. God is sovereign, God is in control, God is present, and God loves me today. It'll set you free.

Jesus says, "Come to Me, come to Me. My yoke is easy, and My burden is light. I'll show you – if you'll come to Me, I'll show you how to take a real rest." I urge you today to lean into this present, "now" love that God has for you.

I'll end with this illustration, but parenting, for me, has been a really unique experience, as I'm sure it is for most parents. We've got a nine-year-old now – Zion – a seven-year-old – Elliot, who I call “El-Dog” – and a little five-year-old – Daddy's little princess – Grace. And man, I love these kids. They are gloriously, wonderfully challenging.

I realized one day – and it was an embarrassing discovery about me – that I was so busy missing when they were little – I call them my “little nuggets.” I love these little guys. I remember thinking, *What's wrong with me? I'm so fickle.* I remember looking, I'm thinking, *Oh, they're starting to talk normal. They're saying their “Rs” normal now. I miss when they say their “Rs” wrong. I miss when they were a baby. I miss ...*

And then – you know how parenting is. It's so funny. It's like, *Oh, I can't wait until we're out of diapers. Oh, my gosh, I cannot wait until we're out of a car seat. Oh, my word, I cannot wait until they can buckle their own selves in. I cannot wait until they can feed themselves. I cannot wait until they – bear with me – wipe themselves. I cannot wait until they drive themselves.* And the cycle goes on and on.

And I remember the Holy Spirit just nudging me: “Judah, what do you want? Do you want to go back, do you want to go forward, or do you want to enjoy today?”

That's what God does with us. That's what God does with us. God's a "today" God. God is a "now" God. Don't get caught up in what's going to happen tomorrow, and certainly don't get caught up in what happened yesterday. Enjoy today. Didn't Jesus teach this? Don't worry about tomorrow. Enjoy today. Enjoy God's love that is present and now. God is with you, God is for you, and God loves you.

I don't know what you're going through. I don't pretend, for a moment, to understand what you're facing, and the challenges and difficulties of your life. But I just sense today, in church, that the Holy Spirit's just trying to nudge you to relax a little bit – is that okay to say in church? – to lean into His love, and let yourself just live today.

You know, we're going to be in heaven before we know it, and this life will be over. We don't have too many days to hope and wish we could go back to the good old days, or hope and wish for another day. All we have is today, and we serve a God of today.

God'll weep with you today. God'll laugh with you today. God is with you today. He knows what you're going through right now. Lean into Him. Communicate with Him. Talk with Him. God loves you so much.

When I was flying home after my dad passed away, in Las Vegas, I was crying, and just talking to God – you know, moments that you don't want anyone ever to see you in –

and I was going, “God, really? That’s my dad. That’s my best friend. And now I’m supposed to pastor this church, and I don’t know who I’m going to ask, and talk to, and ... I don’t know if I can do this.”

I felt like the Holy Spirit just spoke to me and said, “Since when am I not enough, son? Since when am I not enough, each and every day?”

And right there, before I landed home, after watching my dad slip into eternity, I made a decision: “You’re enough. You’re enough for right now. I’m going to take it a day at a time.” And I promise you that I would not be standing on my two feet today ... There is nothing, short of the love of God, that helped me keep my head and my sanity. “Just relishing every day, I’m just going to take today and lean into Your love, and be thankful and grateful for the love that You have for me right here, and right now.”

And I pray, I really pray, that you’ll experience that freedom and that rest today, in the present love of God. Can I pray for you?

Jesus, thank You. Thank You that You never waste Your love. And I thank You, Father, that Your love is faithful, and Your love is true, and Your love is always right now. We lean into You, in this moment, and we say, we trust You, not only with our past, but we trust You with our future. I thank You, Father, for rest, and ease now, in

Your extraordinary love for us. We love You because You first loved us, and we thank You for that. In Jesus' name, amen.

Pastor Groeschel

Father, as we continue in an attitude of prayer today, thank You so much for this powerful message of hope that Your love is now. God, help us to experience Your presence, and Your current love, in this moment.

As you take a minute today, at all of our churches, and you just reflect on what the Spirit is saying to you, I believe there are many of you that you are hurting right now. It may be the pain of something that someone did to you in the past that won't go away. It could be the heaviness, perhaps, of something that you've done, and you're carrying that with you. It may be the fear of what's coming up in your life, and there's a weight on you right now. And at this moment, you simply need to experience the "now" love of God.

If that's you, at all of our churches, and you really want to know His presence, a peace that goes beyond our human ability to understand, would you just slip your hands up right now, at all of our different churches? And I want to take a moment and pray that you would experience this. All of our churches, just lift up your hands right now, as an indication of faith that you need His "now" love.

God, we thank You so much that, just as Jesus wept in the moment, God, that You feel for us. God, even though You know that You're working in all things to bring about good, God, You still love us, You care for us, even the intimate details of our lives.

And God, I pray, at this moment, that no matter what burden someone is carrying – the weight, the guilt, the fear – God, that Your Holy Spirit would personalize Your love in the moment, God, that we could all recognize Your presence, and that Your Holy Spirit would wash across us, God, that we would truly embrace a supernatural peace that goes beyond our own human ability to understand.

God, help us to experience Your unconditional love, in a way that touches our hearts, and transforms and heals our souls. God, we're open to what You want to say to us, do in us, and show us through Your love.

As you keep praying today, at all of our different churches, I'm very moved by what Pastor Judah said, that even if we're 27, and we're going to do something wrong at 42, that God continues to love us. And I want you to think about that, because there are many of you that if you look back over your past, you recognize you've done a lot of things to displease God.

The reality is, if I can just be real honest, you're going to continue, in your future, to do things that displease God, and this is what makes God's salvation so amazing, that

because of His grace, through Jesus, who was perfect, the sacrifice for our sins, risen from the dead, that when we call on God, through Jesus, even though, practically, we still do wrong, positionally we are in Christ, forgiven and made new in the presence of God. And when we put our faith in Jesus, God no longer sees our sinfulness, but He sees the glory of His own Son, Jesus.

In fact, we could talk about our past, or we could talk about our future, but there's a Scripture in the Bible that says, "Today is the day of salvation." And I believe, with all of my heart, that for many of you, today is the day that you will trust the Son of God to forgive your sins, and make you brand new. That's why you're here today.

This message is speaking to you because God purposed in His heart, before the foundation of the world, that you would be here today and experience this unconditional love and grace from our God, because today is the day of your salvation, and you know it. You recognize you're a sinner, and you know you need a Savior. Today you simply surrender your life, and call on Jesus to make you new. That's why you're here, and you can sense it.

At all of our churches, those of you who would say, "Yes, I give up. I surrender. I trust my life to Him. I call on Jesus, and give my life completely to Him to save me" – if that's your prayer today, would you lift your hands high right now?