

LOVE



ADVENT 2019

Sermon Notes



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Christmas is an intriguing time of the year where we work really hard to make love work. We want life to feel different and we don't want it to feel like the rest of the year. So we max out credit cards; we spend weeks planning and cooking and eating; we pretend to like people we can't stand with the dream that somehow this thing we call love will really manifest during this Christmas season.

During this season what I discover every year without fail is that I am pretty lousy at this thing called love. Maybe I'm not alone? It could be that you have discovered a listless heart in you as well?

Why did Jesus come on Christmas Day? What sent Him here? Why did He take on human flesh and die a criminal's death for us? It wasn't because He looked upon the selfishness and sin of our lives and said, "They are just fine without Me." Why did He come? He came because of HIS LOVE!

Jesus came to Bethlehem to show us what love is all about and what it's not about. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that true, genuine love is why Christ redeemed us. We love because we were first loved by Him.

¹Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. ² And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. ⁴ Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; ⁵ does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; ⁶ does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:1-8)

When the Corinthian church heard Paul's words in AD 55, they were hearing a stunning rebuke. Paul just spent the first 12 chapters explaining how damaging their lack of love was. This city of Corinth connected northern and southern Greece and so all commerce and traffic had to go through Corinth. Everybody there had one thing in common - they wanted to make it big. They wanted to live large and flaunt it and indulge themselves. It was a success-oriented, money-hungry, sensual city. Corinth also attracted driven, talented, visionary people and those who could survive in Corinth really made a name for themselves (paraphrased from Tim Keller).

In Corinth, sounding brass and clanging cymbals and pageantry was to impress the pagan gods and get their attention. The louder and more obnoxious the ceremony was the more it would stimulate the gods and your fellow worshippers to action. Paul says that you can have a three-ring worship circus, speak in the languages of men (14:18) and of angels (2 Cor. 12:4), but if you don't love, it doesn't matter.

You might have direct revelation from God, total understanding of the end times and all the intricacies of Scripture. You might even have faith that moves mountain, and this infectious leadership gift that mobilizes

and motivates people (vs. 2). You might help hundreds and thousands of people, have direct revelation from God, and be used miraculously, but if you don't have love, Paul says you are nothing. His point is that loveless Christians ultimately come up short; they come up empty.

In vs. 3, Paul goes to the very top of the virtue lists and says that even those who give all their money to the poor or give their life in martyrdom - if they don't have love it profits them nothing. It doesn't count or merit or earn anything.

We want to count. We want to merit. We want to earn. It's deep in us! This is a huge problem with the Gospel of Grace. The God of the universe is saying to you this Christmas, "I love you and I love you not because of your activity, not because of your talents or abilities or gifts. I love you not because you pretend to be good or you think you are doing good or you are giving it all away. I love you because of my grace." Jesus' dying and rising for you isn't because you and I were impressive, it's because we weren't impressive. THAT'S WHAT REAL LOVE IS ABOUT.

The tragedy of Corinth is that the church was filled with Christians trying to earn God's love. Do you want to know what is universally true of people who are trying to earn God's love? They are irritable, jealous, hurt all the time, never recognized enough. It is a painful and cyclical pattern and it can't be broken through activity or attention; it must be broken through grace!

In vs. 4-8, Paul gets into the recesses of our loveless hearts. He highlights the subtleties of a heart that loves out of fullness with Christ and not emptiness. Ultimately Paul has in mind the manifestation of love, Jesus of Nazareth. Love isn't a personality quality we obtain, but a Person that must breathe life into you. This is what Christmas is all about. It's this Person that leads in Love; it's Jesus that empowers us in love and will sustain us so that we can love out of fullness, not emptiness.

HIS LOVE, YOUR CHRISTMAS

God is underwriting this whole love project. He is funding this whole thing. Even our gifts to Him, He has paid for. You are playing with house money and you are called to spend every ounce of the love you received in Christ Jesus on others. His heart is that we would give away His love without obligation, without announcement, without reservation, without hypocrisy. We love because we were first loved on Christmas!

This Christmas week . . .

- God may want you to forgive someone who has wronged you. What a Christmas miracle that would be!
- Tonight, the Holy Spirit might ask you to drive over to someone's house to pray with them or encourage them or tell them you care about them.
- This week, God might be asking you to call a relative (who is painful to interact with) and simply tell them, "I love you and Merry Christmas!"
- Tomorrow, God might be asking you to be present with your children or grandchildren in a way where they feel heard, seen and loved.

⁹ In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn. 4:9-11).