

## 4-25-21

Sermon- Know What Love Is

Scripture 1 John 3:16-24, CTW PS 23

Hymns- 147, 578, 689

Theme- Here John reminds us that all we do must be based upon a foundation of love. This love is an action, not a feeling. It is meant to produce selfless, sacrificial giving of ourselves for the benefit of others. We give up our lives by serving others with no thought of receiving anything in return.

### I. JOHN'S SUMMARY OF LOVE.

A young bride to be, was very nervous on the day before her wedding, so she went to speak with her pastor. "I'm afraid I might not make it through the ceremony properly," she confessed.

The pastor assured her that everything would be fine: "When you enter the church tomorrow and the processional begins, you will be walking down the same aisle you've walked many times before. Concentrate on that aisle. When you get halfway down the aisle, you'll see the altar, where you and your family have worshiped for many years. Concentrate on that altar. Then, when you're almost to the altar, you will see your groom, the one you love. Concentrate on him."

The bride was relieved and left to prepare for her big moment. The next day, she walked down the aisle with her chin up and eyes bright – a beautiful, confident bride. But those along the center were a bit **surprised** to hear her say over and over: "Aisle, altar, him. Aisle, altar, him."

**A. To be sure, love can change the one you love; but more than that, love changes you!** You see, when you choose to love instead of hate, YOU benefit the most! YOU receive the greatest blessing. YOU gain more than you ever give away. In **1 John Chapter 3: 16-24**, we discover the benefits of love in a hostile world.

**1 John 3:18-19** Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him... (ESV) (English Standard Version).

Literally, this is how we convince or persuade our heart in His presence.

**1 John 3:20** ...for whenever our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. (ESV)

**B. When you choose to love "in deed and in truth," God assures your heart even when your heart condemns you.** Too often, people listen to their hearts more than they listen to God. But when you choose to live in His love, you hear God saying, "Well done! You are my dearly loved child" (**1 John 3:1**). So choose to love when people hate you, and...

## **II. RECEIVE GOD'S ASSURANCE TO YOUR HEART.**

**A. Hear God say to your spirit, "I'm proud of you." And find the confidence to keep on serving Him even when you think you've blown it, even when your own heart condemns you.**

That's what happened to Peter. He had really blown it when he denied knowing Jesus three times as Jesus was on trial before the Jewish High Court. He's standing outside, awaiting the results of the trial, when a servant girl asks him, "You are not one of this man's disciples, are you?"

And Peter says, "I am not."

Later, some others waiting outside ask him again, "You are not one of his disciples, are you?" And Peter denies it again.

Then, a servant who was with those who had arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane says, "Did I not see you with him in the garden?"

This time Peter curses and swears with his third denial of ever knowing Jesus. A rooster crows. Jesus appears in the doorway, looking right at Peter, and Peter's heart condemns him as he runs away in shame.

Later, after Jesus' resurrection, He meets Peter and some of his friends by the Sea of Galilee. They're enjoying some breakfast together when Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" In fact, Jesus asks Peter the same question three times, "Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Jesus redeems Peter!!!

Each time, Peter responds, "Yes, I do love you."

But when Jesus questions his love a third time, Peter appeals not to his own behavior, which condemns him. Peter appeals to Jesus' knowledge of all things. Peter says to Jesus, "You know everything; you know that I love you."

Peter's love for Jesus was not evident to others, because Peter denied knowing Jesus three times. However, Jesus knew his heart; and based on that knowledge, Jesus commissioned Peter to be a leader among His followers.

When Peter's own heart condemned him, Jesus assured him that he was still a valuable member of the team. Jesus redeemed Peter!!!

Now, that's what happens when you choose to love in a world full of hate. God assures your heart that you still belong to Him, and He still wants to use you to change people's lives.

**B. You see, the way you treat people reveals what you truly believe about God. If you treat people like royalty, you believe in a gracious and loving Heavenly Father.**

If you treat people like dirt, you believe in a ruthless Ruler of the Universe.

Think about the "one another's" in the New Testament. There are plenty of times the Bible tells us to "Love one another," "Encourage one another," and "Pray for one another."

But never does the Bible say, "Pick on one another, humble one another, scrutinize one another, pressure one another, embarrass one another, corner one another, interrupt one another, defeat one another, sacrifice one another, shame one another, judge one another, run one another's lives, confess one another's sins, intensify one another's sufferings, point out one another's failings..."

No, you don't see that in the Bible, because that is not what God is all about.

**John 3:17** says, "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." Now, if you truly believe that, you will treat people with compassion, not condemnation. That's because how you treat people reveals what you truly believe about God.

**C. So choose to love and receive God's assurance to your own heart that He loves you unconditionally.**

Pastor Bryan Chapell tells the story of a couple who grew up in the church, have a fine house, sweet kids and good jobs. However, the wife has an emotional/mental problem. She periodically steals from her own family and gambles the money away.

She's been to counselors, doctors, and pastors, but nothing helps permanently. She continues to steal from her husband, pawning objects of value, withdrawing money from bank accounts, and lying about it for months.

Every time she's stolen from her husband and ruined his future, he's forgiven her and taken her back. Even when she gave up on her own life and tried to kill herself, he refused to give up on her.

Reverend Chapell asked the husband why he didn't end this marriage in spite of pressure from many friends and family to do so. The husband's words were courageous and simple: "She is a good mother most of the time, and my children need her. But more than that, they need to know the love of their God. How can they know of a Father in heaven who forgives them if their own father won't forgive their own mother?"

**That man loved his wife unconditionally, because he believed in a God who loved him unconditionally.** We need to do the same. Choose to love even those who don't deserve it and receive God's assurance to your own heart. More than that, choose to love and...

**III. RECEIVE GOD'S ANSWER TO YOUR PRAYER.**

**A. Get what you ask from God, because you give what He asks of you. Obtain a hearing from God, because you hear and listen to Him.**

**1 John 3:21** "Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God..." (ESV)

Literally, we have outspokenness or frankness before God. When we love, we can be bold in prayer.

**1 John 3:22** ... "and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him." (ESV)

What pleases God is love, and when we do what pleases Him, He does what pleases us.

Fran Tarkenton, a former All-Pro quarterback who led his team to three Super Bowls, wrote an article for The Wall Street Journal about prayer in the NFL. He writes:

My forays into hoping for divine intervention didn't work out. I prayed fervently before each of the three Super Bowls we Minnesota Vikings played in. We played against the Dolphins, the Steelers, and the Raiders... I was sure God would be on our side for the game against the Raiders! After all, they were the villains of the league, and it was hard to believe they had more Christians on their team than on our saintly Vikings. We lost.

Before every game, no matter what team I was on at the time, the coach would always ask the most devout player to say a prayer... [Then] after this moment of devotion, the team would all shout in unison, "Now let's go kill those BUMS"

**B. With that kind of an attitude, do you think God heard their prayer? No way! The Bible says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear" (Psalm 66:18, NKJV).**

But the Bible also says, "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (**1 John 5:14**). God's will is that we love people. So when we pray with an attitude of love, God hears those prayers.

Prayer is not enough unless we're willing to love people "in word AND in deed." Then, when we do, God answers abundantly beyond all that we could ask or even think!

So choose to love and receive God's assurance to your heart. Choose to love and receive God's answer to your prayer. And finally, choose to love and...

#### **IV. RECEIVE GOD'S ABIDING PRESENCE IN YOUR LIFE.**

##### **A. Find yourself at home with God. Discover what it means to dwell with God and He with you.**

**1 John 3:23** reminds us "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."

The Christian life is really very simple. As followers of Christ, all he asks us to do is believe in Him and love people. Depend on His power and love the person right in front of you.

In his book, *Sources of Strength*, President Jimmy Carter talks about a personal witnessing experience he had with Eloy Cruz, who was very effective in reaching the very poor immigrants from Puerto Rico. Carter asked him for the secret of his success. Cruz was modest and embarrassed, but he finally said, "Senor Jimmy, we only need to have two loves in our lives. For God, and for the person who happens to be in front of us at any time."

Carter said, "That simple yet profound theology has been a great help to me in understanding the Scriptures. In essence, the whole Bible is an explanation of those two loves."

Now, no matter what you think about Jimmy Carter's politics, he is absolutely right about the essence of the Bible. It's all about loving God and loving people.

Jesus Himself said, "All the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments" (**Matthew 22:40**): Love God and Love your neighbor. Or as **1 John 3:23** puts it: "Believe in... Jesus... and love one another."

**B. You cannot truly love people if you don't believe in Jesus, and if you don't depend on Him.** However, as you trust Christ with your life and live in daily dependence upon Him, He

gives you the love you need to love people, especially those who are difficult to love.

Then, when you do that, you find yourself at home with God. You abide in Him and He abides in you.

**1 John 3:24** reminds us: Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us. (ESV)

When we choose to love instead of hate, when we choose to trust Jesus and love people, then we find ourselves at home with God and He with us. That's because God is love (**1 John 4:8**); so when we choose to dwell in love, we dwell in Him!

God is devoted to people – to you, to me, to that person who hurt you. So when you can learn to see them with His eyes, to love them as He loves them, you discover that He is present in you.

Ask Jesus to help you, because He loved even those who nailed Him to a cross. He prayed for them, pleading with His Heavenly Father to “forgive them, for they know not what they do” (**Luke 23:34**). So ask for His help and choose to love instead of hate.

**Choose** to love and receive God's assurance to your heart.

**Choose** to love and receive God's answer to your prayer. And

**choose** to love and receive God's abiding presence in your life.

**Amen? Let us Come to Him in Prayer...**