

This is Real Love - Introduction

Discussion Notes

June 19, 2016

Open

- A lot is said about love today, what it is and how to give or get it. But for all the confounding messages we receive daily about love, it is most clearly and beautifully observed in acts like kindness, patience and generosity.
- Today we begin a new series where we'll investigate and practice love together.

Back at Easter – What is Real Love? (1 John 4: 9-11)

- Back at Easter I told you about the first time I fell in love.
- We want it badly – tinder, marriage, kids, promotions, social media.
- We asked: “what is real love”?

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us. (1 John 4:9-11)

- The bold claim that Jesus has the universal corner on love.
- John says that God loved us by giving us an awful lot of attention, long before we ever gave him the time of day. That he approached human kind, that he moved towards us, in an understandable way – as Jesus, a seemingly regular person.
- The scriptures say God is great but his greatness doesn't make him distant.
- The Christian story says that God chose to be knowable, approachable, accessible, touchable in the person of Jesus.
- The story goes that we don't have to drag ourselves up to God, but that God bends down to pick us up.
- So before God asks you to take a step toward him, he's already taken a huge step toward you. That's Christmas and Easter in a nutshell.

- The story of Jesus also says that the God who created everything knows us better than we know ourselves, and he even knows the number of hairs on our heads.
- So in Jesus, God moved into our neighborhood, loved all of humanity, including you and I, warts and all.
- And many have argued that is what we all really want. To be fully known by someone and fully loved by someone.
- In the Jesus story, then, these two deep desires are fulfilled in him.
- John says this is real love. It is demonstrated through sacrifice and selflessness of Jesus.
- This means that real love is more than a feeling. More than affection, more than attraction, or even friendship. Real love's origin is the origin of all creation, the heart of God as seen through Jesus.
- It means that real love is relentless, real love is generous, real love is kind, real love is gracious, real love is compassionate, real love is encouraging, real love is forgiving, real love is others-oriented, real love is humble.
- So in Jesus we see God's love most clearly displayed. He enters our pain and death and yet he also leads us out of it. That's the new Exodus, that's our great hope of the future.
- In Jesus we see God's love – this is John's whole point.
- But John adds more – which is what we'll look at this summer - he insists that we can do the same. We can love like Jesus loves. Which is actually a fantastic vision for human life.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other... (1 John 4: 11-12)

- If John were a scientist he'd be very interested in applied sciences. He knows the theory, he's uncovered the facts, but his passion is for application in the present. Paul is the same way. Why? Because that must have been what Jesus was like.

- In other words according to John: the creative, pioneering nature of God's love is intended to be multiplied through human life.
- We are not merely recipients. We are carriers and conduits of God's love and life because his Spirit is in us.
- We are made in the image of God - creative beings designed for great-big God-like purpose and that purpose is to bring life and love.
- Paul says the same thing: 1 Corinthians 13: 13 *Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.*
- This is what we want to explore this summer. We're headed into the exploration and experimentation of everyday, transformational love. How is it displayed, what does it really look like?

Why 1 Corinthians 13?

- John tells us to love one another like God loves us. Paul puts some flesh on that more specifically in some of his writing. He says this in a letter he writes to a church he planted in first century Greece – a spot called Corinth.
- 1 Corinthians 13.4-7

4 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud 5 or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. 6 It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. 7 Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

- The love Paul is describing here is not an ethereal, fleeting feeling. It seems to live in the real world. If Jesus' life tells us anything it's that God's love belongs in the middle of every day life and life's hardest days.
- The gospel suggests us that love isn't a vibe; it can transform people. And it's in our hands to show it.
- Now there are many examples of love in the bible we might explore, certain texts that might help. But we'll begin here (1 Corinthians 13) and look at

other scriptures and stories as we go. It's a framework to begin with that lists some evidences of love.

Who are the Corinthians?

- The Corinthians were real people, with real problems and it was in their church that Paul set this high standard of love – and expected them to be able to meet it!
- Imagine with me that you are a Corinthian, which means you live on the water. Corinth is a port city, and an affluent one at that. A lot of money flows through Corinth, a lot of people flows through Corinth. This city might not be so distant the more we consider.
- Corinth urban, as multi-cultural and multi-faith as it gets - a hodgepodge of ideas, philosophy and culture.
- The city is also highly intellectual. Money after all, usually means education. Cultures collide in Corinth, learning is prized. Art and athletics are also celebrated. A nearby town consistently holds a major global athletic competition.
- The city is also largely pagan. Generally, there are a lot of people worshipping a lot of different gods, living out of a lot of different stories.
- There are a lot of stories in the city. One prominent story was that money and power and pleasure are what life is all about. So the city is competitive economically, intellectually and athletically.
- All this meant that Corinth was also morally bankrupt. There are temples all over the city built to worship dozens different gods.
- Some people have great lives. Other people have horrible lives. The class system is crushing and many people (including women or children) aren't even considered persons, which means they are used and abused at will.
- The Corinthians had heard it all – about all the gods, including the god of one group of people from Palestine who moved to the city in recent years. Their

story is different than other stories – they don't honor the gods, they're practically atheist! They worship one god. Just one!

- This would have been intriguing to the Corinthians, but strange. Some were compelled, however, dissatisfied with city around them, amazing as it is. I imagine the dog eat dog world, the constant self-gratification was as tiring then as it is today.
- One day a strange little teacher visits Corinth, all by himself. He's not as good a presenter as the philosophers who debate in public, not as polished, but there is something to his message, and something radically distinct.
- Some folks hear the message (about one God who made everything and that this God lives among people in Spirit and showed his nature by coming and living amongst human in the flesh, someone named Jesus) and as strange as it was to them, some become convinced.
- People were drawn from all over the city. Different nationalities, different classes, different backgrounds. The diversity of the city kept them apart, but this new message has brought them together, like nothing else in history.
- Imagine being a laborer, barely more than slave. But when you gather with your new friends you are told that class doesn't matter any more, that gender and ethnicity doesn't divide you, background doesn't segregate you. Now, you're brothers and sisters, you're as connected and as one as an arm is to the torso or an eye to a hand. You're like a body. You're all different, but you're one.
- And as brothers and sisters in a new family, with a new story where you've been shown love by God, you are taught that you must now show love to each other.
- And loving each other is hard! Because you and your fellow brothers and sisters have all come from different places, with different world-views and different backgrounds!

- When you come together on Sunday or in the middle of the week to eat and pray and sing and learn, there is a lot of love, but also a lot of awkwardness! This is new to you all!
- Some of these folks were used to worshiping sex, because that's how they'd worship their old gods. Some of the brothers were used to being treated like kings by everyone they meet.
- They also probably had a hard time wrapping their heads around the fact that their leader (the strange little man who visited a year ago and has stayed with them since then) didn't let them wait on him but insisted he wait on them! Shouldn't the slaves be serving supper?! He's the leader, shouldn't he be seated in a place of honor with everyone serving him?
- And why does he care so much that the rich people eat at the same table as the poor people?! Shouldn't the rich people eat before the poor people anyway? Why are the poor your problem? By the way, the only reason we have the words about how to receive communion in 1 Corinthians is because of the issue of equality in the church.
- This is all so new – and Corinth never slept. These people were constantly bombarded with every worldview under the sun and often still made decisions based on how they used to live before they'd met Paul.
- The Corinthians were learning how to think about money, power, sex, ethnicity, gender, family and business differently – and it was a steep curve.
- I think we'll find, if we look closely, that we may have more in common with this little church in Corinth than we might think.
- Love took change and practice. They had to learn and so do we.

Our Hope

- What we want to do this summer is to first grasp and wonderful love of God we celebrated at Easter. We must start there. It's where the Corinthians started. It's what they returned to again and again.

- There's no moving forward without that. Our first hope is that we would seriously meet God in depth and power and healing.
- But we then want to apply it. We want to become God-like and practice in unique, creative, restorative ways the love we've known by him.
- *Practice* is an important word.
- We often hear that love should be easy or natural or ecstatic, some kind of high! Anyone who's ever seriously been in love can attest to these feelings, but can also attest that any really meaningful relationship takes work.
- But it's good work. It's a work of God's Spirit in us. It's work that leads to a bright future. It's work we were made for.
- I think love takes great imagination. That is why it is both difficult and exhilarating. Contempt is destructive and lazy. It takes vision to look beyond ourselves and consider the other, to look at what isn't and see what could be. This is why John can say that "God is love" – to love is to create.
- It starts with us, in our homes on our streets.

How the summer will look

June 19 Introduction – Luke Knight

June 26 Patient – Ryan Bedwell

July 3 Kind – Reuben Kramer

July 10 Humble – Luke Knight

July 17 Decent – Joanne Knight

July 24 True – Mike Vaters

July 31 Forgiving – Brandi and Joel Reimer

August 7 Faithful – Doug Smith

August 14 Conclusion – Ryan Bedwell

August 21 Baptisms / Stories

Discussion Questions

- What did you take away from this sermon?
- How is it that love is so hard but also so easy – so challenging but also so natural at times?
- Share a time you saw love displayed that inspired you.
- How do you best feel loved? How do you best show love?
- Considering the series ahead, how do you hope to grow in love? What kind of love has God shown you that you hope to show to others in new, restorative, creative ways?