

Love

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 September 2024

Preacher: Elliott Lytle

[0 : 0 0] All right. Thank you, Lisa. Welcome to everybody. Good to see everyone. Man, I don't know any better way to start a service than with baptisms and people just professing their love for Jesus. And so really excited to get into this this morning. So we have started a new series where we're talking about what it means to be Christ-like, to actually be a Christian, which is just a word that means a little Christ. And to think about what that kind of life looks like, like how do you actually walk in the Holy Spirit? And what the Bible shows us is that if you are walking with Jesus in his spirit, then your life is going to have certain kinds of fruits in it, like certain ways of being that manifest themselves. And what we're going to be doing in the coming weeks is looking at some of these fruits. But more than that, more importantly, really, how do we cultivate these in our lives? Like how do we actually look like Jesus? And so today I've got maybe the most familiar one of all, the big L, love, right? So even a very short reading of

Scripture will show you that being a people of love is one of the most foundational things about who followers of Jesus are meant to be. And that makes sense because God says it's one of the most foundational things about who He is. Over in 1 John chapter 4 verse 7 we find this verse that says, Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not know God, or does not love, does not know God, because God is love.

So love is this really foundational thing to the Christian life. But up front we've kind of got this issue partly because the word love itself is such this big concept. Like when you say love, that's such a big concept. And it has so many connotations in our daily lives, right? So we are going to have to spend just a little bit of time figuring out what the Bible actually means when it says the word love.

And I think connected to that is the reality that in our culture, like most cultures, we bundle all sorts of things under the word love that aren't actually what the Bible means. Or maybe to say it a little more bluntly, all kinds of things are called love that aren't actually love. And some of that's just as simple as the fact that you can use the word love to mean things that don't have the same weight, right? Like I can say, man, I love chips and salsa. And then I can also say, I love my children. Like hopefully you mean something slightly different, like one of those carries a little more weight than the other, right?

And then of course there are all kinds of like affections and infatuations and maybe obsessions that we call love that really fall short of what the Bible means as well, right? And again, like you know there's like a difference between the love you felt for your first crush and the love you feel for your bride of 25 years. Like those are different things. They have different weights to them.

[3 : 29] But then more serious than that, I think we can see that there's also all kinds of things called love that are really just twisted attachments or disordered affections that passes love, but are actually manipulative or self-focused or harmful. Like things that poses love, but are really only interested in how they make the person feel. Like the end of it is not actually love. And maybe most concerning of all, any of these lesser loves, these things that really aren't love, can easily become an idol that we set in place of God if we put it in the place that only God deserves. I mean the Bible says that God is love, but love is not God. Or maybe to just quote C.S. Lewis here, love having become a God becomes a demon. And if you've ever been caught in a manipulative or weird or disordered love, you know that's the case. But thankfully God doesn't really leave us in the dark as to what He means when He says we are to love. The Bible tells us really plainly what God's love is. It tells us what God's love is like. It tells us how God's love shows itself, like what it looks like. And most importantly, as disciples of

Jesus, it tells us how we can learn to love like God does. So we're going to jump right in and go over to a verse in 1 Corinthians that I think really paints an amazing picture of what love is. And I would say odds are that even if you aren't a churchgoer, you have, I bet you have heard this verse at least once in your life at a wedding, and with good reason because it really paints an amazing picture of what God's love looks like. And so we're going to be in 1 Corinthians 13, and just to set it up, in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul has this really long passage about where he's talking about the different types of gifts that God gives in His church and His people, and how to use those together as a body, and how those together show what the hands and feet of Jesus look like. And it's just, again, this really amazing passage that like leads you through like not being boastful in those and understanding what they are. And so it's this whole thing about here's the gifts and how they show Jesus, but then at the end of that, like, you would think, okay, cool, like that's the utility we really need to show Jesus to the world.

And at the end of verse 12, after he says that, he says, but now I'll show you still an even more excellent way. And then in verse 13 he says this, if I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers and I can understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing. And if I give away all that I have and I deliver up my body to be burned, but I have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. Some translations render that it keeps no record of wrongs. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things and believes all things and hopes all things and endures all things.

Love never ends, because for as prophecies, they will pass away. And as for tongues, they will cease. And as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know now in part, and we prophesy in part, but when perfect comes, the partial will pass away. Like when I was a child, I spoke like a child, and I thought like a child, and I reasoned like a child, but when I became a man, I put away those childish things.

For now, we see in this mirror dimly, but then we'll see it face to face. Now I know it in part, and then I shall know it fully, even as I have been fully known. So now these, faith, hope, and love abide these three, but the greatest of these is love. This is God's Word. I think the first thing we see about God's love in the Bible is really simple, but really profound. Love is focused on the good of others. I mean, think about how profound that is. If we go back and just again kind of reread some of those first verses in 1 Corinthians, right, and we think about that dynamic. If I speak in the tongue of men and angels, but I don't care about others, I'm a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal. Like if the talents and things that God has put in my life that are meant to make beautiful music in this world, if I have those, but I don't care about others, then they're nothing but a racket. If I have prophetic powers and I understand all mysteries and knowledge and I have all faith, but don't care about others, I am nothing. Like the things we look at people and say, that person is really important or really powerful, but you don't care about others, it comes to nothing. And if I give away all that I have and I deliver up my body to be burned, but I don't care about others, I gain nothing. Isn't it interesting that that means you can do all kinds of good things that seem like selfless love, but done for the wrong reasons and for the benefit of only yourself? Like the even sacrificial acts can be things that are done primarily to benefit you or someone's image of you. God's love isn't like that. It can't be like that.

[9 : 59] Commentator Leon Morris says this, The love which is to characterize and control the Christian community is a love for the utterly unworthy. A love which proceeds from a God who is love. It is a love that is lavished on others without a thought of whether they are worthy to receive it or not. It proceeds rather from the nature of the lover than from any merit of the beloved. And then again C.S. Lewis in the problem with pain, he says, Love is not primarily an affectionate feeling, but a steady wish for the loved person's ultimate good as far as it can be obtained.

God's love is focused on others, which by definition means it's not focused on self. And that's actually a really helpful kind of diagnostic because that means there's a way if you're curious like am I dealing with God's love or a counterfeit love? There's actually a really easy diagnostic. It means that a telltale sign of any counterfeit love is that it's selfish, that it's self-centered.

It's the kind of love that treats someone else well because of how that makes me feel or how they make me feel. And I would say caution here like before we fall into the temptation of like yeah I know someone like that and they're so self-centered and you got to recognize that all of us are prone to that. Like the thing that you think is love, that's a diagnostic for you. Like what, why am I really doing this? Regardless of what it looks like on the outside if at the end of the day it's looking out for old number one it's not God's love. And God's word tells us what that selfless love looks like.

God's love is patient and kind. It extends grace to others. And in all these things you can like you can think about like we give ourselves all kinds of excuses to not do that right? Like to not be gracious or kind.

Somebody needs, they need that kick in the rear, right? Like it's patient and kind. It does not envy or boast. Envy and boasting are about me, not about others. It is not arrogant, glorifying me, not others.

[12 : 35] It is not rude, unkind to others. It does not insist on its own way. Like that's just written in the scripture.

It's not irritable or resentful. Like your irritability or anger do not accomplish the love of God. It keeps no record of wrongs. God's love is focused on others. And because it's focused on others, I think it actually means something else interesting, which is God's love is actually the antidote to fear as well. Because fear is often self-focused. It's about self-focused, self-preservation.

Like fear keeps you from acting in love towards others because you're terrified that something you need taken care of won't be taken care of. Like who will look out for me? And so it kind of gives you license to hurt someone else because you're scared that they're going to hurt you. Or you don't have the freedom to love because you're terrified that the thing that you desperately need and want to hope to happen isn't going to happen. You know when Jesus was on the earth, he never gave in to fear. Not one time.

And it was not for lack of danger. Danger was an ever-present reality in his life. It was a very real danger fear at all times, particularly after he started declaring his father's kingdom. But in all of that, he never gave way to fear. And you know the reason for that wasn't because Jesus had mastered some kind of discipline that we don't have, right? Like he had done some kind of discipline where he could control all his bad thoughts, right? And it also wasn't because he had some kind of, like he'd learned to disassociate himself from fear so he could operate. And it also wasn't even primarily because he was God, right? Like part of what Jesus was doing being fully God and fully man was showing us what it's like to be humans. Like the reason God, he could walk every day without fear is because he walked every day with his father. It's because every day Jesus went into the day truly full, truly loved, and confident he was safe in his father every day. Like fear never had any chance against the faith that he had in his father.

And that fragrance follows him his entire life. Even into the day of his crucifixion, I think one of the most amazing things in Scripture is like if you look at the most agonizing moments at the end of his life. Like the place where like if you were going to bail on thinking about others, it would be that. Like even as he's going to the cross, he is still doling out grace and mercy to people. Like he is still saying forgive them because they don't know what they're doing. He is still thinking about his mother and the care of her.

[16:01] Like as he's about to take his last breath, right? Like in utter agony, he still has the wherewithal to answer the prayer of a thief beside of him who just says, Jesus, can you just, can you maybe just remember me? Every moment to the very end, he is doling out grace and mercy. That's the kind of love that God means when he puts it in Scripture. And so I think as followers of Jesus, that means there should really only be one pressing question in our lives. Jesus, how do I love like that?

And the answer is shockingly simple. You learn to love like Jesus by being with Jesus. You know, in these coming weeks, we're going to talk about how to see the fruits of the Spirit in your life, like to see these attributes of who God is manifest your life in real ways. Like one of the things that will become very quickly apparent to you if you try to engage in this is that one thing you can't do is get these fruits by simply deciding to want them, right? Like, or simply, maybe to say simply deciding to do them, right? So you, you can't just will your way to be more patient.

You, you can't just wake up and decide you're going to be more peaceful. I'm going to be peaceful today. Like, I mean, are you? Like, like if you're anxious, you can't just say, I'm going to decide not to be anxious right now. It's all good. And you can't 10 steps your way into loving like Jesus.

You can't shame your way into it. You can't make yourself feel bad to get there. You have to be with Jesus. You have to be formed by Him, and that only happens when you're near Him.

And interestingly, that's why spiritual disciplines in the church aren't actually designed by themselves to produce fruit. Like, like if you've ever honestly wondered, hey, how does prayer, or reading my Bible, or solitude and silence, or fasting, or giving something away to the poor, like, like, how does that actually make me more loving? And the answer is by themselves, they don't. You can do every one of those things and remain mean as a rattlesnake. Spiritual disciplines aren't designed to produce fruit. They are designed to get you close to Jesus. They are designed to provide an opportunity and a space for you to get close to Jesus, to fellowship with His Spirit. And that's how we're formed. You know, again, like, following sports a lot like I do, you know, when somebody's, like, making a transition from one league to another, right? Like, say you're going from, like, college to the pros. Like, there are all kinds of, like, drills and daily habits and weight routines and things you do, but what you'll notice with a lot of, like, the really great players is, like, when they're coming up, the first thing they want to do when they get in the league is, like, who is the best player on this team? Like, who is the superstar? And they want to get near that person. Like, they want to try to absorb something from that person. Because it's not just about doing the thing. It's about learning the attitude. It's about, like, establishing in your mind what it takes to be like that, right? And I think that's no less true in this case. Like, if you want to be like Jesus, you have to be around that fragrance. Like, you have to understand and feel how He moves.

[20 : 05] But the interesting thing for us is we have even more advantage than something like that in sports, because it's not just the discipline. Like, the Bible says God has put His very Spirit inside of you. So that means when you're doing things that put you close to Jesus that make it easier for you to hear and see Jesus, it's not just you observe something, you read it in Scripture. It's His very Spirit inside you can talk to you, can form you, can show you right at that moment what it's means, can take away a fear, can change something that's broken. Like, that's how transformation happens. Again, frankly, I think that's why, like, this is a transformation that no human system can do.

Because, yes, there's discipline to it, but the discipline itself doesn't change you. And yes, there's walking with Jesus, and that brings about things in you, but beyond all of that, His very Spirit is inside you, communing with you, helping you to walk in Him. That's how we're changed. And that's how we learn to love like that. You know, the last part of those verses in 1 Corinthians talk a lot about gifts, like a lot of things that are useful for our walk in the world today, but also how they're passing away. How, like, prophecies and gifts and gifts of teaching and all those things, they're passing away. And the reason is, because we won't need them. Like, spoiler alert, when Jesus comes in all His glory, you're not going to need me to preach you a sermon on love anymore. Like, you'll be fine. Those things are passing away. But faith and hope and love endure on because they're part of your walk with Jesus. So, like, when we're close to Jesus, we learn to have faith because we learn that our Father can be trusted. And that'll never end. That faith that your good

Father can be trusted will never end. And when we're close to Jesus, we learn to, like, we never cease to have hope because we learn and see from Him that nothing's impossible for God. And there's no situation that is ever truly hopeless for a child of God. Jesus, like, when we did this baptism this morning, we're declaring that even death itself bows before Jesus. Even death itself is conquered by the King. Like, there's never a truly hopeless situation. And when we walk with Jesus, we learn to love because we see we are loved. Like, we don't have to operate in fear or self-preservation because we see we're safe with Him. Like, we see His love isn't based on what we have to offer or what He needs from us so we don't have to be self-conscious that one day He's gonna drop us like a bad habit because we didn't measure up. We see that He loves us not because we deserved it, but only and because of His great heart for us. And that heart is a heart that wills our good at all times. We learn to love like

Jesus when we learn that that's how He loves us. Holy Spirit, give us the grace to see how great the love of Jesus is for us. As the band comes up today, if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, there are all kinds of love in this world or things that are called love that I know can leave you scarred. And that's really confusing.

Like, things that we say are love and they promise life or beauty and they leave you with only painful things. That show you that what they've taught you over the years is that love is really just an attempt to manipulate or control you. That's not what Jesus offers. He doesn't need anything from you. All He wants to do is to step into those places of wounding, to bind up that broken heart, to show you what it looks like and what it feels like to be loved, truly loved, just because of who He is.

[24 : 53] And so whether it was something you did to yourself or something someone else did to you, like, if that's the kind of love you want, Jesus wants to love you like that, and I would invite you to come to Him today. You just ask Him, say, Jesus, I want that kind of love. Maybe you want to talk to one of the people over here for prayer beside the stage. That's how you get it. If you are a follower of Jesus and you want to love like that, got to spend time with Him. No substitute for it. That's how you get there.

You have to let His life form your life. Maybe even this morning, like, sometimes that can be convicting. Like, it can show you that, like, I am self-centered and how I love, or I'm irritable all the time because I'm not getting what I want, or I'm scared to death and it's hurting people around me because I'm desperately trying to secure something that I can't live without. And the beautiful thing about this moment before we come to communion is Jesus' love is greater than that, too.

Like, we don't have to impress Him. We just have to say, Father, forgive me and change me from these disordered loves, these broken things. Day by day in that walk, He's going to do it. I think we kind of said this last week, but I don't know. Maybe someone needs to hear it again. Jesse said, Jesus will never love you more completely than He does right now today.

Like, no matter how good you get it, like, how good you do the checklist, how well you perform the rest of your life, Jesus isn't going to love you one piece more. And by the way, if you mess it up really bad, Jesus isn't going to love you any less. His love isn't based on your performance.

And so you can bring those places where you are failing and saying, Jesus, I know I'm secure in your love day by day. Help me to learn to love like you. So let's just take a moment to do that, to pray that He'll walk with us. And then part of, like, we talk about the discipline, like, one of the things we do to commune with Him is this communion table. It's a weekly reminder for us that that is the reality of His love, that He spared nothing, His own body, His own blood, that you would never be lost. And so come and come before Him and ask what you need to ask, and then come and partake in faith that Jesus is never going to leave you or forsake you.

[27 : 33] Father, we give this moment to you. We give you this time at the communion table. Holy Spirit, I would just pray that you would not only reveal in our hearts the places where our loves fall short, but convict us of the unbreakable, unshakable, indefeatable goodness of Jesus' love for us. Let that overwhelm any shame, any work of Satan. God, I just pray as we take this meal, the saints of God would feel it and know it. Holy Spirit, come and be with us. In Jesus' name.