

God's Love Changing Me

John 3:16

Introduction:

It's the first thing we want our children and grandchildren to understand about God.

We show them pictures; we tell them stories, and we teach them songs about it.

It's basic; it's fundamental; it's essential to our faith.

Nothing else makes sense if we don't understand this.

Folks, God loves us!

But it's even more than this! **God is Love!**

This morning – **all of us are seekers.**

Within all of us there are those things which we strive for and desire.

We all have goals; we all have dreams.

And in every one of us there is the hope that those dreams will come true.

In our Spiritual Quest to find the Power to be Free in our relationship with Christ and others, we find today something that every one of us desires more than anything: LOVE.

What is it that you are seeking?

The fact is that all of us are involved in the living of life.

But in this process, we find that things don't always go as smoothly as we would like for them to go.

The road of life has bumps and the road of life has many potholes.

And as we weave ourselves around those hairpin curves and climb over those steep hills, we find that some things which we thought were important no longer seem to be as important to us.

At some point, all of us struggle and have problems. I face them and you face them.

Everywhere you look you see people hurting and they are in need.

In 1971 Tim Clay had a hit song. It was number 61 in the top 100 on February 14, 1971. The words of the song were, "What the world needs now is love sweet love, not just for some but for everyone."

Greg Jones says, “I have often wondered if the person who wrote this song ever read this verse. In the love gift of Jesus Christ provided by God for the world we have been given love in abundance. All the love we need can be found at the cross! Love to save. Love to heal. Love to deliver. Love that will bring you peace with God and peace with mankind. We don’t have the capacity to love anyone apart from the love of God. Wives can not love their husbands right apart from the love of God. Husbands can not love their wives right apart from the love of God. Mothers and fathers can not love their children right apart from the love of God. Children can not love their parents right apart from the love of God. Brother and sisters can not love each other right apart from the love of God. It is in discovering God’s love for us that we learn how to love each other. I can see why the theme of this popular 1971 hit song seems so true to so many. They were simply unaware of the love gift provided by God. They are caught in the illusion that what the world needs now is love when in reality God has met that need.”

You and I must believe that God who is in heaven loves us with an everlasting LOVE.

1) The first thing I want us to see is God is Love!

“*For God so loved ...*” the first part of John 3:16 says.

Illustration:

Let me relate this story to you:

Some of you might remember the pot-bellied pig craze a few years ago when people were spending hundreds of dollars to own one of those exotic house pets imported from Vietnam.

It was amazing. When Dru and I lived in Westerville, we had neighbors who owned not just one of those pigs, but two.

They treated them like pets. They lived in the house with them. When I asked about the pigs, my neighbor explained to me that they did their thing in a litter box down in the basement.

I heard them squealing one day and looked over their fence to see them giving the pigs a bath on the back porch.

When I saw all that I was glad that I was half way normal and owned a dog. Do you know what I mean?

But anyway let me get to the real part of this story. The potbelly pigs didn’t pan out to be what they were suppose to be as pets for many people.

They were suppose to be gentle.

Only gain up to a weight of 40 lbs.

They were suppose to be very smart. Yah!

And you could put a leash on them and walk them like a dog down the sidewalk.

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Well, they weren't so gentle. They gained up to 150 lbs or more. And sometimes very aggressive in their behavior.

So people were looking for a way to unload them. To get rid of them.

There was a man by the name of Dale Riffle who came to these pigs rescue. He loved Vietnam potbelly pigs.

He actually sold his suburban home and moved with one pig to a 5 acre farm in West Virginia ... and then he started taking in unwanted potbellied pigs and before long the guy was literally in "hog-heaven."

He had acquired over 200 pot-bellied pigs and he treated them to a luxurious pig - lifestyle.

These little porkers snoozed on a fresh bed of pine shavings every night.

They wallowed in mud puddles.

They soaked in plastic swimming pools all to the sound of piped-in classical music.

And every day these pot-bellied pigs waited in line for one of Riffles belly rubs.

They never had to fear that one day they would become bacon or pork chops on the family table.

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And Dale Riffle said, "We are all put on earth for some reason and I guess pigs are my lot in life." I guess the guy found his purpose in life.

How many of you this morning would agree that this is a pretty amazing story for anyone in their right mind who would fall so totally in love with Vietnam pot-bellied pigs?

Spiritual application:

Let me tell you something that is even more amazing.

The central theme of the Bible, many have referred to this verse as the Golden Text of the Bible and is found in John 3:16.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

The amazing thing is that our majestic, all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly holy God is passionately in love with imperfect sometimes openly rebellious, frequently indifferent people like you and me.

You see, in many ways sin makes human beings even more unlovely than Riffle's pigs.

There might be someone here this morning who would rebel at this analogy, but let me take you to Romans 3 and read to you how the writer describes us humans

beginning in verse 10 and maybe – just maybe you’ll won’t feel as insulted:

9-20 “So where does that put us? Do we Jews get a better break than the others? Not really. Basically, all of us, whether insiders or outsiders, start out in identical conditions, which is to say that we all start out as sinners. Scripture leaves no doubt about it:

*There's nobody living right, not even one,
nobody who knows the score, nobody alert for
God.*

*They've all taken the wrong turn;
They've all wandered down blind alleys.*

*No one's living right;
I can't find a single one.*

*Their throats are gaping graves,
Their tongues slick as mudslides.*

*Every word they speak is tinged with poison.
They open their mouths and pollute the air.*

*They race for the honor of sinner-of-the-year,
Litter the land with heartbreak and ruin,*

*Don't know the first thing about living with others.
They never give God the time of day.*

This makes it clear, doesn't it, that whatever is written in these Scriptures is not what God says about others but to us to whom these Scriptures were addressed in the first place! And it's clear enough, isn't it, that we're sinners, every one of us, in the same sinking boat with everybody else? Our involvement with God's revelation doesn't put us right with God. What it does is force us to face our complicity in everyone else's sin.

Now – We have to conclude from this that - Mankind is a fallen creature. The Bible establishes that.

Isaiah said that even our best attempts at goodness we are as filthy rags in comparison to the holiness of God.

BUT – GOD LOVES US ANYWAY! – EVEN TO THE POINT OF WANTING TO ADOPT US AS HIS VERY OWN.

I John 3:1 *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”*

So – while we are unlovely ... we are NOT unloved.

And deep down inside of every one of us we desperately want to be loved.

And to everyone here this morning – we must believe that God loves us with an everlasting love.

Charles Wesley wrote that song that said, **“Love that will not let me go.”**

This brings me to my second point:

God does not call us to simply receive the gift of His love; He calls us to become channels of His Love.

2) Therefore, God wants to Love through us.

When we become Christian believers we suddenly realize that all our unloving words, thoughts, and deeds must go. We realize how wrong they've been!

We cannot go on speaking and thinking and acting as we did before we accepted His love.

The Word of God says:

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” Matthew 7:12

This is where our behavior changes.

This is where our attitudes change.

This is where our treatment of others changes.

It's what we refer to as Practical Holiness.

Jesus said: ***“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”***

All of us want to be liked. Although there are probably a few people who are antisocial, the vast majority of people make an honest attempt to get along with others and would like for others to think well of them.

On our jobs, around our neighborhoods, and at church we try to be likeable and friendly.

We make an honest attempt to treat people in such a way that they have positive feelings toward us.

Sometimes it works, and other times it doesn't. No matter how hard we try.

Unfortunately, there are those times when people decide they don't like us, even though we've made an attempt to be kind to them.

We think we're okay people, and yet there are some people who decide to become our enemy.

And what do we do when that happens?

We have a tendency to want to strike back.

Often it produces further animosity and bad feelings.

It makes the hostile person more hostile, and leaves us feeling worse instead of better.

And yet Jesus tells us there is a better way.

As a matter of fact, Jesus gave us a radical solution to this ancient problem.

He said instead of retaliating against your enemy, you should love him by doing good to him.

And our response is: “Love him! You've got to be kidding.”

How can we expect to love those who are treating us harshly and unfairly?

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Surely, no one could do that, or would want to.

There is no doubt that Christians have their limits.

But when it comes to the Love that Jesus is talking about here, the limits far exceed what we might think.

The confusion comes in our own carnality, when we adopt the thinking of the world.

Jesus even taught us that we are to turn the other cheek when someone slaps us.

Jesus taught us to walk the second mile.

He teaches us to pray for those who persecute us.

But you say – I can't do that!

Do you remember what they did to Jesus?

They taunted Him.

They spit on Him

They whipped Him

They pulled out His beard

They hung Him on an old rugged cross

And while He hung there on that cross humiliated and suffering, He said, "*Father, forgive them for they don't know what they are doing.*"

Practical Holiness:

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This works in the workplace when unreasonable bosses are flexing their irritating muscle.

It works in the school room situation when someone demands and threatens you

It's that unreasonable demand that comes from a very selfish person.

You see – going the second mile will touch others with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

What is the real mark of a Christian?

Is it that lapel pin that says, "Jesus first?"

Is it a bumper sticker that says, "Honk if you love Jesus?"

Is it a glib "Praise the Lord" when anything goes wrong?

No! It's none of those things.

The real mark of a Christian believer is LOVE!

Jesus said in John 14:23-24 *23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.*

The real mark of a Christian is unselfish love and a laying down of our lives for others.

It's not about our rights. If anyone had rights it was Jesus.

But Jesus chose to lay down His divine rights.

And when the soldier at the foot of the Cross began to see who Jesus was by His actions and His words, it finally hit him and he said, "*Truly this was the Son of God.*"

Spiritual Application:

If we as Christians learn this life of Practical Holiness of listening and obeying all that Jesus taught and go the second mile it will change our walk with God.

Friend, listen to me, it will Free your heart and mind from this baggage and bondage of bitterness, anger, and even hatred.

And when your heart is free, then no one can touch you or your peace.

How does the world respond to this kind of love?

This kind of love is not expected.

It is the God kind of love that makes others want to love like that.

When they see believers responding like that, they want what you have.

This then becomes one of the greatest evangelism tools the church has.

Illustration:

It was the day after Christmas and Mr. Greene parked his car to pick up the morning paper.

He noticed a dirty, poorly dressed boy, looking at his car.

Seeing the boy eyeing the car, he reminded himself to be quick or he might be missing a hubcap when he returned.

He came out of the store with his paper under his arm and just as he opened the door to the car, the boy asked, "Mister, how much would a new car like that cost?"

Mr. Greene responded and said, "I really don't know, my brother gave me this car as a gift."

The ragged little boy looking unbelievably at the car and, with a look of wonder in his eyes, said something unexpected.

He didn't say what you might think. "Gee, I wish I had a brother like that."

Instead, the little dirty boy said, "Gee, I wish I could be a brother like that."

How do we love the way Jesus taught us to Love?

How do we get over the hurdle of loving others even when they terribly hurt us?

To think biblically and to live this out in practical holiness we have to adopt the teachings of Jesus.

Since God has loved us we are to love like He loves!

This generation needs to rethink its understanding of God's love.

It's often used as an excuse for bad behavior when people say, "Well, God loves me anyway."

Do you see the behavior issue here?

Yes, God loves us, that is true.

But let us understand that God's love is powerful and life-changing!

Friend, you must get beyond the carnal response of being unkind and unloving.

THIS BRINGS ME TO MY THIRD POINT IN THIS MESSAGE:

3) Because Christ loves us, He purposes to transform us so that we live in the power of His love and under the control of His love.

Ephesians 5:1-2 "Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something

from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that."

If the truth were to be known...deep down the Holy Spirit is calling us to be more loving.

As believers we want to be more loving.

We would like to be honest and admit, maybe even shed some tears, to give ourselves to each other.

But we don't know how to begin the process.

Let me try to share with you how we can be transformed into the disciple Jesus wants us to be:

When we say we want to be like Christ – or we say we want to everything Jesus wants us to be – it speaks of the Lordship of Christ in our hearts and lives.

So how do we get this accomplished?

How do we seek this?

1. First of all we must remember that the only way this love can happen in our hearts is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In our humanity and because of our sinful nature we are not capable of this kind of love.

Therefore we must become seekers of this kind Love. Only God can change our selfish hearts.

We are by our sinful natures users and we must seek for God's Holy Spirit to make us givers of love.

We are by nature indifferent and we must ask God to make us caring.

Let me illustrate that here at the church:

You've heard the saying "only 20% of the people do 80% of the work of the church."

What the staff and I see very clearly is that 80% of the members of this church need to see that we cannot afford to be indifferent towards the ministries of this church.

If that continues, we will have a continual fallout because of the frustration of the 20%.

This is only one example of being indifferent. But let me ask each of you this morning.

Are you willing to pray about this and seek God to find out in what area you could help carry the ministry load here at the church?

Illustration:

I spoke to someone this past week in my office about this very thing.

One of their concerns was the lack of commitment to become involved in the different ministries of this church.

It has become a frustration to their family.

I have to be honest with you that this family is visiting other churches because of this.

Now, mind you our church is not unique. This is happening everywhere.

But let me take you back to prove to you what I'm saying so we won't take this lightly.

So we won't let this just fly over our heads.

By our sinful nature we are indifferent and uncommitted to the cause of Jesus Christ when we don't have His total Love and Care in our lives.

The Holy Spirit won't let me go here without telling you specifically what I'm talking about.

Being indifferent about the ministries of this church means saying

I won't be indifferent when it comes to making sure our church chairs are sit up before a service.

I won't be indifferent when it comes to teaching a class in the Children's church department. Not only the women, but we need men who will help teach our children.

I won't be indifferent when it comes to how my church looks, I'll volunteer and be committed to doing things

with my hands so that His church will look as good as my home.

I won't be indifferent when it comes prayer for the ministries of our church.

I refuse to be indifferent with it comes to Upward sports and the ministry that is involved with the kids.

Do you see what I'm saying? I'm not here to bat you from behind the pulpit – I'm here to help us to understand what I'm preaching about.

True Love and Care begins with the Lordship of Christ.

How do we seek this Love of Christ?

2) Secondly, We must be Honest with God and then ourselves.

Honest with God.

As believers we must be willing to confess our sins.

I don't care how sanctified you think you are this morning – this must start with honesty.

- those feelings of bitterness
- jealousy
- hatred
- competition
- accepting the truth

We have to admit our sins.

II Chronicles 7:14 says, *“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”*

Notice here that Repentance begins with God's people.

God's people must be honest and sorry for their sins before we will ever have an impact on our world.

We must also be honest with ourselves.

We have to stop justifying our attitudes and actions.

Folks, it's a sin when we slander or gossip.

It's a sin when we make fun of another's failures.

It's a sin when we turn away from one in need.

It's a sin when we put down our church ... or the leaders of our church.

When we tear down others to make ourselves look better.

In these cases we must stop saying we are righteous.

We must stop excusing our behavior with the words, “Oh, we didn't mean anything by it.”

We must stop pretending to be noble.

We must stop making excuses and face reality

WE ARE SINNING.

And we have to start thinking and asking about the Love of God – the Love of Jesus.

IF we want to be like Jesus – we will reevaluate our spiritual lives and look deeply inside to see where we are.

Conclusion:

Are you a channel of God's love?

Do you live out God's love?

What are you doing to give yourself to the ministry of His church?

Are you allowing the 20% to do 80% of the work in your church?

If you are then you're not really in love with Jesus and Jesus' love is not really working through your life.

We're on a Quest here and honesty is where we begin.

Kathy Jacobs is one who knows the Love and Power of Jesus.

If anyone knows the Love of Jesus it is Kathy.

Listen to her testimony and let's be willing to respond to this invitation.

Would you be willing to come and experience the transforming power of God's love and surrender to His complete control as she sings.

And we naturally measure people by how they compare to us, we must ask God to help us see people through His eyes.