

## 1. Introduction

- a. Last week I had the privilege of picking up our missionary family from the airport and as we were driving back from the airport, were discussing the beautiful places in the world. He was mentioning the Grand Canyon and how that's the kind of place that you can't capture in a picture nor describe. It's so magnificent that you just have to see it. Words and pictures won't do.
- b. This week I experienced something that you can't describe with a picture or words. Sara had a gall bladder and hernia surgery this week and as a result:
  - i. My in-laws took our kids for us overnight and prepared a meal for us
  - ii. Priscila made us a fantastic dinner and drove it all the way to our house in the south of GR
  - iii. The elders allowed me to stay home and miss an important meeting to take care of Sara
  - iv. JT and Dawnae showed up to our house to help host neighborhood bbq
  - v. Countless people in this church were praying for Sara
  - vi. If I were to use a word to describe it, I could only use the word "love"
- c. This morning we have a text that describes something that you can't quite capture with words or pictures. You simply have to see it. In fact this chapter begins with that very command. Our text today:

## 2. Text

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

## 3. Observations

- a. We start this section with another command on how to live. A command that is repeated from Jesus given only in that close and intimate upper room setting. It is the command to love one another.
- b. In the verse right after calling them "little children" (the verse that connects much of what 1 John is saying to the upper room) – Jesus says in John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another".
- c. But what is love?

## 4. Excursion in love

- a. The answer to this question is found in 1 John 3:16 "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." –
- b. Love is two things. First, Love is a sacrificial act. Laying your own life down then is the most sacrificial thing you can do. It's not just dying that shows love, but sacrificing your life is the

highest form, it's the standard, and it's the "north pole" of love so that all actions are judged on whether they are love-orientated or not

- i. It's not the only way to express love as in v17 John says, "God's love abides" in those to give to their brother or sister in need, but it is the standard.
  - c. Second love is a choice. See how John says "you ought to" – that means that you have a choice in the matter and he is encouraging us to make that choice. John assumes choice when he commands something we "ought" to do.
    - i. Love is a choice made in freedom. You have to make the choice to love, in freedom. The Bible has this underneath all of the scriptures. Love is never under coercion; love is expressed in freedom of choice.
    - ii. God loves us because He's completely free to make any choice He wants to as God, and even though God could choose otherwise as God, God still makes the decision to love us. To send His own Son for us. To pursue reconciliation with us. Love is first a foremost a choice.
    - iii. This is what is meant by Jacob I loved, Esau I hated. It simply means God chose to bless Jacob's seed to continue the promise He had going with Abraham. "Not choosing" someone means to hate in the OT.
      1. It's less about hating Esau, and more about the fact that God could have not-chosen both Jacob and Esau and stopped caring about humans right there with Isaac.
      2. In Luke 14:26 when Jesus says that people need to hate their own fathers, mothers, wife, and children and sisters to follow him, he's saying they need to choose Jesus over them. In the end that's how you'll love them well.
  - d. We conclude Love is a choice made towards sacrifice.
5. Stop defining love – see love as it is – The Cross
- a. There are many more ways to define love and we could talk about all sorts of aspects of God's love. But to keep using words to define love, is to start missing the mark.
  - b. Notice how John puts it in this passage so that he doesn't have to write an academic article on it, he's not doing a book tour on this definition he simply says "1 John 3:16 "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us".
    - i. We don't need to be cultured, refined, or educated to really grasp love. There are no gatekeepers to knowing love.
  - c. John says see this love? The love of God? That's love. Any other definition of love that does not include the cross is not love. Plain and simple.
  - d. The world loves to define love, but if anyone tries to describe love without the cross, they are filling the room with air, and words.
  - e. We have to be shown love to understand love, and once we truly see the cross for what it is, how could our feeble words even express completely what love is. The cross is something to behold at all places and at all times by all peoples.
    - i. This means that if you are struggling to feel love, contemplate on the cross.
    - ii. Are you struggling to show love to others? Look at the cross.
    - iii. Are you struggling to feel God's love near you? Look at the cross.
6. One thing love is not

- a. Despite the many words used to describe love, one thing that's missing from this definition and is missing from the Bible, is the idea that love is just an emotion.
- b. Love is not mere emotion.
  - i. Love can have emotion but it doesn't always have an emotion tied to it.
  - ii. God has an emotional love for us. We are told God loves us like a Father loves his son, like a mother loves her child, like a husband loves his bride. God indeed has an emotional aspect to His love. Because God has everlasting eternal love, His actions and emotions are synced.
  - iii. Jesus in the garden.
- c. We however, are fallen creatures and we don't always have our emotions tied the love we need to show. This is why John needs to remind us to love, to command us.
  - i. In fact much of marriage counseling today is addressing the "we have fallen out of love" lie that is so prevalent in culture.
  - ii. The world lies to us all the time by sticking the word love to everything. "I love pizza, I love this movie, I love this song". Please heart this Instagram to show your love, as if that were love.
  - iii. The problem with this idea of love is that it's not love. When we say we love those things we are saying we love how those things make us feel pleasure. I love how pizza makes me feel pleasure of taste. I love how that movie makes me feel entertained. I love how that song makes me feel the pleasure of music. Etc.
  - iv. This is an enormous problem because we then start attaching that definition to people! Much of marriage counseling is fighting against this idea that one spouse or both spouse has for each other. We got married because we loved how my spouse makes me feel pleasure in life. We got married because that person was serving my need for emotional support, physical touch, companionship, etc.
  - v. That's not loving the person, it's loving what they do for you. When we love people like we love things, then as soon as something better comes along, then suddenly, I don't love pizza anymore, I love ice cream more. I don't love that movie anymore, I think it's cheesy now, I love this other new one song now.
  - vi. This is opposite definition of love since love is a choice to sacrifice. In marriage counseling we find people unchoosing a spouse like they've unchosen to listen to their favorite band. They've chosen something else that makes them happy, which is just another form of self-centered living (the opposite of love). Much of marriage counseling is spent on how people "love" other things more than their spouse.
  - vii. We spend at the church counsel couples to see that you simply have to choose to love the other person despite how they make you feel. Because of that vow that was made before God, you've no choice but to direct your will towards your husband/wife. Even without feeling love, even despite the emotion they might have.
  - viii. If both parties make the choice towards acting in love to each other, regardless of emotion- the marriage remains.
  - ix. But let me give you some hope, as if marriage is just duty. Look at what John says in verse 14 **John 3:14 "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers."** Time and again, when couples choose to make the choice to love each

other because they want to honor God and the vow they've made to each other, the miracle of life happens. I don't mean a child, I mean the drudgery of acting solely out of duty turns into something life giving and indeed pleasurable to both spouses even emotionally.

- x. Because of a fallen world, our emotions aren't often directed towards the things we ought to love, but God honors the decisions we make in love and often will reward us with the emotion of love as well.

## 7. The physical necessity of showing love

- a. As it turns out, the people in the time of John's church had a problem identifying what love was. Specifically because of their cultural context and a popular philosophy known as Gnosticism.
- b. Gnosticism is a broad term teaching that the matter or physical things is inherently evil, and that only the spiritual was divine and good.
- c. One such Gnostic teaching is called "Docetism" that stated that Jesus only seemed like God. He seemed like the Messiah but that he wasn't really a human. There would be no way that a Spiritual God would actually take on flesh and actually suffer, and actually be ingrained in the creation.
  - i. Ignatius argues against this teaching in a letter.
- d. Another prominent 1<sup>st</sup> century antichrist like figure named Cerinthus was out there teaching that "Christ" was something that descended upon Jesus at his baptism, but then departed from Jesus before his crucifixion. So Jesus being Messiah wasn't really true.
- e. That mixing of spiritual and physical made no sense to both Docetists and to followers of Cerinthus.
- f. But we need not even know of this cultural context, lest we forget that Peter himself was rebuked as satan for denying that Jesus would suffer with his body! This is indeed a problem for all of us as Christians.
- g. When John writes that we ought to love one another, when he reiterates the words of Jesus in that intimate upper room, John is very much saying- we ought to love through the physical example of the cross.
- h. Listen, I don't want to be preaching this message to you, because I really just want to maximize pleasure in my life and minimize pain. I really don't want to sacrifice, I really just want to love how the world loves.
- i. You remember how the world loves? The world simply thinks love = acceptance. Of course they say that while at the same time not accepting everyone, but they like to say that love is just accepting people for who they are. Think of how simple and non-sacrificial that is. With this definition I can love simply by thinking the right thing. A completely internalized reality.
  - i. I will grant that there is something to be said to the fact that we ought not to make the lives of people harder than it should be. We ought not to throw banana peels in front of people who are trying to keep their balance. We ought not to make it harder for those struggling with sin to approach us in the church. We don't add burdens on to people on purpose.
  - ii. Acceptance is certainly an aspect of what it means to love but if Jesus only accepted us, and never died for us, then whenever we approached Him in all His glory, we would be

consumed and die. A holy God would surely lead to the death of a sinner. The only way Jesus can truly accept us is if we have the propitiation of the cross.

- j. This is why John has to remind his church and us today why we need to love one another. Like the gnostics and docetists and the world today, who all think that we can love through some invisible unmeasured, uncommunicative unphysical act. Again **John says 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.** John has to reiterate this message to us, because, yes, this is a hard truth to grasp. We love in deed and in truth.
    - i. I would much rather show love like a Gnostic.
    - ii. No, I don't want to wake up in the middle of the night and care for a baby. I would rather sleep and keep the baby in my thoughts.
    - iii. No, I don't want to drive somewhere to show love to someone who is sick, I really would rather send a text and pour lots of my emotions into that text.
    - iv. No, I don't want to call someone just because they've repeated a mistake and need to talk about it again. I really would just rather keep playing phone tag until they forget about it so that my effort could communicate love instead my action.
    - v. No, I don't want to get up from the couch to love my kids and discipline them. I really would rather just yell and get my point across, after all my I've made my invisible intentions known!
  - k. It is of no coincidence then that John starts out this letter stating all the physical realities of Jesus. **1 John 1 "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life —"**
    - i. We heard the voice of Jesus
    - ii. We saw Jesus physically
    - iii. We touched Him with our hands
    - iv. John has to say this because Jesus does the absolute most a person can do. He stops being an eternal Spirit, He takes on a finite body, He is born as a baby, He suffers, He dies, He is buried, He descends to the dead.
    - v. To love is to choose to take sacrificial action for the wellbeing of others.
8. HTSWL? – (How Then Shall We Live?)
- a. **Incorporate our bodies in worship in so far as you are able to freely choose this act.**
    - i. **Psalm 141:2 "Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice!"**
    - ii. **Psalm 95:6 "Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!"**
    - iii. Fast
  - b. **Let us imitate the love that other Christians show.**
    - i. v12 says Cain envied the righteous deeds of Abel. He envied how God was working in Abel's life and responding to Abel, and accepting the offerings of Abel. Other Christians who are showing love to others are to be celebrated and even modeled sometimes! Paul says imitate me as I imitate Christ right before writing the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13.
  - c. **Let us use the world's goods to show love to each other.**

- i. V17 commands us to not close our hearts because we might not want to give. Let us give so that something that is ours is extended and reaches another in the church- this is the kind of love that can only be seen.
- d. **Let us love with or without the world's approval.**
  - i. V13 says “don’t be surprised brothers, that the world hates you”. The immediate context of this passage is to Love each other in the church, despite how crazy the world thinks we are. We’re not seeking validation on how to love from the world. We are seeking to abide in the love of God by loving others.