

Series: Advent 2021- On earth as it is in heaven

Week 4: The LOVE we've been given, and the Love we give

✠ Surprise! YOU are a super hero!

- **Today is the 4th and final Sunday of Advent- the season leading when we purposefully consider and celebrate the miraculous significance of the coming of the Messiah, the birth of Christ.**
 - **Began with HOPE. Christ came to humanity- the WORD WAS MADE FLESH- so that we may receive and know the great gift of HOPE. AND, we will experience hope on a deeper level as we are BRINGERS of hope into our world.**
 - **Likewise, Christ came to humanity so that all people may receive and know the great gift of PEACE. AND, we will come to experience the gift of peace as we are PEACEMAKERS.**
 - **Last week- we explored how Christ has brought to all people the gift of JOY... AND, once again, we will come to experience Christ's joy in a more significant way as we are BRINGERS of joy to those around us.**
- **NOW, TODAY... If you are a believer, a disciple of Jesus, DID YOU KNOW that Christ came to bring to you a SUPER POWER. SURPRISE... you are...**
- **Movie illustration- usually from Starwars or the MCU... but today we are turning to the DC Comics universe... and men, I'm sorry, but in this illustration, we are all WONDERWOMAN. CLIP.**

✠ From ultimate cliché to ultimate hope

- **"Only Love can save the world"... Is that the ultimate cliché, or is it our ultimate hope? Hate to say it, but the concept of LOVE, at least in popular culture, over the years has become the ultimate cliché. LOVE (or the lack of it) is one of those rare themes that dominates both rock AND country music.**
 - **Beatles... All you need is love.**
 - **Burt Bacharach (68): What the world needs now- love sweet love- not just for some, but everyone**
- **But here's deal... as cheesy as this is, IT IS TRUE. The human condition may have turned LOVE into the ultimate cliché', but this doesn't change the fact that love is, absolutely, our ultimate hope.**
- **SO YES Diana, U are right. Only love can save world.**
- **And church- what WE KNOW- what has been revealed in Christ- is that LOVE HAS ALREADY SAVED THE WORLD. OR, love has already done everything necessary for the world to be saved.**
- **In Ephesians, Paul is writing to people who have already entered into that love- but just recently. When you read the book- especially chapter 2- you can sense Paul challenging these early believers- AND US 2k years later- to just BEGIN to grasp the sheer magnitude of what we have received in Christ.**
- **And to DO THIS, he helps us recognize what we deserved.**

✠ What we deserved and what we received

Ephesians 2:1-5 *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.*

- ***This is core to Christian message. What all humanity shares- on its own- is reality of human condition. We are broken, spiritually dead, and separated from God.***
- ***We inherently recognize and agree with GOODNESS of God, but are separated from source of that goodness, which is God himself.***
- ***Thus, we are dominated by sin, pride, shame, brokenness, it's in our nature to hurt each other... and as the Spirit led Paul to write, BY OUR VERY NATURE we are deserving of God's wrath.***
- ***That's what we deserve. BUT, IN CHRIST, this is NOT what we have received. Paul continues...***

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

- ***THAT is a miraculous statement. In fact, one of our big problems is how HARD it is for us to comprehend just HOW incredible and miraculous this reality is.***
- ***Paul understood this better than most. In 1st Timothy he referred to himself as the 'worst of sinners', and this wasn't just self-deprecating rhetoric.***
- ***You see, when Paul wrote this letter to the church in Ephesus, he had burned into his memory what it was like- what it did to your soul- to hate people. To hurt people. To be so filled with religious jealousy and animosity that you would seek to destroy people, families, even to the point of murder.***
- ***Paul ALSO understood what it meant to know God's perfection- to know what was RIGHT, and AGREE with God's perfect moral law- but at the same time to be utterly unable to do it. Paul describes this heart-wrenching anguish in Romans 7.***
- ***AND SO, when he wrote.. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made me alive with Christ even when I was dead in my sin... This wasn't just doctrine, it was the deep realization of a miracle that- as we even begin to grasp it- will bring us to our knees in gratitude and worship.***
- ***Just a few paragraphs later, Paul would pray- passionately- that we would come to GRASP the magnitude of Christ's love for us- for mankind. In this prayer we see THE GIFT of God's love to us, and the CALLING this gift brings.***

† The gift and the calling

Ephesians 3:17-19 *And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*

- ***We've looked at passage hundreds of times, and it still defies comprehension. That's really what Paul is praying for, isn't it? God's love is beyond us in every dimension. I used to think phrase "surpasses knowledge" meant extent of God's love surpassed our ability to know everything about it, but it's even more than that. There's sense here that Love of God can't even be described by knowledge- it's beyond our concept of knowledge- it's something that can't just be grasped or described intellectually, it is a power than can only be fully known by experience.***
- ***But how do we come to know – really- that which in Paul's own words is beyond knowing?***

– **ONE THING that starts to point us in right direction is a better understanding of what Christ has done through his DBR, WHY he did it, & how we share in it.**

– **It's truths like that we see in Romans 6...**

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

– **Fast forward just a bit to Romans 8:1**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.

– **Or, even more mindblowing, just a few paragraphs down, starting in Romans 8:28..**

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

– **There is LIFETIME of power in these passages... and a lifetime of coming to understand the miracle of NEW LIFE they proclaim. WE WILL COME TO GRASP THE LOVE OF GOD in greater measure as we sincerely seek to experience Him in HIS WORD.**

– **ANOTHER WAY- as Paul is doing right there in Ephesians 3... IS TO PRAY! Not just pray for God to do the things we ask, but to pray that the Holy Spirit would open the eyes of our hearts so we may come to understand what GOD HAS ALREADY DONE, and that we may KNOW HIM MORE.**

– **AND CHURCH- most consistent theme throughout all of the New Testament for how we will come to know and experience the LOVE OF GOD, is by expressing that LOVE TO THE PEOPLE AROUND US.**

– **You've heard me say it hundreds of times... According to scripture- including Jesus himself- the greatest commandment is to LOVE THE LORD OUR GOD. With all of who we are. AND, the way we DO THAT isn't just by praying, singing, closing our eyes and lifting our hands in emotional worship.**

– **As wonderful as those things may be, they are empty apart from God's call for us to live out Christ's love in our relationships with other people.**

– **AS DISCIPLES OF CHRIST, THIS IS OUR GREATEST CALLING.**

† Love, law, and morality

– **Let's push into that just a bit. When we think of God's moral law, or the moral teaching of scripture, what comes to mind? We may first think of the moral law of the Old Testament- the 10 commandments and broader Mosaic Law.**

– **NOW, if you've been tracking with our teaching here for the last 18 years, you know that we now live in the NEW COVENANT, and we are no longer under the authority of the OLD COVENANT law and system.**

– **Next, maybe we think of the moral teaching of the NT. Perhaps we think of moral issues relating to human sexuality, money, marriage, the value of human life, and the biblical concepts of freedom and liberty.**

- **THESE ARE ALL IMPORTANT- worthy of being explored and understood. BUT THEY ARE NOT OUR HIGHEST MORAL CALLING. Or, perhaps better said, they all are subsets of our highest moral calling.**

Romans 13:8-10 *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.* ⁹ *The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not covet,” and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”* ¹⁰ *Love does no harm to a neighbor. **(Love does not elevate my rights above the needs of others- love will always consider how my actions impacts others)*** Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Galatians 5:13-14... *You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh **(to just view life through what you need, how things impact you)**; rather, serve one another humbly in love.* ¹⁴ *For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”*

- **Just a few sentences later, Paul would write that...**

²² *the fruit of the Spirit is love...*

- **We KNOW this, but we must HEAR this, wrestle with it's implications- especially in our world today.**
- **As disciples of Jesus, our HIGHEST MORAL CALLING IS TO LOVE our fellow human beings.**
- **I can have my doctrine straight, all moral positions clear as day- but if I'm not KIND... it matters little.**
- **Scripture is clear- Virtually ALL obedience to Christ will be driven by the love the Spirit gives us for other people. Otherwise it's not obedience, it's just moral performance.**
- **One of clearest statements of this is found in 1 John. In chapter four, John describes how our experience and expression of God's love is made complete.**

† Love made complete

1 John 4:7-12, 19-21 *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.* ⁸ *Whoever does not love **(other people)** does not know God, because God is love.* ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.* ¹¹ *Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* ¹² *No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*

- **This is answer to Paul's prayer... John continues:**

¹⁹ *We love because he first loved us.* ²⁰ *Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.* ²¹ *And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.*

- **I'm about to get really practical with this, but first, one more scripture reference that speaks to the KIND OF LOVE God calls us to have for each other.**

John 15:9-12 *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.* ¹⁰ *If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.* ¹¹ *I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.* ¹² *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*

- **Friends, that statement, simply, should bring to a stop every conflict, grudge, source of bitterness or resentment that has ever existed within the church. AND, if we allow the spirit to really unpack this in our hearts and minds, it will transform how we engage and respond to the people in our lives.**
- **If you have time this week, I encourage you to meditate on that statement- verse 12. Jesus said “Love each other as I have loved you”.**
- **Question- how has Christ loved you? Maybe write down your thoughts... then ask... in my relationships with those around me, how I THINK ABOUT PEOPLE- how am I reflecting this? LORD, where will you work to grow me, increasingly change me so this is true of me, of how I live? If we are really honest, God will use this to do some deep work in our hearts.**
- **But there’s another way to consider what the Love of Christ looks like in how we live. It’s a passage you know well, and it’s probably the most practical, and impactful, description of what Love looks like.**
- **It’s the LOVE IS passage from 1 Cor. 13. But here’s the thing. This isn’t just a description of what LOVE IS. This is a calling for us- as people indwelt by the very Spirit of Jesus- to be able to say- in increasing measure- this is who I AM.**

✠ From *Love is to I am*

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.*

- **SO, here’s the exercise, if you dare. I’ve written out a little paraphrase of this passage, putting it into the first person. You might could do your own version.**
- **Consider your most important relationships. OR, perhaps more importantly, consider your relationships where there is stress, difficulty. THEN, read this description of what the Love of Christ will look like in you.**
- **As you do, do you get stuck? Do these ring true, or do they reveal a place God is wanting to work?**
- **Perhaps you flip the statement into a question. Rather than “I am patient”, I may think of what’s going on in my life right now, and ask “God, AM I being patient?” AM I being kind?**
- **Consider this as I read through it... and then, if we can, we are going to read through it together.**
- **Because of the Grace of God shown to me, and the power and nature of God’s Spirit that dwells within me... knowing that I have not yet been made perfect, but pressing on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me... LORD, enable me to sincerely say...**

I am patient. I am kind.

I’m not envious of those around me.

*I am secure in my identity in Christ,
and not envious of others.*

I don’t seek to elevate myself above others.

I genuinely am seeking the Spirit’s work on my pride.

I seek the good of others, rather than the good of myself.

I’m not mastered by anger, and I don’t hold grudges.

*I take no joy from the brokenness of others
I always seek to be honest.
I first desire to protect and trust the people around me.
And by the power of Christ's Spirit within me,
Even when things are hard, I'll never lose hope,
I'll never give up, and my love for people will not fail.*

- **Let's read it together....**
- **If part of that was difficult- as it was for me- that is not a place where God is bringing guilt and condemnation. Rather, in his infinite Grace and mercy, that is a place where he wants to bring healing, redemption, and transformation.**
- **Will you let him? Will we let him?**
- **Pray.**