

## **SERMON, ZION, March 14 John 3:14-21**

The word 'love' conjures up many different things. There is a modern dictionary that lists 28 various uses for the word: tender affection, warm attachment, intimate passion, strong predication, amorous benevolence. Yet not one of these properly define or describe what the Bible means when it speaks of the love of God.

The love of God is what is called Agape love. It is the highest form of love. It is found only in God. It exists only because of God, and it comes only from God. Anything else is something else – a counterfeit, a substitute, a fake. Agape love, which is the highest form of love, is referenced in the new testament 137 times. That's how important it is.

Here is a good definition of Agape love: **'an unconditional commitment to actively pursue & secure the good of another through sacrificial behavior.'** That's the love God has for that which He has made. We see that most clearly in the Cross.

John Wesley wrote, **"The origin and cause of our redemption is the inexpressible love of God the Father, who willed to redeem us by the blood of His own Son; the grace of the Son, who freely took our curse upon Him, and imparts His blessing and merits to us."**

Our response to His love for us can only be that of loving Him. Matthew 22:37-38, reads, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment."**

Faith, in and of itself, is useless unless it is energized by God's love. The command to love is the foundation of the Christian walk. The reason God wants us to love Him with all our heart, soul, and mind is because that is how He loves us. God's very essence is love. **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."** That's part of today's Gospel.

God has always been love! That's His nature. That's who He is. Even before He created us. He has always sought to have a close relationship with His children. We were made for this love. The entire story of human history is wrapped up within it. Love is the energy of life. Love is why we were created. Love is our eternal destiny.

Christianity is the only religion that sets forth the Creator of the Universe as Love. All of creation resounds with the proof that God is love. Within Him is found all the fullness of excellence, beauty, and perfection. He is the author of all that is good in creation. He proved He is love by choosing to walk among us and die in our place.

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In Christ He reached out His arms to embrace us in tender affection with nail-pierced hands most purely and intimately. The very nature and essence of love requires that it must grow in a willing heart. Sadly, many aren't yet able to experience the fundamental reality that God loves them. There are even those who would argue that God could not possibly be in love with them.

What we believe about God is the most important thing contained in our mind. It affects everything about us. For too many people, God seems remote, impersonal, and unknowable. Because of that, many suffer from an inability to feel forgiven. They are nagged by doubt and mistrust of Him.

Jesus revealed this truth when He asked; **"Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him."**

Some of us had an earthly father who was never around when they needed him. They experienced trauma in the home. Abuse of all kinds could have been present. Maybe all you know from your father is extreme discipline or a "you are not good enough attitude". If so, you may be having a challenging time pursuing an intimate relationship with the heavenly Father. But know this: His love for you is a giving, sacrificial love. The Bible speaks of several different types of love in the Greek language. "Agape" has been defined as a self-sacrificial love committed to the highest good. It's love that is not dependent on the emotions. Without this love, no one could be saved. Through "agape" love, God set aside His wrath against mankind and poured it out on the Beloved Son.

The Bible unveils the ultimate purpose of creating mankind at the very end. It reveals the day when the Bride of Christ, that's us, His children, meet our heavenly Bridegroom, Christ. At that time the marriage covenant between us will be celebrated. This is how John said it in his book of revelation, **"Let us rejoice and be glad & give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."**

We are the Bride of Christ. Each one of us. Individually. There can be no difference in God's love, even if there was only one person left on the planet. This is the most profound mystery of all! The King of the Universe, the Beautiful God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the supreme Lord of all creation is passionately in love with every individual person on this planet. The Bible describes it as the love of a groom for his bride! His heart is full of deep love for every Christian as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

The Bible teaches that God's heart is filled to overflowing with enjoyment and delight over His people. So that, that He pursues every Believer with a personal and relentless, infinite love. God is not some mystical, nebulous force whose love is only focused on vast populations. He is passionate about each individual person.

John the Baptist introduced himself and his personal ministry in context to the Bridegroom King. He said, **"The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete."**

Jesus introduced this truth in His last sermon before the Cross. The Apostle John points to the prominence of this truth **"The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."**

The Bible clearly reveals how important to God the Bride-Bridegroom relationship is. Rev. 19:7-9; **"let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints."** And the angel said to me, **"Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."** And he said to me, **"These are the true words of God."**

Human words cannot express the love God has for every person. God is PASSIONATE about every one of us and who we are in Christ. God is passionate about what we do. About our families and friends and loved ones. He is passionate about seeing each one of His grow closer to Him. To know Him more so that they can be more like Him. Yet, His love is in a realm that transcends all human comprehension and understanding. Attempts at explaining this passion with expressions such as lovesick, desperate, hopeless, romantic, head-over-heals, etc., are infinitely inadequate to describe His magnificent love.

When a person receives Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, He awakens the passion of His love within them. He then asks them to begin a journey of holy desire for more of Him on an uncertain path and destination. As the Christian willingly begins this journey, they will ultimately come to the point of no return - which is the place of self-abandonment - where no sacrifice is too great, or any possession held in higher importance than the fiery flame of God's all-consuming affection. It is there that His love is sealed upon their heart.

The Christian can then join with the Psalmist in declaring: **"Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none on the earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."**

God has placed within men and women the need for holy love. The simple truth is that God looks upon every Christian with loving affection. His love and enjoyment for every individual is vitally important for emotional and spiritual health, whether they be male or female. It may be hard for some to accept Jesus as the Bridegroom King on a personal basis. But that does not negate the truth that God's infinite and majestic love is directed personally towards them.

The amazing truth is that every Christian is a love gift given by the Father to the Son. We are always the object of Jesus' prayers! This is one of the greatest mysteries of God. Jesus sees each individual believer as personally belonging to Him forever. They are the dowry of the Bridegroom King! Nothing can separate them from His love. It is not because they believed on Jesus but because the Father has given them to Him!

**"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."**

In His prayer of intercession, Jesus thanks the Father for giving them to Him. Every Believer belongs to the Father and the Son because God is not mad. He is madly in love!

It is not an unreasonable command to love God. His love is the only kind of love that the human heart was made for. The love of God is the strongest force in the universe because it emanates directly from His heart. It is far more than youthful enthusiasm or the emotional affection and passion of human love. It is deeper and more influential than any human emotion. It is what set the entire universe into motion and sent Jesus to die on the Cross.

When a person comes to see Jesus for who He really is - LOVE incarnate - they can truly understand their ultimate destiny and "rely on the love God has for us," because "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16 NIV). Understanding that God is love will open up the heart to accept God's invitation to engage in a love relationship built on the foundation of trust. There is no safe hiding place outside of His all-consuming burning love. The only real safety in this world for the Christian is to be consumed by the love of God.

The Christian can do nothing to gain His affection. Obedience alone will not produce love in the human heart - nor can it excite love. It is the affectionate kindness and goodness of God that produces & calls forth the supreme love from the heart that He desires. His love can become deeply rooted & interwoven within the mind & emotions of the Believer.

Loving God is not an impossible task. This love commanded by God is really not that different from that which is offered effortlessly to one's children or spouse or family. Within it is found the same pleasure and a sense of purpose, It is not that hard to express as God requires. He wants every human being to love Him. As the Apostle of love wrote, "**We love because He first loved us.**"

The infinite Creator God has given humanity an infinite capacity to love and be loved. Within Jesus - love incarnate - every Christian lives and moves and has their being.

He is the foundation of all love. To love Him with all the heart is the very least that one can do. The Great Commandment is about loving God with all of one's affections, emotions, and devotion. It is only within Him that one will find complete rest and contentment. Love fulfills all the commandments because when a Born-Again Christian loves God, they fulfill all of the law.