

WORSHIP: A FANCY WORD FOR LOVE

JOHN 3:16 / REVELATION 3:14-22

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Since God Loves us so Passionately, All He Wants From Us is to Passionately Love Him. Our Expression of This Love is Called Worship.

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During the Lenten season this year, we took that opportunity to examine what our purpose in life is. Further, we examined our purpose as individuals and as a church. We used Rick Warren's curriculum called "*The Purpose Driven Life*."

Today begins the Advent/Christmas season. We will take this opportunity to review these purposes. If you want to revisit the book and review your notes from the last time, we would be starting at week #2 in *The Purpose Driven Life* book, which starts at chapter 8. Let me make one procedural remark here for those who will be reviewing the book. We are going to be reversing weeks 3 & 4. So the order will proceed like this; worship, fellowship, ministry, discipleship, and evangelism.

This morning we are going to start with our first purpose, worship. I think this is a great place to start because worship is simply a religious word that describes our passionate love for God. In other words, this is the most fundamental way we approach life. It colors everything we do. We were created as a result of God's love, and He passionately desires for us to love Him in return.

Love is not for the timid. Loving someone can be very risky. Taking the risk to love someone has the potential to be extremely rewarding or extremely painful. Let me explain. When I was dating Luig, I was very impressed how her mother took care of her father. She got up every morning, made his tea, cooked his breakfast, and got him the morning newspaper. At night, she would have his dinner ready, let him relax, and bathe him before he went to bed. She waited on him hand and foot. I remarked several times of how impressed I was.

On the first day of our honeymoon Luig and I were having breakfast and again I remarked how impressed I was with how caring her mother was. I said, "Tell me, does it run in the family?" She said, "It sure does. I take after my father."

I'm glad for opportunities like this morning when I can retell the simple message of Christianity. We were created by God specifically to be in a passionate, intimate love relationship with Him. The most fundamental way we exist in the world is love and the most fundamental love relationship is with God. Either we will love God or we will reject Him. Either we will worship Him or we will worship someone or something else. The main idea of this morning's message is this. **SINCE GOD LOVES US SO PASSIONATELY, ALL HE WANTS FROM US IS TO PASSIONATELY LOVE HIM. OUR EXPRESSION OF THIS LOVE IS CALLED WORSHIP.** Whenever we use the word worship, we mean by that, the most passionate love we have in life. In other words, it is the basic, most driving force in life. Who or what is this love in our lives devoted to? The Bible says that this most basic love is to be directed towards God. All other love we have to give in life is meant to come as an overflow of this love.

I. GOD DEMONSTRATES HIS LOVE FIRST (Jn 3:16 / Rev 3:14)

God Has Continually Demonstrated His Passionate Love For Us From the Beginning of Time And He Continues to Show That Love For Us.

We often confuse religion with what God really wants from us. Religion starts from us and directs itself up to God. However, true Christianity starts from God, works its way down to us, and then is returned up to God. True Christianity, true love originates with God. In John 3:16 and Revelation 3:14, we can see that God demonstrates His love first. In other words **GOD HAS CONTINUALLY DEMONSTRATED HIS PASSIONATE LOVE FOR US FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME AND HE CONTINUES TO SHOW THAT LOVE FOR US.** Out of love, God created us, He redeemed us, and He lives in us.

A. OUR NATURAL STATE (JOHN 3:16)

John 3:16 describes our natural state. Way back at the beginning of time, God existed in eternity. He existed in the form of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God was complete in Himself and needed no one or no thing to complete Him. However because of the overflow of love that existed in the Godhead, God chose to create human beings and to include us in this love-fest. We really need to understand how we were created and for what purpose we were created. We were created to be in a love relationship with God. He wanted to share His love with human beings. It is also important to note that God created the universe: the stars, the sun, the moon, the earth, sky, and sea, along with all the plants and animals to be a context for us to live and meet God in. Out of all created things and beings, God only chose to personally breathe the breath of life into human beings. You and I are different from all created beings in that we are created in God's image. We were created with the specific purpose of loving God.

However, it doesn't take much looking around to detect that something has gone very wrong. The world is filled with hateful human beings. We have all done bad things to others. We have all been the victims of others' bad behavior. Adam and Eve, the first two humans God created, chose to disobey Him. We call that sin. Since that event, not only did all of us as human beings inherit God's image, this desire to love God, but we inherited the sin nature of Adam and Eve as well. The penalty for disobeying God is death. Now in the Bible, death means separation. Physical death is the separation of our spirit from our body. Spiritual death is to be separated from God for all eternity. This separation is what we call Hell. We were all born physically alive, but spiritually dead. In other words, we were born as living, embodied spirits. But we were spiritually dead. Because we were born with a natural bent to disobey God, we were born separated from God. In our natural human state, we are condemned to spend eternity in Hell, separated from God. In our natural state, we are perishing.

B. GOD'S PASSIONATE RESPONSE (JOHN 3:16)

But because of love John 3:16 shows God's passionate response to our sin problem. I think we often miss the power of John 3:16 because we tend to read it generically. The fact is that each one of us here was born as enemies of God, destined to perish for eternity. But again because of the overflow of love that existed between the members of the Godhead, God the Father sent God the Son, Jesus to come and pay the price for our sin. Because of the incredible love of God, Jesus agreed to take on human flesh and come to earth. Jesus came for the purpose of redeeming us from the penalty of sin. The penalty of sin is eternal separation from God. Redemption means that Jesus, by suffering and dying on the cross, paid the price for our sin. Jesus came so that you and I could be in a restored, passionate, intimate relationship with God. It's personal for Jesus. While dying on the cross, He called out your name and mine. Look at this verse and follow along.

For God so loved [your name] that He gave His only Son, Jesus so that when so that when [I] believe in Him, [I] will no longer perish but have eternal life.

You and I were headed for an eternity in Hell and there is absolutely nothing we could do about it. That was our destiny. God had no obligation to change that. He gave humans a chance to love Him, but we blew our big chance. But because of God's incredible love, God the Father watched His Son suffer and die for us. God the Son willingly came to suffer for you and me. All we can do is believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

I don't think this takes a whole lot of reflection. We all know that we have done horrible things in our lives. There is no way we can be in a relationship with a holy, pure, and righteous God. We could not possibly stand in His presence all alone. But if we place our faith and trust in Jesus and confess Him as our Lord and Savior, He will change our eternal destinies from death to life. All we can do to become spiritually alive is to place our faith and trust in Jesus. And when we do, God the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and takes up residence within our spirits. That is why we can be certain we will remain alive and connected to God.

C. GOD'S CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT (REVELATION 3:14)

So God created us, God redeemed us, and God indwells us. But further, we can see that God has a continued involvement with His creation as described in Revelation 3:14. We often quote verses from this section and forget who it was written for. We often read these verses to unbelievers but if we look at the context, we can see that this section was written to the church. The first three chapters of the Book of Revelation are written to seven churches. In this section, Jesus makes it clear that He has been watching the Church at Laodicea. Jesus is the Amen, the true witness, and the ruler of God's creation. This letter to Laodicea is a personal letter from God.

Let's combine all of what we have said. God created us and redeemed us because of His incredibly passionate love. He continues to look over our affairs. If you and I were completely honest with ourselves, we would immediately realize how screwed up we really are and in need of God's wonderful love and forgiveness. I don't know where you are this morning in your relationship with God. But I do know this. God loves you more than you can imagine. He loves you more than you love yourself. His only desire for you and me is that we feel and respond to His love. This is the fact of God's love. **GOD HAS CONTINUALLY DEMONSTRATED HIS PASSIONATE LOVE FOR US FROM THE BEGINNING OF TIME AND HE CONTINUES TO SHOW THAT LOVE FOR US.**

II. A POOR RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE (Rev 3:15-19)

We Continually Reject God's Love In Many Different Ways.

A. INDIFFERENCE (15-16)

Revelation 3:15-19 demonstrates some poor responses to God's love. I find this to be incredible in myself as well as others. Even though God continually reaches out to us with His incredible love, **WE CONTINUALLY REJECT GOD'S LOVE IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS.** Let's look at some ways in which we push God away.

First, as verses 15-16 point out, we are often indifferent to God's love. Indifference pushes God's love away. People have misinterpreted these verses for as long as I can remember. Jesus says to the church people in Laodicea, *"I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth!"*

Now people think Jesus is saying "I want you to be hot towards me", meaning that we are on fire for Jesus and totally in love with Him, or that Jesus wants us to cold towards Him, totally against Him. Does that really make sense to you? Do you think Jesus wants us to be against Him?

Around the Laodicean area, there were two types of springs, both out of town in the hills. There were cold, artesian springs. Out of these springs flowed cold, refreshing water. They came up out of the ground ice cold.

In other places, there were hot springs that came up out of the ground. People would sit in them like a modern day whirlpool baths and get relief from their aches and pains. Now some tried to pipe this water to the city. However, by the time the cold spring water or the hot spring water reached the city, they were both lukewarm. The once cold water was no longer refreshing and the hot spring water was lukewarm perhaps not even comfortable to take a bath in.

What Jesus is saying is that He wanted passion. He wanted them to be useful. He wanted them to be like a refreshing cool drink of water to one another and to the world around them. He wanted them to be like healing waters of the hot springs. Jesus told people that followed Him that He wanted them to be salt and light to this dark world. It seems as if the church at Laodicea was only interested in being ministered to. They were interested in programs for themselves. They were indifferent to the people perishing outside the church. Most churches today create programs and spend money on programs designed to minister to people already in the church. And even then, the programs and money are spent on people who really don't have many legitimate needs.

Seldom do modern churches design programs and spend money on reaching unbelievers, outsiders, and people who are in real need in the church. We learned from the first section that God has this passionate desire that none should perish. If we were truly in love with God, wouldn't we share His passion? But the fact is that we are often indifferent to people in need, unbelievers, outsiders, and indifferent to God and His will.

B. PRIDE (17)

Verse 17 informs us that our pride causes us to push God away. Our pride often causes us to evaluate our circumstances wrongly. Most of us are doing okay financially, or if we are not, many of us have not used our money wisely. Nevertheless, this church at Laodicea was a lot like most of our churches. They got together and thanked God for all the blessings He had given them. They tended to think of God's blessing in terms of jobs, money, property, wealth, health, and prosperity. They had it all, and many of us have it all. We talk about how blessed we are. But look what Jesus said to them. He said, "*You don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.*" Keep this in mind. Jesus is talking to church people. We often think of ourselves as good people and when we get things like jobs, money, houses, promotions. We often count them as blessings -- blessings that we somehow deserve. We often attribute good things that happen to us as a result of our doing or being good. I think that's a pretty common belief we hold in the Western church. We feel that if we are good and righteous and holy that we should enjoy health, wealth, and prosperity. That is just cleverly disguised pride and self-righteousness.

C. RELIGIOUS DELUSION (18-19)

And that brings us to our religious delusion that is explained in verses 18-19. We run around doing all sorts of religious stuff and use religious language. We do all sorts of things in the name of Jesus and somehow we think we are good. Jesus says we are self-deluded, self-righteous, self-satisfied religious hypocrites. We must constantly remember that we are totally lost and totally unworthy without Jesus Christ. We need to learn to listen to and submit to Jesus. We are blind and useless without Christ. This section seems to me to say that we easily fool ourselves into thinking we are God's children, doing God's will in God's way. And when we are blessed we somehow think that is God's reward for our righteous behavior. When we read passages like this I think we should be frightened. How many things am I doing in my life that is really for John, of John, and by John? I have been seriously studying prayer and worship over this past year. I'm very religious, but I'm not sure how pleasing I really am to God. I've been evaluating my life in my quiet time. One of the questions I ask myself at the end of the day is, "What kinds of things grabbed my attention?" As I evaluate myself, I have come to realize that worldly things tend to grab my attention more often than God's things. If that's the case, then perhaps I love the world more than God. Another way to say that is, "Perhaps I am worshiping the world and not God." And if that's the case then I am totally useless to God. I'm neither cold and refreshing nor hot and healing. I don't want to be like this but the fact seems to be **WE CONTINUALLY REJECT GOD'S LOVE IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS.**

III. A PROPER RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE (Rev 3:20-22)

The Only Proper Response to God's Love is to Love Him Back.

I think that we want to say that we love God, but I wonder. Would we feel loved if our spouse, boyfriend, or girlfriend demonstrated love to us the way we demonstrate love to God? Real love is characterized by invitation -- invitation to share life with one another. Revelation 3:20-22 describes a proper response to God's love. **THE ONLY PROPER RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE IS TO LOVE HIM BACK.** Let's think about this for a moment. God gave everything He had so that we could be in a right relationship with Him. The only proper response to that kind of love would be the kind described by Jesus when He said, "*Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.*" The driving force behind all we do or think should be our love for God. Our lives should be constant worship. By that I mean that everything we think or do should be motivated and driven by God's continuous love for us and ours for Him.

A. AN INVITATION TO INTIMACY (20)

In verse 20, Jesus portrays Himself as waiting for an invitation to intimacy. We often use this verse as an evangelistic verse. In other words, we present the gospel message to someone. Then we paint this picture for them. Jesus is standing at the door of your heart. He is knocking and calling out to you. Jesus desires to come into your heart, save your soul, and live with you forever. I think that is a legitimate use of the verse. It is graphic and accurate.

However, let's take a moment to think about the context here. Jesus is writing this letter to the church. Here is how we should hear it. Let's say Jesus wrote this letter to us at Devon Church. Here is what He is saying, *"You are all in there singing, and praying and worshiping, but you have locked me outside of the church. You're in there and I'm out here. If any of you in there here me knocking and calling out, please come to the door and let me in."* How sad is that to think about that everything we do here in church might be excluding Jesus? If that's the case, then it would be sad to say we are worshiping, which means we are expressing our love for God and He isn't even here. The church at Laodicea thought they were blessed. They were growing, they had plenty of money, and they were well known. But Jesus somehow felt excluded from all they did.

Our church leaders need to constantly address this thought. However, this morning I want to focus on us as individual worshippers. Keep in mind that I have said that worship is something that happens all the time, not just on Sunday morning. If it's just happening on Sunday morning, then it's not worship at all. If you are married, would you be happy if your wife simply did things for herself all week long, spent money, decorated the house, cooked only food she liked, and never consulted you on anything? And then once a week on Saturday afternoon, she sat down with you for one hour and said, "I love you." How loved would you feel?

You and I consume God's life. When we demonstrate our love for Him and others, He is happy. When we disobey Him, ignore Him, harm or ignore others, we make Him sad. Our model for love comes from God. As the overflow of love God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have for one another motivates them to act out on our behalf, so the overflow of love between God and us should motivate all that we do. Jesus has chosen to occupy earth by living in us. In other words, Jesus wants to set people free from fear, from sin, from Satan, and from death. Jesus wants the poor to find food, clothing, shelter and dignity. Jesus wants the oppressed to find justice. And He wants to do it through us. Jesus wants us to build His Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus occupies earth through us.

B. AN INVITATION TO LASTING RELATIONSHIP (21)

But take a look at verse 21. Jesus gives us an invitation to a lasting relationship. Jesus invites us to occupy heaven through Him. Jesus gained victory in life by loving and obeying God the Father. Jesus has already taken His seat of victory. And now He invites us to share in that victory. The Apostle Paul says that we are already seated in heaven with Christ. Just as Jesus occupies earth through us, we now occupy heaven through Him. This love and all its power flows both ways when the circuit of love is completed. God first loved within the Trinity. That love overflowed and was poured out on us. When we received Jesus by faith, God poured out His love on us, and then the overflow spilled out onto those around us, and back to God. Worship is the overflow of love that motivates, empowers, and drives everything we do.

C. AN INVITATION TO ALL (22)

And verse 22 is an open invitation to all. Take some time to think about what occupies your thoughts, your time, your energy, and what you spend your money on. Jesus was concerned with bringing salvation to the lost. People all around us are frightened of terrorism. They are afraid of death. They are slaves to sin and to lust. We have the message that will set them free. How much time do we spend reaching out to those who don't know Jesus? Jesus was concerned that the poor receive food, clothing, shelter and justice. How much time do we spend thinking about that? Jesus came to heal the brokenhearted. There is much more, but I dare say we spend more time thinking about what we can buy next, what job we want next, or what boy or girl we want to date. I think we get the idea.

But here is the point. Anyone who is willing to listen and hear, God is willing to get involved with. It is true. It doesn't matter what you have done or what you have failed to do. Now is the time for worship. Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart. He is calling out to you. If you are willing to listen, you will hear. Open up your heart to Jesus. He will come in. Focus on loving Him by allowing His love and your love to mingle together, overflow, and be a motivation for all you think and do. **THE ONLY PROPER RESPONSE TO GOD'S LOVE IS TO LOVE HIM BACK.**

Conclusion

The problem for most of us is that we have confused religion for true love and worship. There is a difference between religion and relationship. Listen to what Francis Schaeffer says,

“We must ask do I fight merely for doctrinal faithfulness? This is like the wife who never sleeps with anybody else, but never shows love to her own husband. Is that a sufficient relationship in marriage? No, ten thousand times no. Yet if I am a Christian who speaks and acts for doctrinal faithfulness but do not show love to the divine bridegroom, I am in the same place as such a wife. What God wants from us is not only doctrinal faithfulness, but our love day and night. Not in theory, mind you, but in practice.”

Here is the idea and meaning of worship. **SINCE GOD LOVES US SO PASSIONATELY, ALL HE WANTS FROM US IS TO PASSIONATELY LOVE HIM. OUR EXPRESSION OF THIS LOVE IS CALLED WORSHIP.**

Jesus gave all He had to be in a relationship with us. He is now at the door of our hearts, knocking and calling out. Open the door, let Him in ... now is the time to pour out your love to Him ... now is the time for worship.