

Love

The Wonder of Christmas—part 4

December 18, 2022

DAY 1: What is love?

1. Secular people, of which I was one for twenty years, never question that they know what love is. Virtually everyone assumes:

- “I’m a loving person.”
- “If I don’t love someone it’s not because of a failure of love on my part.”
- “If I don’t love someone it’s due to a failure on their part.”

2. Jesus tells us that’s exactly how “pagans” think.

Matthew 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

3. What point is Jesus making about the kind of love “tax collectors” and “pagans” have?

4. Is it any virtue to love someone who already loves you?

5. What kind of love does it take to love an enemy? (v. 44). How is it possible to become a person who loves the way God loves His enemies?

6. When Jesus says to be perfect He is not referring to the perfection of character (which is impossible in this life) but to a perfect love, defined by how God loves us.

7. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 2: Love is defined by God's love: love for the unlovable

1. It rarely dawns on us that we may have a very inadequate and shallow definition of love or that our love is faulty, or even needs an overhaul!

2. What does it mean to love the way God loves us? Put yourself in God's shoes. Try to love someone like us.

3. How do you love someone:

- Who refuses your love?
- Who falsely accuses you of wrongdoing?
- Who expects you to do for them whatever they want?
- Who has little thought of any kind of reciprocal back to you?
- Whose general attitude toward you is, "Leave me alone, and I'll leave you alone"?
- Who takes for granted everything you have done for them, and still expects more?

4. This is God's dilemma with us.

...and yet...

Romans 5:6 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

5. "Sinner" is an umbrella term, describing a category or condition of human nature. A sinner is someone who

- Falls short of what they are supposed to do and be.
- Misses the target of what they are supposed to do or be.
- Is corrupt. There is something wrong in our human nature.
- Lives out a "first me, then you," approach to life and relationships.

6. What points is the Apostle Paul making about God's love in Romans 5:6-8?

7. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 3: Love is defined by God's love: overcoming our resistance to His love

1. When a secular person hears us say that we are all “sinners,” he or she immediately scoffs. The reason? The secular person hears the label “sinner” and equates it with a rapist or murderer.

Titus 3:2 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

2. Being a sinner doesn't only mean we do reprehensible things. It means that we err everyday in ways we are not even aware of.

3. If you had people at work that treated you foolishly, that disobeyed their boss, that were lax in their work because of addiction issues, that wanted ill for you, envied what good you had, and hated you, how would you respond?

4. Your work life would be miserably every day. You would hate going to work, you'd hate being at meetings with them, you'd never go to lunch with them. You would cocoon yourself.

5. The Apostle Paul says that that is how we've treated with each other and how we've treated God!

Yet...

Titus 3:4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

6. How does Paul describe the character of God?

7. What did God do?

8. Why would he save people like us?

9. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 4: Learning to love like God does

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1. “For God so loved ... the He gave...”
2. Anyone can “love” when you are loved, or when you already have the feelings of love, or the person you love is “lovable.”
3. But to love the unlovely, to give to them, or sacrifice for them is something entirely different.
4. God’s love for people is most seen at the cross. It is the sacrificial death of Jesus for sinners that defines real love.
5. Jesus died for us that we might not have to experience eternal death in hell.
6. It is the willingness to sacrifice for someone else’ benefit that defines love differently than just the feelings of love, or loving someone who already loves you.

Human love is doing what’s best for me at any cost to you.
God’s love is doing what’s best for you at any cost to Himself.

1 John 4:19 We love because God first loved us.

It takes divine love inside someone to enable them to love like God loves us.

7. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: The love of God at Christmas

1. The Larger Story of salvation touches down in Bethlehem, in the most humbling of ways.

Luke 2:1-14 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

2. What we call the Christmas story is not just about a cute baby delivered in a makeshift stable. The coming of the Son of God to be born as a human being, to live as one of us, and then to die for us is a story with its roots all the way back with Adam and Eve. The first of several hundred messianic prophecies began in Genesis 3. About 1,500 years of Old Testament history tells us God's larger story.

3. God created us and this world as a gift to enjoy Him and one another. We were made to reflect His wondrous love for us to others.

4. Instead, every person has turned away from God and from being a blessing to others as the central driver in their life to being. Every person now lives for self and self-interest as the central driver of their life. Even what looks like altruism is stained by self-interest. We are corrupted.

5. Luke continues the Christmas story...

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

6. What is the "good news of great joy?"

7. Who is this baby born in Bethlehem? List the words that describe Him.

8. Why did He come?

9. In what ways is the good news corroborated as of divine origin?

10. What strikes you from today's devotional?