

## But That He Loved Us

It's Valentine's Day! And that means two basic things.

- 1) You're on cloud 9 if you're in a relationship, or you hate this entire day if you aren't.
- 2) Any time spent sitting in a church means listening to the same old sermon on dating and how to appropriately love your partner.

Well, guess what? I am NOT going to give that sermon tonight...but it's still going to be about love! Specifically, there are three points I want to hit on.

- 1) God is love, and He loves us.
- 2) Love is held above all else.
- 3) Love has the power to forgive.

Many of you were at the Joint Retreat Worship night, and maybe you remember (or maybe you don't) that I quoted 2 verses from Galatians.

Galatians 5:1

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

And Galatians 5:6

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

Now at first glance, I can understand that these two don't seem totally related. But I see it differently. That relation stems directly from the idea of love! It is clearly stated in verse 6 that love, or faith expressing itself through love, is the only thing that truly counts to Christ.

Now look back at verse 1. Christ is the one who set us free. He set us free to love! And He did so out of His own love for us.

Let me draw your attention to a few other verses to explain what I mean!

1 John 4:7-12

"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because **God is love**. 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. **This is love**: not that we loved God, **but that he loved us** and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 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 basically a sermon in itself. If you have ever doubted the truth behind the statement, "God loves me," here is your proof. It isn't about what we want God to do for us, and it isn't even about what He is going to do. It's about what He has already done! He has already shown us His love. You just need to realize that this one action, this one sacrifice of love, was the ultimate love story and romantic gesture. God is the original Nicholas Sparks, and even better than that! Because He didn't just write some sappy love story, He actually died for us in His own. And it is in this amazing love story that love is defined.

1 John 3:16

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters."

This is my point. Not only did Jesus love you enough to live the ultimate love story by dying for you, but in the process He set you free from the slavery of this world to have the freedom to love like He does. He set the example that we are to follow.

Love holds a certain power that nothing else does! Love is the greatest thing that any of us can accomplish. It is the greatest commandment we have ever been given. So on this Valentine's Day, I want to show you in Scripture some of the many ways love is explained.

2 John 1:6

"And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love."

Why is it so important that we walk in love? Why do Scripture, the Apostles, and even Jesus Himself spend such an extensive amount of time focusing on love? Because...

...to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." and to 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' are the two greatest commandments. There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30).

Love is a command that is talked about constantly through out Scripture. Verses like 1 Corinthians 13:13 tell us the importance of love,

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love."

This exact same sentiment is found in Colossians 3:12-14

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

Love is powerful. Just from these 2 accounts we are told that love is above all else. To look deeper at the context of these passages, we can see some of the more applicable

implications of love. To be brief, the most obvious one here is forgiveness. We forgive as God forgave, we forgive out of love. God loved us enough to die for us and to give us a path to freedom from our own sins. And love is the virtue that makes this simple. Love creates unity, it brings us together. We can see that just in how we meet here each week, as one ministry, due to our love for God. But it is God's love for us that makes this possible. It is Christ's example on the cross, the single truest expression of love, that proves the forgiving power that love holds.

1 Peter 4:8 has always had me wondering.

"Above all else, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

As I have already stated, love is the most important aspect of a walk with Christ, so much so that it is even placed above faith. With that in mind, could it be that this verse is saying that our love for another can lead to the forgiveness of their sins? Lets look at the example of Christ, He loved us so much that He died for us. But His love for us has also brought forgiveness to our sins, so is it the same that our love for another can bring forgiveness to their sins? Maybe it is more complicated than that, but that certainly gives love some amazing and practical power! The point here, though, is that love has the power to forgive. Whether it is our forgiveness for someone who has wronged us, or God freeing us from the guilt and the burden of our sins, it is love that makes it possible.

I have shown you a lot of Scriptures referring to love. And most of them have been testimonies of Apostles. I want to end out by showing you something that Jesus said of Himself.

John 10:11-18

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

It's Valentine's Day. It's so easy to look for love in the wrong places, especially on a Holiday that glorifies being in love. So we spend our time looking for the temporary solution. We look for the hired hand to love us, only to watch them run away when times get tough. But we all have a Good Shepherd that will never leave us. He has called us together and unified us as one flock, under one Shepherd. Truly, He has laid down His

life to save us. And He has done so willingly. What love could ever be greater than that? The love of a God, of OUR God, to lay down His life for us.

John 15:13

"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friend."

Stop looking. You know where love can be found.