

Theme: Love is...

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (NIV)

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It is not rude, 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. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. 12 Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

One Valentine's Day a few years ago I did not realize that it was, in fact, Valentine's Day (that should tell you all you need to know about my "love life" at that time!), and I made the mistake of shopping at a Walmart amongst some of the thousands of "frantic-looking" people (mostly guys!) wandering aimlessly through the store looking for that perfect, last-minute Valentine's gift. Near the front of the store there was a very large display with the words **Love is...** printed in big letters and surrounded by hearts around the bottom of the display. Do you want to guess what was being sold on this large display? Frosted heart-shaped cookies and bouquets of flowers. That, apparently, is how Walmart defined what **Love is...** (or at least they were trying to suggest to you that bouquets and frosted cookies are part of what **Love is**)!

Now, hopefully we know better than to turn to corporate America or to Hallmark to define for us what **Love is**. But in case you were not aware of it, Tuesday is Valentine's Day, a day when "love" is talked about and advertised everywhere you look—but never truly or properly defined. It is important, then, for us to turn to the One who is the definition of love: God! ("**God is love.**" – 1 John 4:8).

This morning we will be talking about some of the things God tells us **Love is**, and even some of the things love is not! We pray that our God, who is love, would send us His Holy Spirit to bless our study.

One of the most thought-provoking books I've read over the past few years is a book called *Don't Waste Your Life*, by Christian author and pastor, John Piper. In one of the early chapters of his book Piper points to one of the great misconceptions about love that we experience in our culture today. He titles this short section of his book: *Does Being Loved Mean Being Made Much Of?* He writes,

For most people, to be loved is to be made much of. Almost everything in our Western culture serves this distortion of love. We are taught in a thousand ways that love means increasing someone's self-esteem. Love is helping someone feel good about themselves. Love is giving someone a mirror and helping him like what he sees.

This is NOT what the Bible means by the love of God. Love is doing what is best for someone. But making self the object of our highest affections is not best for us. It is, in fact, a lethal distraction. We were made to see and savor God—and savoring Him, to be supremely satisfied, and thus spread in all the world the worth of His presence. Not to show people the

all-satisfying God is not to love them. To make them feel good about themselves when they were made to feel good about seeing God is like taking someone to the Alps and locking them in a room full of mirrors. (Piper, John, Don't Waste Your Life, p. 33 – emphasis mine – LB)

Did you catch how Pastor Piper defined what love is NOT, and what **Love is?** Love is NOT making much of someone else and making them feel good about themselves. **Love is...** “doing what is best for someone” and showing them the “all-satisfying God” and His love for them. To NOT show them God and His love, is in fact, the *opposite* of love!

Isn't that part of how our text for this morning defines what **Love is...** and what love is NOT? Look again at **v. 5, Love is... “not self-seeking” (1 Corinthians 13:5).** Love, true love, always seeks what is best for others, putting others before “self.” The Apostle Paul, who is the writer of our text, also writes in his letter to the **Philippians**, “**Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others**” (Philippians 2:3-4).

In fact, doesn't the rest of the definition of **Love** in our text support this definition that **Love is...** selfless, NOT self-seeking? We read again from **v. 4-8** of our text, “**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails**” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

That, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, is what God says **Love is...** That definition goes a little deeper than frosted cookies and floral bouquets, doesn't it? It goes a little deeper than a Hallmark card and a heart-shaped box of chocolates. The question is, “How have we measured up?” Has anyone here displayed what God says **Love is...** *perfectly* in their life for even one day, or for even one hour? Have we *always* been concerned with and done what is best for others? Have we *always* been “**patient, kind, not envious, not boastful, not proud, not rude, not self-seeking, not easily angered, not keeping a record of wrongs, not delighting in evil, but rejoicing with the truth? Always protecting, always trusting, always hoping, always persevering, never failing**”? (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). I, for one, have not loved perfectly like this. Not for one day. Probably not even for one hour of my life, I would guess. How about you? Don't we all have to admit the same?

Let me bring you some good news this morning: We all know someone who *has* displayed this love perfectly in their life—not just for an hour, or for a day, but for an entire lifetime! That someone is, of course, Jesus! He is the ultimate definition of what **Love is...** In fact, I want you to do something with me. As I read through the portions of our text that define what **Love is...** and what love is NOT let's insert “Jesus” for the word “**love.**”

“[Jesus] is patient, [Jesus] is kind. [Jesus] does not envy, [He] does not boast, [He] is not proud. [He] is not rude, [He] is not self-seeking, [He] is not easily angered, [He] keeps no record of wrongs. [Jesus] does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. [He] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. [Jesus] never fails.” (see 1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

It works, doesn't it? Jesus is the only one who fits God's definition of what **Love is...** I have even more good news for you this morning: Because Jesus lived and loved us perfectly during His lifetime God now credits Jesus' perfect love to you and me! That's right! When God looks at your life and mine He no longer sees all the times we've failed to live and love perfectly; He sees Jesus and His perfect life and love covering us! That means when God looks at us & puts our names into His definition of love our names “work” just like Jesus' does! (Insert your name for Jesus' name above in **1 Corinthean 13:4-8).**

That is mind-blowing, isn't it? Thank God Jesus is love! Thank God **Love is... JESUS!** Let's read once again one of the other definitions God gives us for what **Love is...** We read this definition in our first Scripture reading for this morning: **1 John 4:10 NIV** – **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”** Jesus showed His love for us, and showed us that He is the definition of God's love by doing what was truly best for us, even though it caused Him incredible pain and even the agony of hell itself when He died for our sins on the cross. He didn't stay dead, however, He rose to life the third day and lives again to continue to show us His **love** by doing what is truly best for us every moment of every day of every one of our lives! Everything—everything good, and everything bad that God turns for the good of His redeemed children—was purchased by the bloody death of Jesus Christ for us and continues to be worked in our lives through Christ.



Finally, we come this morning to the “Now what?” “Now what...are we going to do with this **love**, now that we have defined it and have been reminded that it has been given to us in Jesus?” The answer, plain and simple, is that we go out and give it away! We live it! Let's go back to one more quote from John Piper, this time from one page later in his book under the section, *“Loving People Means Pointing Them to the All-Satisfying God.”* He writes:

Now back to what it means to be loved. The idea has been almost totally distorted. Love has to do with showing a dying soul the life-giving beauty of the glory of God, especially His grace [which means, “undeserved love” - LB]...we show God's glory in a hundred practical ways that include care about food and clothes and shelter and health. That's what Jesus meant when He said, “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Every good work should be a revelation of the glory of God...Not to aim to show God is not to love, because God is what we need most deeply. And to have all else without Him is to perish in the end. The Bible says that you can give away all that you have and deliver your body to be burned and have not love (1 Corinthians 13:3) [as we read in our text for this sermon - LB]. If you don't point people to God for everlasting joy, you don't love. You waste your life. (Piper, p. 34)

Let's not “waste our lives.” Let's not even waste this Valentine's Day by not truly showing **love** to others, or not showing them truly what **Love is...** by showing them JESUS! God has shown and given this **love** to you and me. Let's show it and give it to others, today, on Valentine's Day, and always. **“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).** Amen.