

It's About Love

Pastor Jeff Wood

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One evening long ago I went to the video store to get the family a movie to watch. (Do you remember video stores?) When I showed up at home with my selection for us, my family looked at me and said, “Documentary? You got a documentary? We were waiting and wondering if it would be a Comedy? Adventure? Drama? But we never, ever dreamed you’d come home with a documentary!”

Well, I had gotten a documentary and I had because it was about a tragic expedition to scale Everest and I had read the book on it shortly before.

The expedition suffered eight deaths in May of 1996. The book was called *Into Thin Air* and the video probably was of the same name. One of the basic reasons behind the disarray and those deaths on that particular 1996 expedition was that the guides and participants violated the cardinal rule of that mountain. That rule is, “Getting to the top is optional but getting down to the bottom is essential.” There is a certain set of conditions, a certain timetable, certain physical limits within which the climb is possible. Those are just there and that’s that. Desire, enthusiasm, wishing it were otherwise, all of that doesn’t change the facts. If those facts are ignored, then it is to the climbers’ peril. Not matter how close you are to the summit, how beautiful it seems, how heroic your desire, how much you can taste it, how hopeful you may be that the facts won’t be the facts today, ... it does not matter. If you wish to climb another day, if you haven’t made it there within a certain set of parameters, you must turn back.

We go to a fairly familiar passage today and in the climbing of the years of our lives it says something

very similar to the cardinal rule of climbing Everest. There are all sorts of things that are optional. But there is one thing essential. That's what God says. Don't miss it. And you wouldn't want to anymore than you'd want to go to France and miss the Eifel Tower or French pastries. But all sorts of people for all sorts of reasons do.

1 Corinthians 13 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.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.

There are all sorts of things in life that are exciting, stimulating, and engaging (climbing business ladders, traveling, developing recognition in your community). But they are all optional, to be added on and studied *only* after every day us getting and working the one thing essential for life.

The passage we just read and heard is from a letter that Pastor Paul writes to a young church he started in Greece, in a town called Corinth. Enthusiastic but at the same time quite sophomoric, the Corinthians were very consumed with glitz, spiritual glitz. They were more interested in the novel than the fundamental. They were contrarian and spiritually brassy; these things got their attention. For example, rhetorical finery or spiritual power from a teacher? They skipped right over spiritual power. Paul corrects them addressing what really, in terms of God and life, should get our first attention, our first pursuit. This is of most importance.

The Corinthians miss it, in part, because it is ... well, plain. Plain, like air and water are plain. The Corinthians, and so many others, (including the church -- remember the Corinthians are Christians) have overlooked it. It's like my children, in a world that has an aisle in the grocery store dedicated to fancy, sports type drinks, never wanting water. It's been given lip-service as important perhaps but not "I really believe it" commitment.

The chapter divides into three sections. The first paragraph is about the *essentialness* of love. The *essentialness* of love. I once heard someone talk about how he thought of his life in terms of "A" issues and "B" issues. In this case he was chagrined because he had been signing papers at the office, answering one last

phone call, and pulling one more file for his briefcase before going to the airport to catch a flight. The important thing, the “A” issue was to catch the airplane. But because of his attending to papers, phones, and files he missed his flight. He got mired down in “B” issues and missed the “A” issue.

Love is an “A” issue. You and I can take care of the kids’ check lists. We can sign the school papers, buy the groceries, chauffeur the car (all of which are a part of loving) ... we can do all that, and still miss connecting with them and being warm with them.

Tony Campolo, sociologist and popular Christian speaker, tells of the Duck Woman. It was when he was at the University of Pennsylvania. She was someone who lived around there and was seen about the campus. She was deranged, always in some strange mental fog, always walking around quacking. “Quack. Quack.” Strongly stimulated by a lecture or by some praying or something, when Tony came upon her, he was in his own state of earnestness, ... and though he had walked by her dozens of time and others were even now doing so, he stopped and he determined to look at her with all the love he could gather from his being and the universe and God. She said, “Quack.” He looked at her with all I just said, love, universe, God. She looked up at him. He said, “Hello” with all that love. And for the first time ever, he could see a lifting of the fog from behind her eyes, and she said, “Hello. It’s a nice day, isn’t it?” Sane. Lucid. And then the fog settled back in and she said, “Quack.” But there it was. Love gathered in and given with deep focus. And it had power. It transformed. It lifted the fog and brought a beautiful moment.

Yes, love is where life and power and God are at. Without it we are all in a fog. It is essential for life, lucidity, for finding and being with God. We can think we are spiritual but if we aren’t, bottom-line, working to love, we have missed the boat. (I love the quarterback

statistics which after lining up all the passes completed, the yards run, the interceptions thrown, then shows “wins” – did he figure out how to get a win? Some, whether Johnny Unitas or Fran Tarkenton or Joe Namath, may have not had every great stat but you know what? They had wins. That’s the bottom line and for Christ’s people “the win” is “love.” Did we figure out how to love?)

The first paragraph is about the necessity of love and the second is about the *make-up* of love. Not rouge. Components. Essentialness and then makeup. There is a *pot pourri* of phrases Paul uses in describing the nature of true love, things like love being kind, not being self-seeking. I imagine going over to a fence rail and asking the person standing there about love. He doesn’t give me a Webster’s definition but says look at that person over there being kind, that person over there not keeping rack of wrong, ... that’s love.

At bottom love is about respecting the otherness of another, that they have a life and will, and then applying yourself to what is their good. It is not sentiment, though that may enter in.¹

Love isn’t something fear-based or need-based or self-based. A number of years ago someone in my immediate family died. In the aftermath I found all sorts of people offering help. It all seemed like love. But in many cases, while well-meaning, it was less than love. Some people needed to help in ways that were not meaningful to me but were to them and their meaning was what was most important. Some of them had a greater need to help than I had need of their help. In my need I faced having to manage their need to help. When I said I really don’t want what you’re offering, their need

¹ Dallas Willard often points out that we say we love chocolate cake but we’re not looking out for its best interests. We are going to eat it!

for me to take it was greater. Things can look like love and not be.

I can do all sorts of things for you, from cheering you on to stuffing my frustrations with you, *because* I do not want you to think poorly of me or abandon me. But then, while it looks like love, I am fundamentally not operating of love for you but out of fear for me. If I do all sorts of things for you, from baking a pie to bringing home flowers, *so as* to get something from you that I want ... then I am doing something human and normal but it isn't quite love. Because it is about me and what I want rather than about you and what you need. If I do all sorts of things for you, from picking up your room to balancing the check book, not because you need or want a picked up room or a balanced checkbook but *because* I need them or I need you to have them, then those acts are about me, not you.

Love isn't what we do to stave off our fears, or to get what we want, or to take care of our needs. Love is about the other. Verse 5. We have all these describers – patient, kind, not envying, not boasting, not rude, ... and there in the midst of them is this: Love is about the other. It is respecting and honoring and giving without needing to control. This is the way God loves us.

The essentialness of love, the make-up of love, and thirdly, there is the *lastingness* of love. Our church has been here about 35 years. There are chapels in Scotland a thousand years old. I'm sure they are proud of their legacy as we are of ours and I would think that they are proud of that building which has stood over the years and years. But every building at some point will falter and fail. What will make it through whatever tempering and purifying fires there are going into the new heaven and new earth is love.

Aesop, of the fables, said, "No act of love however small is wasted." It has value and lasts. Consider people's achievements, promotions, purchases,

... then when they have simply loved you. When I was six and my cat died, a college student who lived in our home put down his work and consoled me. Decades later I remember that. He went on to become president of his country but what I remember is the love. Time and again it is true. Decades later I remember the oriental woman who had an agenda for herself in the little chapel in my college but gave it up and prayed for me because I felt so overwhelmed. Decades later, that's what I remember. Or the Dutch guy who understood the Dutch language being shouted at me and who had seen the unfair situation being foisted on me and jumped in to help me. I remember that years later. These I remember in a different way than those that have to do with fame and fortune.

Love lasts. Love is the most needed thing in life. Love is for the other. Love lasts. Mother Theresa pointed out that you and I could do great deeds with little love or little deeds with great love. The essential is love so, brothers and sisters, let's go toward love. In the mountain of life it is what counts.

Insert into this chapter thirteen, where it says love, the word "God." "God is patient. God is kind. God never fails." Or insert, "God with respect to me." So "God with respect to me is patient and kind...he always with respect to me protects, always with respect to me hopes, always with respect to me trusts. God with respect to you and to me never fails.

We are loved. That is what this table is all about. So be loved and love.

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call. pastorjeffwood@gmail.com

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