

Lovest Thou Me? (Part 1)

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[0:00] We're in a different generation, aren't we? I mean, things are just really crazy. I mean, from the political realm all the way down.

! And it's an interesting thing.! Churches of this generation have become interesting as well, and I'm glad God's in control of all of that and not me. Amen?

But you know, in thinking of today, but also looking back, I contemplate sometimes the early church and the work of the apostles in that period of time.

And you think about the tremendous things God accomplished through their lives and through their living. And the question arose in my mind as I was thinking about that, what is it within them? What was it within these men and women that just really enabled them to accomplish the things of God that they accomplished?

What was that? I mean, after all, these were, for the most part, just simple, ordinary men. Some of them were just plain fishermen by trade.

[1:25] Most of them were considered by many to be ignorant and ordinary men, simple men, unlearned and ignorant.

But yet, in their generation, they swept the known world with a message that had eternal consequences. Most powerful message and work ever accomplished among mankind.

So there had to be something within them that enabled them to do that. And as I considered that, two things came to mind. And the one of them we, the first one I think we consider as we look at the early days of the ministry of these men, of the apostles.

John chapter 1, turn there for just a moment if you will, and we'll get a look at this quickly. John chapter 1, and well, verse 44 and following, we recognize this is the point where Jesus begins to confront these men that he's calling out to be his apostles.

And, of course, it starts with the disciples, the two disciples of John the Baptist, who see Jesus, and they end up spending the night with him.

[2:41] And then they leave and begin to say, we have found the Lord Jesus. We have found the Christ. We have found the Messiah. One of those was Andrew. That was Simon Peter's brother, you recall.

Find Simon his brother and tells him, we found the Messiah. We found the Christ. And in verse 42, he brings him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, thou art Simon, the son of Jonah. Now, that's an important statement for us to see as we get into the message a little bit further. So I want you to continue to remember that. Jesus sees Simon and says, thou art Simon, the son of Jonah.

Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone. The day following, Jesus would go forth into Galilee and findeth Philip and said unto him, follow me.

Now, Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. And Philip findeth Nathanael and saith unto him, we have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did right.

[3:52] Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God, or the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, come and see.

Now, look at verse 47. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him and saith unto him, behold, an Israelite indeed. In whom is no guile.

Now, notice Nathanael's response to that. Nathanael saith unto him, whence knowest thou me?

And Jesus answered and said unto him, before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the son of God. Thou art the king of Israel.

And then over in Matthew chapter 16, you recall the time when Jesus asks his apostles, whom do men say that I, the son of man, am?

[4:53] And they give the various responses. And then Jesus looked at them and said, whom say ye that I am? And I want you to notice, Peter's the one that responds in verse number 16 of that chapter.

Simon Peter answered and said, thou art the Christ, the son of the living God. There was another place in the scriptures in the ministry of Jesus where the time came when many of those had been following him, then began to depart.

Jesus looks at the apostles and says, will you also go away? And they simply said, to whom shall we go? For thou hast the words of eternal life.

You are the Christ. You're the son of God. You're the anointed one. You're the Messiah. To whom else could we go? You see, these men had a deep-seated conviction as to who the person of Jesus Christ is and was.

It wasn't just a mere intellectual assent and acknowledgement that, yeah, he's the one that the Old Testament prophets spoke of that would come. This wasn't just a mere simple, outward, simplistic confession that he is the Christ.

[6:16] This is a deep-seated, down-in-the-depth-of-the-heart reality that that's who he is. Now, the way they come to that conclusion more and more, it becomes, I believe, more deeply embedded within them as they're walking with Jesus in his earthly ministry.

They see him. They hear him. They begin, by experience, to know who he is. Now, that ought to teach us a lesson. Amen? When we come to Christ, there's a variety of ways, numerous ways, in which people come to that reality that he is the Savior of the world, that he died for their sins, and that their sins would be forgiven, they would be saved, enter into a relationship with God through faith in Christ.

Many, many different ways to approach that. But my question today for us is, to begin with, how far have we gone with that since the time we came to know Christ?

Have we simply depended upon hearsay? Have we simply depended upon what we read by commentators, or even in the Scriptures? Or have we really searched him out to see who he is, to see if he really is who he said he is, so that we can have within us that deep-seated, unshakable confidence that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

That would give us the confidence to walk with him, follow him, as these men did. Now, the second thing that we see is really going to be the focus of what we want to look at today.

[8:15] Over in Matthew chapter 22, turn there with me just a moment. Matthew chapter 22, verse 34, there's the Pharisees had heard that, the Scripture says that Jesus had put the Sadducees to silence.

You remember the conflict between the Pharisees and Sadducees. So, the Pharisees send someone to Jesus, a doctor of the law, if you will.

And, no doubt, had in mind the idea that, okay, if he silenced the Sadducees, we're going to dare him to silence us.

And so, they send this man, and here's what this lawyer asks of him. Trying to bring him, or test him, and the Scripture says, test him or tempt him.

Verse 36, he says, Master, what is the greatest commandment in the law? Being a Jew, he knew the law.

[9:19] Of all the law, what is the greatest commandment that God ever gave? And here's what his response is. Jesus saith unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.

In essence, with the totality of your being. That's the greatest commandment. Now, according to that, all of God's people are to love God.

Now, I don't know of a believer yet that doesn't go around from time to time and says, I love God. I love him. Just like we go to our wife, or our spouses, or our children, and say, I love you.

I love you. We just had a couple of little grandkids leave this morning to go back home, and hug them and tell them, I love you. And they tell us back, I love you.

[10:35] Great thing. But the question for us is this. With what type of love do we love God? How deep is that love for God?

I'm concerned that in a lot of cases, our love for God is simply a humanistic type love that we can have for everybody else.

And then secondly, my thought comes to me, how is it? All right. Scripture says, I'm supposed to love God. All right. So how do I make myself love God?

How do I make myself love anybody? We know the human characteristics of love. You know, we've become attached to people in various shapes and forms and ways and manners, and have various types of love demonstrated to individuals.

Love of husbands to wives, wives to husbands, children to parents, and vice versa. We have acquaintances, whether they're neighbors, whether they're work companions, whatever they are, that we find some common interest with.

[11:44] And so we have a type of love for them. But realize something with me here. When Jesus said, here's the greatest commandment, thou shalt love the Lord thy God.

The word for love that he uses there is simply that word that is the love that God is. You know it well. It's the word agape.

The agape love for God. That is how we are to love him. Now realize with me, Jesus, or the scripture declares for us, I think it's the apostle, or John maybe, that expressed to us.

He says in one of his letters, behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God. The word manner there is the idea of something foreign or something alien.

What alien kind of love the Father hath bestowed upon us. Meaning that it is alien, it is foreign to the natural man within us, in what we are in our humanness.

[13:01] Agape love is not part of that characteristic. We find scripture telling us that agape love can only be produced in the life of the believer that has yielded himself to the Spirit of God, so that the Spirit of God can produce that within his life.

But yet, that's the type of love we are to have for God. Agape love. Now, foreign to the natural man. So if that's the case then, something has got to be done within us to enable us to have that type of love for God.

In just a moment, we're going to look a little bit more about what that agape love really is, and what characterizes that agape love. But turn with me to John chapter 21. And let's take a look at something here.

God gives us, in his word, a great picture of all of this. And something that you and I need to consider.

[14:08] Now, remember earlier when we looked at the first aspect of all of this. Their deep-seated conviction of who God is. When Jesus saw Simon, he said, Simon, son of Jonah.

Simon, son of Jonah. Impetuous, inconsistent, uncontrolled, in his humanness.

That's the picture of Simon Peter. Simon, son of Jonah. Now, inconsistent, unstable, not stable in purpose or devotion, the word Jonah has those elements to it.

Now, John chapter 21. Take note with me. Verse 1. After these things, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples at the sea of Tiberias, and on this wise showed he himself.

There were together Simon Peter and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathaniel of Canaan, Galilee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of his disciples. And Simon Peter saith unto him, I go a fishing.

[15:27] I go a fishing. Now, I want you to think of something just a moment. Here's Peter. Here's Simon. He's walked with Jesus for a couple of years.

Been a part of his ministry. Heard him teach. Sat, if you will, at the feet in the classroom of learning from Jesus. Been included in that inner circle of believers.

He experienced Gethsemane. But then, denies his Lord. But then there were post-resurrection encounters with the Lord Jesus.

Saw him alive. But yet after all of that, after all those experiences with him, and everything that's transpired, even though he was crucified, he saw him resurrected, alive again.

He says, I'm going fishing. Fellas, I'm going fishing. Back to the old occupation.

[16:40] That's where I'm going. The others follow. Now, in spite of everything they had heard and seen and learned of him, in spite of the revelations of Christ that they had seen and received, and in spite of the calling, he says, I'm going fishing.

Now, notice what happens here. I'm going fishing. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care. Take care.

Take care. Take care. side of the ship, and ye shall find. Now, you got to realize, to this point, they didn't know who this was on the shore. The question was asked, did you catch anything? No, cast it on the right side.

[17 : 56] When he said that, it had to spark a memory of the same type thing that had begun early on in that ministry. He began to realize, no question here, he obeys. They cast, therefore, and now they were not able to draw it in for the multitude of fishes. Therefore, that disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, that's John, saying to Peter, it's the Lord. Now, when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girded his fish's coat unto him, and he did cast himself into the sea. The other disciple came in a little ship, for they were not far out from land, dragging the net with fishes. As soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread. And Jesus saith unto them, bring of the fish which you have now caught. And Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes, and 153, and for all there were so many, yet was not the net broken.

Jesus said, come and dine. Now, I want you to recognize something here. They catch the fish because they did what Jesus said. Nets were full. They almost broke. They drug him to the shore, and they come up to the beach where Jesus is, and there's a fish, there's a fish and a loaf of bread. Same terminology. The only other place in Scripture with the Greek word for fish here is ever found in Scripture is back on the Sermon on the Mount where he feeds the 5,000 with that small amount of fish and bread. Same idea. And they see that. Where did it come from?

Nobody knows. It was just there. Jesus had it on the fire. Cooking. And then he says, go get the fish brought. You're caught. Bring him in. Then he says, come and dine. Come and dine.

Now, what's all of this leading up to? Well, you know the rest of the story. We're going to get there in just a second. Now, up to this point, realize, Simon Peter, Simon Peter, impetuous, self-sufficient, depending upon his own ability and strength, Peter. The thing that Jesus was beginning to draw out of all of this is the reality that he's showing, Peter, that you are not going to be able to be like you've always been. You've always depended upon your own abilities, your own self-effort. You're self-sufficient, you think. But not so now. You see, before I told you what to do and you just did it on your own, you didn't catch a thing. But now that I told you how to fish, your nets are full.

But he goes on further here. He feeds them, just like he fed the multitudes at the time of the Sermon on the Mount. Now, nobody asked, who art thou, knowing that it was the Lord. Jesus then cometh and taketh bread and giveth them and fish likewise. This is now the third time Jesus showed himself to the disciples, and after that he was risen from the dead. Now, look at verse 15. Here's the whole crux of it all. When they had dined, now realize, after they had been satisfied with the meal, the food that Jesus had provided for them. Jesus saith unto Simon Peter, and here's the terminology again, Simon, son of Jonas, as if to say, Simon, remember who you are in your natural state. Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? Now, you realize the terminology here.

[22 : 52] Simon, do you have agape love for me more than these? You know, there's always been speculation what the these are, but I think in the context of everything that takes place, it's got to be the idea, do you really love me? Do you really have agape love for me more than the other disciples do?

The reason I say that is because, well, I think one of the reasons Jesus does this the way he does is because something that has happened previously in the life of Peter. You realize with me here, he's asked the same question in various terminology three times.

Back on their way to Gethsemane, after the Passover feast that Jesus dined with, with the disciples, when he instituted the Lord's Supper, remember he said to them before they left, this night all of you will be offended because of me. Remember what Peter said?

Peter said, no way, Lord. Uh-uh. All the rest of these guys, they may be offended by you, but my love is stronger than theirs. I'll never be offended by you. You remember what Jesus said?

Peter, Simon, before the cock crows three times, you will have, the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

[24 : 35] And shortly after Peter had made that statement, that happened. Yeah. Denied him three times.

These things hung like an albatross around Peter's neck. Especially when he's in the presence of the Lord Jesus. And even in the presence of the other disciples. Peter, uh-huh.

Back yonder, you said, I'll never deny you my love's too strong. Peter, do you really have agape love for me more than these guys do?

Now notice his answer. He said, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. Whoops. You know that I have phileo love for you.

You know that. Yeah. Know what he asked. But he said, Feed my sheep. Feed them like herdsmen. My little lambs.

[25 : 48] He saith to him again the second time, Simon, Simon, son of Jonas. Same terminology. Do you have agape love for me?

He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. You know I have phileo love for you.

You know that. Then he says, shepherd my sheep.

Don't just feed them. Shepherd them. Lead them. Guide them. Direct them. Now, He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas.

Now Jesus changes the terminology. Do you really have phileo love, that brotherly affection kind of love for me?

Do you really have that? Now I want you to take notice of what happens here. Peter was grieved. He was brought to grief and sorrow is the idea.

[27 : 04] Because the Lord said unto him three times, or the third time, Do you love me?

Something about the third time, do you nod him three times?

Oh, Jesus trying to show him everything to this point that you've done, you've done out of that impetuous humanness that you've got within yourself and from this point forward that's got to change.

It's got to. If you're going to accomplish, well let me rephrase that, if I'm going to accomplish through you the things I've designed to accomplish through you, you're not going to be able to do it with self-sufficiency and self-confidence.

You're going to have to do it through the springboard of agape love. That's what you're going to have. You don't have that yet, but you're going to have to have it.

And I think when he showed him, you know, the three terms he uses here, feed my little lambs and then shepherd my sheep and then feed my sheep.

[28 : 22] The small ones, the young ones, the adult ones. Speaking of the idea that Peter, what I've got in store for you, the ministry, the work that's going to be done through you is going to increase in what it is.

you're going to have to be different than you are now. You see, agape love, love produced within the life of the yielded believer by the Spirit of God that deems the object or the person loved as something or someone very, very precious.

it causes us to want to forsake all else and to cleave unto him, to yield ourselves to him, affectionately admire him, constantly resting in him.

One person says, supremely pleased and satisfied with him as our portion. I like that. Amen? That he is himself our portion because of the love that we have for him.

Now, self-confidence is going to have to be denied in order for us to accomplish what God has to accomplish.

[29 : 51] It's got to be replaced by agape love for God. Now, feed my lambs, shepherd my sheep.

It's got to be done through agape love. Now, I'm glad to hear that it happened because you recognize on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God birthed the early church and indwelt the 120 in the upper room Peter.

Not Simon Peter, but Peter gets up and preaches one of the most eloquent messages on the person of Christ Jesus that's ever been preached in the midst of the capital city of Judaism, if you will.

And he follows in his life ministry, the workings of the Lord Jesus through that agape love that he allowed the Spirit of God to produce within his heart and mind.

If we're ever going to let God do through us what he designed to do, we're going to have to have that very same type of love produced within us.

[31 : 22] Think it interesting that when Paul in the book of Galatians writes concerning the work of the Spirit of God, he talks about the fruit of the Spirit.

You know, the idea that the Spirit of God within us is doing battle with the natural man within us, and they're both trying to ward each other off. Now, of course, Scripture says it depends upon which one we yield to as to what the outcome is going to be.

But then he says the fruit of the Spirit is, what's he begin with? Agape love. Yeah. Yeah. First and foremost, it's the basis, it's the footing, it's the foundation of everything God does, because that's who he is.

God is love. Agape love. We must surrender, yield to the Spirit of God to the extent that he can produce that agape love within us.

Ephesians chapter 5 verses 1 and 2 says, be you therefore followers or imitators, mimic if you will, God.

[32:52] Be imitators of God as dear children, and the idea there is, as children that are experiencing the agape love of God.

That's our experience. Now, perhaps, perhaps that is something that we need to really consider. Know intellectually that I have experienced the love of God. I mean, Scripture declares for me that the way that the love of God has been manifest to me is that he gave his only begotten son.

Got that? got that right here. But have we really grasped the reality of how much God loves us and how much he has manifested that love to us in our life, in our living, to the point that we just get on our knees and say, God, thank you for loving me.

Thank you. I don't understand it. I can't put my finger on it, but God, it's there and I thank you for that. Yeah.

[34:20] A simplistic passage. John 3, 16, for God so loved the world. How did he love the world?

I love that phrase. It got a hold of me one day. He so loved the world. When you and I were sinners, when you and I were enemies of God, when you and I had no thoughts toward him, when we were at enmity with him and didn't have any desire for him, he loved us with the love that goes beyond human love because it never fails.

love that puts up with everything but wants us to change us from what we are. Agape love.

He so loved us when we were in the most unlovable condition with that agape love. And he loved us so much that he gave who?

Who? his only begotten son. Yeah. What a picture he gives to us when Abraham is commanded to take Isaac and he says, your only son, the son that you love, the son that you I'm not going to use that phrase, the son that you anticipated for so long that you desire to come, that you knew God had promised you.

[36:06] I want you to take him, your own flesh and blood, to the mount that I show you, and there I want you to offer him a sacrifice to me.

you ever wondered why when Abraham got up there, you know, Isaac, Isaac has got the wood in his hand and the torch and everything's ready to go.

On the way up the mountain, he looks and says, dad, you've got everything, but where's the lamb for the sacrifice? Son, God will provide himself a sacrifice.

Okay, he gets him up on the mountaintop, binds his son, after he builds the altar, binds the son up, puts him on that altar, and gets ready to slay him, pulls the dagger out, and ready to slay him.

Do you ever wonder why he never hesitated? You know, how many remember the Old Testament or the Ten Commandment movie, Charlton Heston, and all of that, you know, yeah, yeah, they've got Abraham, no, God, no, I don't want to, no, no, baloney, amen?

[37:32] He never hesitated, he went right up and did what God told him to do. Why is that? Because it was a picture of what God himself was going to do to his son, and that without hesitation.

Why? God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, his beloved one.

Yeah. For sinners who cared nothing for him like you and me. That's agape love. And that's the type of love God wants to produce within us through his spirit, by his spirit.

To have that kind of love for God that whatever God says, we go. No hesitation, no question, no waiting to prepare.

God, if this meets my standards, I'll go. No, no, no. Agape love says, all right, Lord, you said it, we'll do it.

[38:51] That's agape love. Yeah. Because, you see, 1 Corinthians 12, 13, Paul says, agape love is characterized by self-sacrifice.

It gives itself up. And that's what Paul is saying here in Ephesians 5. to be followers of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us and hath given himself.

He gave himself up for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savor.

Yeah. We're to walk in the sphere of that same type of love that caused Jesus to give himself up for us.

The highest expression of agape love. That's it. That's it. We are to walk in that love.

[39 : 58] Walk in the sphere of that. In every aspect of our life and every aspect of our living to walk in the sphere of agape love.

Thank you.