

## I LOVE MY CHURCH

Take time to greet one another. Feel free to get up and walk around a bit if you want to. Video – Disabled Player Gets a Shot. Why did the audience respond in the way they did? Why was there such celebration when that young man made the shot? It wasn't the game winning basket. It is because they had just seen love in action. It wasn't about winning a game; it was about loving a person. Let me ask you a question this morning. Do you love this church? Today we are beginning a new series called "I Love My Church." Over the next 4 weeks we are going to look at what it means to love your church and some ways in which we can do that.

John 13:34 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Jesus is speaking here to his disciples. In this scripture Jesus is saying three things about love;

### 1. Love is EXPECTED

Jesus starts here by saying in verse 34 "a new *command* I give you." Love is not optional for us as believers. It is commanded of us. Jesus EXPECTS it from us. He not only tells us that we should love but He also tells us WHO and HOW we should love. He says here that we are to love ONE ANOTHER. In the context of this verse, Jesus is speaking to his disciples. He is saying that we should love other believers. This does not mean that we should not also love those outside the church, it just means that love should start inside the church. He also says HOW we should love one another, that we should love "as I have loved you." Our love for the church should be the same as the love that Jesus has for the church. It should be a complete and sacrificial love.

What does it mean to love your church? Is there a particular thing that you love to do or place you love to go? I 'love' fishing. Some people love to cross stich, or scrapbooking, or golf etc. Have you ever visited a restaurant that you really enjoyed? The food was amazing, the service was excellent and the price was reasonable. If someone were to ask you what your favorite place to eat out was you would say that restaurant. You just really 'love' eating at that place.

Compare that kind of love with the love you have for your spouse or your children. I love my wife and I love my daughters. The love that I have for my wife and kids is far greater than the love I have for fishing or for things like a restaurant. So, what are we saying when we say, "I love my church"? What does it mean when Jesus commanded us to love one another? Does He want us to love one another like you loved your favorite activity or experience at the restaurant, or does He want me to love the church like I do my own family?

With restaurants there is an internet service called Yelp. It is a place you can go where you can rate your experience. If the food was great and the service was good and the price reasonable then you could go ahead and rate it on Yelp so that others would know it is a great place to visit. That would be your way of recommending that place to others. If it was a bad experience then you could give a poor rating to tell others to avoid it.

With my family, it isn't about quality of food or how great the service was. It is about relationship. I love my family for who they are, not necessarily what they have done. I am intrinsically connected with my family. My love for them is unconditional and sacrificial. There are good times and there are bad times, but you don't try to rate your family on Yelp. You just love them.

The church was never meant to be like a restaurant; it is a family. Church is not something that you go to, it is something that you are part of. Our love for one another is based on relationships. This begins first and foremost in a relationship with Jesus, and through that we are connected to one another. Jesus loves us and has brought us into relationship with Himself. In becoming part of God's family, we aren't only brought into a relationship with Him but also into relationship with one another. Being in a relationship with Jesus means being part of the church, part of His kingdom, part of the family of God and community of faith.

A few years ago, Newsweek magazine had this cover photo that said "Forget the Church, Follow Jesus." There are a lot of people in the world today who think like that. Loving Jesus but not the church is not an option. They are a package deal.

You may have heard me say this before but it is like someone coming up to me and saying that they really like me but they can't stand Naomi. Do you think that is someone who will be a close friend? Probably not. Why? Because Naomi and I are a package deal. You don't get one without the other. Likewise, you cannot just take Jesus and leave the church. They are a package deal.

Unfortunately, in the world today many people treat the church like a restaurant. It is just something they go to. They approach it with a consumer mentality. You apply a Yelp mentality to worship - "Well, I did not care for the Hymn we sang, and the seat was a little hard and the pastor's message had too many stories - so I give it 2 stars." If the experience isn't just to their liking, they'll find somewhere else to go or not go at all. This is beyond unfortunate. This sets up expectations for the church that it was never intended to fulfill. Also, and we have to be honest here, that kind of love is not relationship focused; it is self-focused. This is not loving as Jesus loved. Coming to church whenever you see fit, or whenever you are comfortable with it, and only if it is enjoyable and meets your needs is selfish. The church isn't supposed to be like that.

You will experience a love for the church when you intentionally choose to love the church. You will have a deep sense of love for the church when you actively and intentionally practice love for the church. The opposite is also true: When you don't intentionally love the church, then you will not experience a love for the church. We'll love the church when it is about relationships, not when it is like a restaurant.

Love is a choice that we make. Saying that you love your church does not mean that the church is perfect or that there is never any problems. In every family there will be problems. I grew up in a church that was very traditional and very boring. As a young person it really turned me off. I loved Jesus but I was not a huge fan of the church. Eventually I decided that I would become a medical missionary and work in a para-church setting. I had been accepted into medical school but I ended up breaking my arm a week before school started. I missed the opportunity and decided that I would enroll again the next year. During that time, I decided to take some courses at Tyndale Seminary. My first course was about the church, and I fell in love with it again because I was reminded of its purpose. I began seeing the church the way Jesus sees the church.

Love is expected. It is commanded, not optional.

## 2. Love is REFLECTED

John 13:34 ... Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Love is not just expected of us by God, it is also expected of us from the world. The word Christian literally means a 'little Christ.' If you claim to be a follower of Jesus then people will look at you and judge your life based on His example. We are His ambassadors.

When we lived in Kuwait, there was a woman who came to see me for marriage counselling. I remember the first time we met she asked me what my nationality was. I told her I was Canadian. She said, "Oh no, I HATE Canadians!" I kind of laughed and asked her why she hated Canadians and she said that she had met one once and she did not like them. An entire nation of people, vilified because of a single negative encounter. At the end of the counselling, I remember she kind of smiled and said, "OK, maybe I was wrong. I guess not ALL Canadian are bad."

If you call yourself a Christian then you are saying that you are an imitator of Christ. Jesus said people would know us by our love. In other words, if you claim to be a follower of Christ, you will reflect Christ's character. God is love, so we as Christians need to show love as well. When people see us, they should see Christ. We should be imitators and reflectors of His love and glory.

There are many ways in which we demonstrate love, but Jesus here says that the primary way we are to demonstrate love is by how we treat one another. How do you treat other Christians? Our love for one another shows in a practical way our love for God.

1 John 4:19-21 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

It was the closing night of a summer VBS. The teacher of one of the classes had missed one night and hadn't encountered a boy who had come that night, but who was there that Friday. He only had one hand. It shook her a little... and she began to be afraid that the others might make fun of him. In fact, she was so distracted by this that when time came for the closing program she mechanically led the children onto the stage and told them "Now, let's all build our churches. Put your hands together now, here is the church, here is the steeple . . ." Then suddenly, she was aware that she had done. The little boy couldn't build a "church" because he had only one hand.

After a moment of awkward silence, the little girl seated next to the boy with one hand held her hand up to his and said, "Here, let's build the church together." That little girl understood the truth of Christian love. Christian love is when one believer reaches out to another believer to build Christ's church. God calls us to be devoted to one another... to honor one another above ourselves.

Love is expected and must be reflected.

### 3. Love is DIRECTED

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Love is not only to be expected and reflected; it must also be directed. Love is evangelistic. It is also expensive - it costs us. The love that Jesus talks about is a sacrificial love which means that it is more than just a feeling. Love is more than just a quiver in your liver. It involves action.

Thomas a Kempis said it this way: "Whoever loves much, does much."

What does it look like to intentionally love the church? To be in community with one another as God intended it to be? Well, that's what the rest of this series is about! Let me give you an overview of what we'll be looking at:

We love one another by serving. It is understanding God has given each of His followers supernaturally empowered abilities to encourage and help one another and the community. Did you know you have superpowers? We're going to talk about that.

We love one another by giving. It is learning to share not only our time and talents but also our treasure with others.

Lastly, we love one another by sharing our faith beyond the walls of the church. The love that Jesus gives to us and that we can have for one another isn't to be kept to ourselves. The love that we are to have for one another is also meant to show our community what the love of Jesus looks like. If we aren't sharing the love of God with our words and deeds, then we aren't truly loving.

Maybe you are here today and you are a lot like I was in university. You love God, but not the church. Maybe you have been burned by the church in the past. Maybe some of you have had some negative experiences with church in the past, and for that I am truly sorry.

One individual said that Church is often like a bunch of porcupines getting together to get warm. They might get warm... but they can also get hurt.

I want to close with a story Fred Craddock told about his father. When he was growing up his father had been hurt by someone in the church. Because of this he stopped going to church. For years the church reached out to him, but he always rejected their offers to go to church with one statement: "All they want is another name and another pledge" (meaning: they didn't care about him, all they wanted was more people and more money).

Year after year, people from the church would visit trying to get him to come back and he would repeat the same phrase as he dismissed them: "all they want is another name and another pledge." That's what Craddock's father always said... all except one time. Fred Craddock tells of how his father got cancer. Over a period of time, the once strong man wasted away to a mere 78 pounds, and when Craddock made it home and visited him in his hospital room he was shocked by his father's frail appearance. He was also shocked by the appearance of the room. It was filled with flowers and cards. As Craddock went about the room looking at the flowers and reading their cards, he was struck by the fact that almost all of them came from the very members of the church that his father had for so long rejected.

His father motioned him to the bed, and because he could no longer speak due to the cancer, he weakly wrote these words on his notepad. Words from Hamlet: "Draw your breath in pain as you tell my story..." "What's your story, dad?" Craddock asked. Then his father wrote these three words, "I Was Wrong."

That church loved Craddock's father. And because they loved him, they gave God the room and the time to change his heart. All because they were committed to concept of loving one another.