

'For God so Loved the World' – Part 2*'The Key to Life'*

by Rev. Robert Griffith

In the first message in this teaching series we affirmed that love lies at the core of who we are as human beings and why we were created. We took a fresh look at Genesis 2:15-18 and specifically where God made a fundamental statement about humanity. He said, *"It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."* Even though this verse is applied most often to marriage, the foundational principle articulated here applies to all humanity - married or single, widowed or divorced - none of us are meant to be alone.

In fact the vast majority of what God has said and done throughout our entire human history has been directed at ensuring that we never again have to endure the emptiness, frustration and debilitating darkness of being alone. A life of loving and being loved, in the final analysis, is why we were created.

Now if our primary purpose in life is to receive and to give love then everyone can be a huge success in life regardless of age, intellect, physical ability, wealth or status. The wonderful thing about the way God set things up is that you don't need to have a great intellect. You don't need to have great beauty. You don't need to have outstanding energy or physical strength. You don't really need good life chances at all. To be a total success in life, in God's eyes; to achieve your highest purpose as a human being created in the image of God, you just have to be somebody who has learned how to receive love and give love.

It has often been said that life is not fair – and that's true - of course it's not fair! No one gets an equal amount of anything. If 'fairness' means everyone is the same then life is certainly not fair. But the big equaliser is that you can be a huge success as a human being if you learn how to receive and give love. God created us out of love - for love. That's the main point of life.

So with that foundational truth in mind, let me ask a really important question, the answer to which will determine the whole future of the Christian Church. What is the main reason we should tell people about Jesus? What's the primary motivation for sharing our faith? Why should we share the gospel, the good news with anyone? Is it because God commanded us to do so? That may be true, but I suggest that's not the main reason to share the gospel with people. Is it because we need more people to fill our empty seats on Sunday? That may be true, but I suggest that's not the main reason to share the gospel with people. Is it because we're afraid they're going to hell if we don't get them to wrap their minds around certain theological abstractions? That may be true, but I suggest that's not the main reason to share the gospel with people either.

I believe the primary reason we should tell people about Jesus is because we care about them and don't want them to miss out on the whole point of life by not experiencing the love of the God in Jesus Christ! They will miss the main reason they breathe if they don't experience God's love and return that love to God and to those around them.

That's why we should want to share the good news with everyone on the planet – so they can be fully human and fully alive, as God intended; so they can experience the power, the wonder and the glory of the kingdom of heaven now as a present reality, not a distant hope beyond the grave! To miss out on receiving God's love and letting that love flow through us to others - is to miss out on the very essence of being human.

1 John 4:7-9 *“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 (i.e. have life) through him.”*

To live in Christ, through Christ and for Christ is to know God's love and prove that love by being people who love. How do we know if someone really knows God? Someone who prays a lot knows God, right? Not necessarily. Somebody who knows the Bible really well knows God. Not necessarily. The Pharisees knew the Scriptures better than anyone - but they didn't know God – they helped kill God when He showed up! Even when He was sitting down and eating dinner with them – they still didn't know God and they were experts in the Scriptures! I am also pretty sure Satan knows the Bible inside out – but that hasn't done much for his relationship with God!

Well, how about somebody who operates in spiritual gifts - somebody who has the power of God in their lives - certainly that proves that they know God? Not necessarily. Well what about the person who works hard for God and gives their whole life to serve God in the Church - they must know God. Maybe, or maybe they just know the Church.

The Apostle Paul answers this beautifully in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. This is my paraphrase:

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, if I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge ... if I have a faith that can move mountains ... if I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, if I do all these incredible things that we value so highly in ministry - if I do all that better than anyone else in the world - but I do it without love - then it means absolutely nothing!”

Not only that - it's a noisy gong; it's an irritation; it's a distraction and it adds up to ZERO. So we don't know God and we are not participating in authentic Christianity or authentic humanity unless our lives are characterised by love. Let's read it again:

1 John 4:7-8 *“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.”*

That's about as clear and unambiguous as you can get. Praise God for the piercing simplicity of His Word! Now these insights are certainly not new – but if we really take these basic truths at face value, they are quite confronting. For example, I want you to imagine for a moment, how others would describe you as a person in one sentence. What would be the first, or most obvious thing they would say about you. Would people say without hesitation: *“Oh yes, she's a woman (or he's a man) first of all who loves God with all her heart, mind and soul and loves other people as she loves herself.”* As we ponder that scenario for a moment, we may be forced to conclude that most people would talk for a while about other attributes we may have before they get to the fact that we love God and other people, and we would hope they get there eventually! But maybe they would not.

Now the fact that we may not be described first and foremost as people who love God and other people - should not cause us to beat ourselves up with guilt and shame. We shouldn't lose sleep over it. We should simply thank God for His revelation and make it a matter of serious prayer, and I believe God will speak to us through this teaching series and help us re-focus on the foundation of our faith and our lives as God's special creation. God will continue to confront us with the priority of love because I know that the one thing I just have to get right in this life, the one thing you have to get right in this life if we are to truly be successful and fulfil our purpose is love.

It truly is that important. It truly is the foundation of everything else. Visions, goals and plans are all great, but at its heart, the focus of your life and mine - the direction in which we need to be heading if we are to be all that God created us to be and have an authentic existence is frighteningly simple: We need to be people who are described as those who sincerely love God and love other people.

Now *that* is something to live for; *that* is something which is achievable regardless of intellect, beauty, Bible knowledge, language, culture, family history, marital status or the state of the economy. With that focus and purpose you don't need to take into account how messed up you were as a child or even how messed up you might still be. This is something you can head towards no matter who you are and you can end up being the biggest and best and most authentic person you could possibly be and it's never too late to start. You might be 9, 29 or 89 - it doesn't matter – it's never too early or too late to learn how to love and be loved.

Of course some of us may have some 'unlearning' or re-evaluating to do. Because there are many today who didn't experience a lot of love when they were growing up. There may be some people (hearing) reading this sermon right now who just never got the hang of receiving or giving love. Love is something that you receive, but also something you learn. Love is a gift from God but it is also something you are taught. You experience love over time and then end up doing love. If you are raised that way then you learn this as a child. But sadly, many people today just didn't have that experience as a child. So you may be one who never really got the hang of being loved and then loving others because your childhood was not the best it could be. That is sad. However, what's even sadder is that as we matured as men and women the world around us didn't do much to change that deficiency.

For example, as an adult man, I was not told that the first thing, the most important thing I needed to do as a man, the first thing I needed to do in order to prove authentic manhood is to develop the capacity to love and be loved. Nobody told me that. The world and the culture around me actually told me that love got in the way of being an authentic Aussie male - because after all, a man accomplishes; a man achieves; a man conquers; a man dominates, a man provides. Isn't that what many of us were told by the media, our peer group and the world in general? If you can get a little affection along the way, great for you, but it certainly is not all that important compared to being a successful achiever and provider - in fact love can often get in the way of success.

What's even more amazing and sad is that when I became a Christian and eventually headed into full time ministry I was then searching for the secret of success in the Kingdom of God. I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to change the world and as I sat in lectures in Theological College, as I read books and was mentored by Bible scholars and senior Pastors, I gained all sorts of advice and insights about how to be rooted and grounded in the fundamentals of the faith so I could have a fruitful and successful ministry. But guess what? Not once, at least not once that I can remember - maybe I wasn't listening, but not once do I remember anyone saying, *"Learn how to be loved by God first. Don't go anywhere or do anything until you learn how to receive and give love, because that is foundational to all ministry and all life, especially life in the Kingdom of God."* No one said that to me.

Instead I was told I had to learn how to preach; learn how to study and teach the Bible; learn how to pray; learn how to counsel; learn how to do spiritual warfare; learn how to be a leader ... and the list goes on. I was told all of these things and they are all very important and could be regarded as foundational to a successful ministry also, but not once did anyone tell me that the foundation beneath all those things had to be *"the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit."* (Romans 5:5) What I should have been told is, *"First and foremost, before you do anything else, before you even attempt to minister in Jesus' name, learn how to receive God's love and give that love to others."*

Sadly it took many years in ministry before anyone said that to me and I can remember the time, the location, the person ... and the impact. The time: May, 1993. The location: Stanwell Tops Conference Centre in NSW, Australia. The person: Dr Ken Blue. The impact: life-changing, ministry-transforming and the beginning of the greatest spiritual battle imaginable - but that is a story for another day!

Before I wrap up this second message in this series, let's just take a brief advance look at a passage which I hope will become our foundational reading for the remainder of this series. We have several of the Apostle Paul's prayers recorded in Scripture - this is one of them. Ephesians 3:14-19.

“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, (because you are rooted and grounded in love – you then) may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

When you got out of bed this morning, I wonder if you realised that you, little old you, can actually be filled with the fullness of God? You can be everything a human being was created to be (inside those limitations in Genesis 2 that I mentioned last week); you can achieve your purpose as a man or woman or young person if you are rooted and established (or grounded) in love because God is love and if you truly know God then you will experience and express God – you will love.

In this teaching series God is going to show us again what that means and what that looks like and the Holy Spirit is going to change lives and re-arrange priorities and replace wrong ideas and wonky theology in our minds as we explore what it truly means to have the very roots of our lives deep in love (deep in God); as we explore what being grounded in love actually means for us today. In these first two sermons, I just wanted to set the scene for what I believe God will unwrap for us and reveal to our hearts and minds in the remainder of this teaching.

However, I do need to stress again that this is a teaching series - which means that each sermon will form part of a bigger picture and although I will try to ensure that each one stands alone and provides spiritual food week by week and a recap of previous sermons - if you want to get your teeth into the spiritual meat God is preparing for us, then I would really encourage you to follow the whole series via our website because the real gems in any Biblical teaching are only discovered by those who take the time to dig and the best way to do that is to expose yourself to the teaching more than once and ensure that you get the full picture. From past experience, I can guarantee that it will be time well spent and God will meet you in that commitment in ways you never dreamed of - He always does.

So until our next time together, I will be praying that you will be: rooted and established in love and that you will have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and you will know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.