

GALATIANS 2:22-23
(Gospel: Lk 5:12-16; NT: Gal 5:16-26)

INTRODUCTION

- Self-help industry is worth over \$13B in the US alone.¹
 - Books, apps, coaching services.
 - Walk into any Barnes & Noble and there's an entire section:
 - *The Power of Positive Thinking*
 - *Who Moved My Cheese?*
 - *How to Win Friends and Influence People*
- Why?
 - Something to be cynical about?
 - Or does it reflect that deep down we know we were made for more...
- Bible affirms that desire and gives us good news about it – two things:
 - First: Growth not about trying to become what our world tells you to be.
 - Don't have to lose 20 lbs., become a conversational maestro, or achieve some Zen state of soul.
 - Instead, it's about becoming who God designed you to be.
 - Second: This isn't self-help; this is the fruit of the Spirit.
 - God is at work in you to help you become like him.
 - Which is, deep down, the life for which we long.
- What does this life look like?
 - That's what this series is all about.
 - Today we start with the top of the list: Love.
- Ask three questions:
 - What is it? How has Jesus loved us? How can we love others?
 - Definition → Gospel → Application. **[Pray]**

WHAT IS LOVE?

- Question for the ages → And many a power ballad.
 - Even those words might bring a melody to mind.
 - If you hum it for the rest of the day, you're welcome.
- Use the term "love" a lot BUT find it's quite hard to define → How would you define it?
- Turns out that the Greek language can help us out.²
 - NT was originally written in Greek and in Greek has four words for love...
 - Helpful considering our overuse (pizza/wife).
 1. EROS – Sensual, physical love (where we get "erotic").
 2. STORGE – Family love (parent to child).
 3. PHILOS – Brotherly love (friendship/roommates – "Philadelphia").
 4. AGAPE – An unconditional attitude that results in action.
- It's this last term that's used here in the fruit of the Spirit → So let's chew on definition:
 - ***Love is an unconditional attitude that results in action.***
 - **Unconditional:** Not earned or deserved → Not given as a reward for good behavior → Don't necessarily get anything in return for it → Isn't withheld when someone messes up...

- **Attitude:** Important point here is that it starts on the inside...
 - Disposition toward someone, way of thinking and feeling about them...
 - Where you desire the best for them...
- **Results in action:** Starts internally but expressed externally → Concrete results.
 - NOT: Passive, gooey-eyed emotionalism.
 - BUT: Active, concrete, and tangible → Money-where-the-mouth-is...
Love is an unconditional attitude that results in action.
- This definition is not typically what our world has in mind when it talks about love.
 - Sad illustration of this when looked up “love” in the dictionary this week.
 - Merriam-Webster lists three uses:³
 - (1) Strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties |
Maternal *love* for a child. [STORGE]
 - (2) Attraction based on sexual desire: affection and tenderness felt by lovers |
After all these years, they are still very much in *love*. [EROS]
 - (3) Affection based on admiration, benevolence, or common interests |
Love for his old schoolmates. [PHILOS]
 - There isn’t a fourth use... and in all the entries that follow, nothing approaches the kind of love that the Bible is talking about when it uses this term **AGAPE**.
- What is love? **An unconditional attitude that results in action.**

Transition: That’s our first question.

- Before asking how we can love like this, very important we ask second question first...
- Move from definitions to the gospel and ask...

HOW HAS JESUS LOVED US?

All kinds of passages we could pick to illustrate love from the life of Jesus → But let’s look at the one that we read a moment ago (Luke 5:12-13).

While [Jesus] was in one of the cities...

- Making way through Galilee performing incredible miracles, healing sick/diseased, and generally taking everyone’s breath away.
- Here we find him – likely on the outskirts of a city – because...

...there came a man full of leprosy.

- Passage communicates tone of shock – lit. says: “*lo and behold, a man full of leprosy!*”
- If ever there was a shunned class, here it is:
 - Leprosy is **ugly** – Ghostly rash cover the body as extremities begin to crumble.
 - Leprosy is **infectious** – Meant lepers were banished to outskirts of the city.
 - Leprosy was **fatal** – No treatment or cure would lead to certain death.
 - Leprosy was **unclean**...
- And Luke, the doctor, says this man is **full of leprosy**:
 - Clearly in advanced stages.
 - Goal was to stay as far away from him as possible.

And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him...

- Man comes up to Jesus...
 - Drops to his knees and falls on his face.
 - Bandages flowing. Sores oozing.
- Everyone in the crowd takes big step back...
- Then the man speaks → Begs Jesus, pleads with him, implores him:

...Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.

- It's a heartbreaking request:
 - Aware of his desperate condition AND aware Jesus has power to help.
 - But doesn't know if Jesus will help...
- Then Jesus does something unexpected:

Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean."

- Notice what he says: **I will; be clean.**
 - You see your need and you see my power; that's good!
 - But see something else – I am always willing to help those in need. (**Attitude.**)
- Next, notice what Jesus does: **Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him...** (**Action.**)
 - The faces in the crowd grimace as Jesus raises his hand.
 - Some turn away while others cover eyes of their children as reaches for the man.
 - But then think about it from the leper's perspective:
 - Suddenly feels something he's not felt in a long time...
 - The compassionate touch of another human being.
- For Jesus, this touch could be infectious, could be fatal – definitely makes him unclean.
- But look what happens...

And immediately the leprosy left him.

- Turns out the healing of Jesus is more contagious than leprosy.
 - The healing is instantaneous and complete.
 - Imagine the man staring at his hands in disbelief.
- Jesus took the leper's uncleanness upon himself and by so doing made him clean.

I love this story from Jesus's life bc it directly foreshadows how Jesus loves us in his death.

- He takes our spiritual sickness upon himself to heal us and make us clean...
 - **2 Cor 5:21: God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**
 - On the cross Jesus took our sin upon himself so that we would be forgiven.
- It's **unconditional** love:
 - Not earned or deserved → Not given as a reward for good behavior → Isn't withheld when we continue to mess up...
 - Takes us as we are – ugly, fatal disease of sin – and heals us by his grace.
- It's an **attitude**:
 - Disposition of love toward us...
 - He is willing to do whatever it takes to make us clean...
- And he **acts**:

- **Rom 5:8:** God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- **Jn 3:16:** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
- The cross is the ultimate demonstration of love:
 - An unconditional attitude that results in action.*
- **[Unbeliever]:**
 - You want this kind of love? You can have it. Want to be loved like that? Can be.
 - Jesus will forgive your sin and bring healing to your life.
 - Maybe you need that today.
 - Maybe feel the shame over mistakes you've made or pain from the ways life's beaten you up...
 - All you must do is what the leper did → Ask Jesus to help you and he will.
- **[Believer]:** Remember his love for you is what empowers you to love others.
 - We don't jump from what love is to what it looks like in our lives → From definition to application...
 - Instead, application always comes through the gospel → Through Jesus.
 - Reminder that the fruit of the Spirit is not a list of ways in which you're a terrible person and must do better.
 - Beautiful description of who you can now be in response to God's love.
 - It's only in response to his love that we ask our third question...

HOW CAN WE LOVE OTHERS?

- All kinds of ways could answer question → But here's what struck me this week...
 - Really don't want this series to be up-in-the-clouds, highfalutin, philosophizing about the virtues of the Xn life...
 - Really want to grow in this fruit...
 - So here's my invitation...
- Loved by Jesus, love someone actively this week.*

THE CLOSE

- **Love someone.**
 - Charlie Brown: "I love mankind. It's PEOPLE I can't stand!"
 - C. S. Lewis: "*It is easier to be enthusiastic about Humanity with a capital 'H' than it is to love individual men and women, especially those who are uninteresting, exasperating, depraved, or otherwise unattractive. Loving everybody in general may be an excuse for loving nobody in particular.*"⁴
 - Who comes to mind in your life?
 - Brothers/Sisters. Neighbors. Enemies.
 - Spouse? Kids? Colleague? Roommate? Friend?
 - Who is the Spirit putting on your heart?
- **Love them actively.**
 - Jesus healed everyone differently...
 - We need to love people that way too...
 - Does your *someone* need the gift of your forgiveness?

- Do they need the gift of perseverance?
- Do they need the gift of a listening ear?
- Do they need the gift of your voice?
- Maybe they need the gift of counsel – and be thoughtful about it:
 - Maybe they need encouragement...
 - Maybe they need to be challenged...
- Or maybe they need something practical, like the gift of a meal... And again, be thoughtful about it...
 - Do they need an Uber Eats gift card that they can use in peace?
 - Or do they need you to join them at the table?
 - (Maybe need gift of presence or maybe need gift of space.)
- Whatever it is, reflect on how Jesus has loved like this → And love the same way.
 - In a world that doesn't know the love of God → Literally doesn't have a definition for it...
 - We get to make God's love known...
 - *Loved by Jesus, love someone actively this week.*

CONCLUSION

- This isn't self-improvement...
 - It's not, *The Power of Positive Thinking*.
 - Might not find out who moved your cheese.
 - Might not even win friends or influence people.
- Instead, this is the fruit of the Spirit → Loved by Jesus, we can grow in love.
 - Live the life God designed you to live.
 - A life where we become like him.
 - The life for which we long.

RESOURCES AND ENDNOTES

Resources

This list contains some of the resources that were used to prepare this sermon series. Check them out if you want to dig a little deeper.

- Jay Kim, *Analog Christian: Cultivating Contentment, Resilience, and Wisdom in the Digital Age*.
- C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*.
- C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*.
- Martin Luther, *Galatians*.
- Douglas Moo, *Galatians*.
- Redeemer Presbyterian Church, *Paul's Letter to the Galatians*.
- John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*.

Endnotes

¹ Stat accessed [here](#) on 4/13/24.

² See C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, for the seminal treatment of these terms.

³ See [here](#).

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, chapter 29.