

WARNING: TERMS AND CONDITIONS DO NOT APPLY

Series: God Is Love
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Unconditional Love
John 21:15-17

My beloved friends, let us continue to love each other since love comes from God. Everyone who loves is born of God and experiences a relationship with God. The person who refuses to love doesn't know the first thing about God, because God is love

That is an excerpt from a letter written by a guy called John. John was a follower of Jesus and one of his friends.

His passion is for everyone to come to know and believe in Jesus. He was convinced that this was the single greatest thing to have happened on earth and that people needed to hear about it and join in the joy. And one of the things he writes has been our focus for the collection of talks we are doing. God is Love.

John gets to the point where he is convinced that if you could sum everything God is, the sum total is love. He is convinced that creation is breathed into existence as an act of love. That the world continues to exist and being held together in its place by the creator as an act of love. That love was bold enough thorough Jesus to walk with the weak, to die for enemies because God is love.

Here is what he is saying that we often miss, God is love. He loves us so much. I am so convinced of this that I am compelled to write about it, to invite you into this great joy. I think it is critically important for us to realize that God loves us not just because the Bible says and that in fact, the Bible says so because it is true.

Imagine, your daughter writes you a letter from the school or a text message. Or for those of us who went to school before mobile phones were very cheap and the only way to woo someone you liked was through writing letters. Do you believe your daughter or husband or friend loves you because they wrote it or do you believe what they wrote because they actually do?

Here is an interesting experiment. Imagine you are with a friend you really care about and they received a text message from someone who is very kind to them and treats them well. And the text ended with "I Love you" Some guys would go, "Nice" or some ladies may go, "Awww, that's so sweet" Why? The letter speaks of what is already evident.

Let's change the scenario, your friend receives the text from someone who treats them very badly. Takes every chance they get to hurt or embarrass them and it ends with "I love you" What's your reaction? Mine would be, "Oh, seriously!!" Because the 2 just do not add up.

It's the same situation. The reason letters such as these written by apostles and some of their friends are so precious to the church is because they were writing of existent and evident truth.

My invitation to us is that we can intentionally step into the love God is inviting us to every day because he does love us. I think every rising of the sun is a new opportunity for us to

experience and know God's love and it is all around us and so when we finally read the Bible our spirit agrees with the inspired writings. That the song becomes Jesus loves me this I know and so the Bible tells me so.

It's about believing it, it's about accepting it, it's about confessing it and learning to see it in our everyday normal life. Often the supernatural is clothed in the natural.

And to achieve that I have been Juxtaposing God's love with love from people around us. To see similarities and to draw out differences just because love from people is imperfect and God loves us perfectly. We need the Holy Spirit to show us God's perfect love. Love from our family and friends is often because of something.

Our society is very interesting. Have you seen Adverts on TV where they entice you to buy a service? Especially bank loans? They make it look like it is all that is missing in your life. They make the cost look worth your while and after that they quickly say these words "Warning Terms and Conditions Apply".

They say them so fast you barely take notice until you have breached one of those terms and conditions.

You see, unfortunately when we love people and promise to give them the world what we often do not tell them are the terms and conditions.

You know those times we tell people, "I love you because you are beautiful" or "I love you because you are kind." "I love you because of all those." What essentially we are saying is that when that quality that drew us to them changes we won't be so sure what to do? Some of our parents loved us that way.

Let me give us some credit. Some of us say, "I love you because you love Jesus."

What happens to our love for them if ever they are shaken by doubt and they fall away from the faith?

But you see this is essentially the kind of one that we are used to. It is transactional, it is conditional. And what it means is that we often project that on God too. So we really try hard hoping to win God's love. We keep a list of things we think are required of us by God and try to keep them. Why, because we are trying to win God's love. And then what we do, is project that to others too. We decide how much people have to do or not do to be loved by God.

But I think God invites us to unconditional love. The kind of love that is in spite of and not because of. The kind of love that we do nothing to gain and can do nothing to lose. What does unconditional love look like?

Let's pray

John 21:15-17

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Feed My lambs."

He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?"

He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You."

He said to him, "Tend My sheep."

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?"

And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You."

Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep."

Some of us are familiar with this story. Some of us are not. Or even have any idea what implications this conversation has. This is a conversation between Peter and Jesus after he had risen from the dead and right about the time he is taken into the sky in their presence.

Jesus has appeared to his disciples and made them breakfast and then it appears something really intense is happening. Peter seems to be receiving some sort of restoration and his relationship with Jesus is being mended.

Anyone who has heard of church history either as a believer or just someone interested in history knows that Peter was a notable leader in the early church and we even have some of his words surviving in our bibles today. But were it not for this conversation, Peter may have ended up as a footnote in the story of Jesus. This is why; the whole world knows that Judas' betrayed Jesus. We also know of another traitor, the only difference is that we celebrate him. This man Peter.

Before Jesus died, he promised he was ready to follow Jesus to the grave. You remember Jesus saying that the evidence of love between friends is when one is ready to die for the other. Peter is saying a version of this. That he was ready to die for Jesus. They are at dinner and passions are high and it's an emotional moment and all they know is love. And Jesus knows the weight of this so he tells him "Peter, come on. We both know you will not. In fact, you will do the opposite, you will deny me."

On the night of Jesus' arrest, Peter draws out a knife and cuts off the ear of someone who has come with the arresting party. Peter is ready to fight to defend Jesus. Have you seen those videos where a couple is walking together and someone shows up from around a corner and pranks them and all of them run leaving each other? Mostly the guys? At least stop and try to protect or save your partner. Peter was not that guy, he drew his sword and was ready for a fight. Adrenaline runs high and Peter is ready to fight.

Then Jesus is taken away and they follow him. It becomes clear to Peter and the disciples that Jesus is actually going to die. Adrenaline is not as high anymore or at least it is not pushing him to fight but to flight. Presented with a different option, Peter denies Jesus not once, not twice but three times. A traitor. This is betrayal when love needs him to show up.

We all know how betrayal can sting. When our people choose other people or other things over us. When we are cheated out of what is rightfully ours by the people we really trusted or the people where we're expected to protect us. When this happens you vow to protect yourself, you promise never let traitors come that close.

When this happened to Jesus, he did a very different thing. Once he shows up and makes breakfast for Peter and secondly he restores him back to the pastoral position he had before. Not even betraying Jesus could make Jesus love Peter any less or trust him any less.

Instead of love recoiling, love unfolds, instead of love self-preserving love opens up and restore. Instead of love withholding and putting new conditions that have to be met, love restores and loves again.

Jesus says, come I love you and Terms and Conditions Do Not Apply. My love is unconditional.

We find it easier to accept that God loves when we think we are meeting all his conditions. We think there are some fine print terms and conditions to be fulfilled to be loved by God. And so as long as we think we are in good with him. We believe we are loved. We shout God's promises.

I can do all things through Christ

The Lord makes all things work for good etc

Can we still believe in this kind of love even when we are not at our best?

But we could betray Jesus and that would not make him love us any less. Literally, there is nothing you could think of that would make God love you any less. In fact, God meets us with healing and restores us. When the world would put us on probation and write us off for the relationship God restores us to relationship.

When I was a young boy people liked me. You know, I was the son of a pastor and in our culture pastors are pretty important people and so I was important by association or by birth. Hereditary importance. Not just me. All my dad's boys. All the kids in our areas would not make a decision unless we were there or do anything in our absence and that kind of thing.

I was doing pretty good in school. And so that opened doors to being the teacher's favourite. Which actually got me into trouble with my dad later on. When I did not score as high as he had hoped I would in our final exams he said that my previous scores were all favours from teachers haha. And by the way, I had scored really well. I was moderately a good person. I did not break any major rules. I was never rude, at least not to people who knew my dad or were my teachers. Other people, I assure you had a different story.

Then I joined the worship team at church. And there is nothing as beautiful as being the model kid and even God approves of it. You are doing great in school, you're fairly likeable to your parents, you don't get into trouble much and you are in the worship team? That is how everything going good looks like. And even better I would go on to become aware of God's presence at that young age. Isn't it beautiful to be in worship and everything about you responds to God?

Do you remember the exams I mentioned where I did not score as high as my dad hoped I would? Those were my last exams before High School. I scored pretty high but not high enough to go to the School we both wanted where I would have gotten a full scholarship. But that was the beginning of a very interesting journey.

I started with an A like all brilliant freshmen in High School but I did not stay there. But you see when you have been taught that you are creme de la creme you begin to imagine that there is something good about you that other people do not have. You begin to think that every other person who is not having it good it is because there is something wrong they are doing. They are not good enough. So I legally became the proverbial pharisee. The guys who beat their chest before God and count all the good things they do and all the things they do right.

So I was very self-righteous around people. I knew the right thing to do and say and could not understand why some of them found it difficult to simply stick to the rules. Be obedient, think and say the right things. No wonder they do not do so well in exams, no wonder they dislike authority and no wonder they do not experience God as I do. I thought I had earned God's love. And unfortunately some of live as if they have earned God's love.

But life is not that simple. For One, my grades started crashing under the weight of just being an adolescent. Was not always my dad's friend cause now I wanted things that he did not agree with. Finally, I was on the same side as my older brothers when they would say how they felt my parents were old school and hide some of the things they wanted to do.

I started getting into all kinds of trouble. I started seeing cracks in my well-built wall of self-righteousness. I knew what things I thought God required of me and I was not footing the bill anymore. My thoughts were not always pure, my actions were not always good, how treated others was not always great. You know all the kind of things you can be introduced to in high school and at the university. I became everything I saw in those people. Those people whom I thought must have made God very angry. Those people who had crises in life was probably because they did not honour God well enough.

And you know the truth is, Many years later after becoming awake to my own wretchedness, I still have very big struggles. I still don't always do things right, I still make mistakes, I still don't always have pure thoughts or pure actions. My life is often in crisis I am everything I used to think should be the life of those who have made God very angry.

However, there is also another thread of truth in all that. When I was full of myself, self-righteous and thought I had earned God's love I was very aware in my spirit of God' love. Praying or worship or music, in general,, was so full of God's Spirit and presence. God's love had no Terms or Conditions. It was just Love.

When I was awakened to my emptiness and imperfection and brokenness, I was still aware of God. Even in my most darkest moments whether it was because of a crisis in life or because of a failure on my part God has always been present. I have never felt the rejected by God or that he would not answer when I call. And this really puzzled me. Because in my mind that is not how love is supposed to work. I am supposed to toe the line, believe all the right things, I am supposed to keep all the rules for God to love me. And that is what I projected to everyone else. I did not think much of them because they did not keep the standards I kept. But Experiencing God's mercy when I not only did not meet his standards but was unable to meet the standards I kept for myself was a new experience of unconditional love.

You see some of us, have no idea that God's love for us is not dependent on how good we are. On how many Sundays we show up or how much money you put in the offertory. Or even how sin free you are. Whatever your definition of sin is. Wherever you woke up from this morning.

Sometimes I realize that people in the church do not want to say this because we think that would be saying to people that they are licensed to live in sin. Because people both in and out of the church are struggling with sin then this truth is better told especially by the church. Because only love can free us from sin. You see, God hating sin and God loving us unconditionally are two truths that are not mutually exclusive.

Only love can cover sin. We know this. Haven't you defended your spouse or kid when in your heart you know that you two need to have a conversation as soon as you get home? Because only knowing you are perfectly and unconditionally loved can even bring you to desiring to live right.

I visited the communities living in the dumpsite on Friday. It is crazy what poverty pushes people to do. Then some of the sad stories you hear is that they will accept prayer, they will accept gifts and help from Jesus people but will not give their lives to Jesus. Not because they do not want to, but they think the things they have done or continue to do disqualify them from God's unending love.

Unfortunately, it's not just out there that people think they are excluded from God's love because of they have not met the conditions. Even in church some don't think God loves them as much because they just do not meet the standards.

God's love for you is not dependent on anything you can do or will do or have done. God's love is not dependent on who you are, who you have been or who you will be. God's love is wholly dependent on who he is.

Because God's love for us is not dependent on how well we do, on how many rules we keep.

You know we sing the words, How high, how wide, how deep is your love. But sometimes we fail to get the implications of what we sing.

There is no greatness that you could rise too that would make you too great for God's love. You could be uncomfortably rich and famous or powerful but God's love is still higher than that. It will not limit God's love.

There are no depths that you could sink too, that would make God not love you. You could be Hitler, you could be an angry mom, or a bitter dad, you could be in illicit sexual relationship whatever lows you can imagine, You still would not reach the depths of God's love.

There is nothing to your right or your left that could distract you enough for God to love you. It could be politics, it could be religions, it could be doubt. You will never reach to wide for God's love.

There is nothing before you or behind you that would be too great for God to love you. It could be your past that is not great talking about or a future where you are not everything you thought you would be or everything you said you are. Even then there is nothing that would be more steadfast than God's love

So here are a few questions to think about. If you stopped coming to church if you stopped reading the Bible and going tithe if you failed terribly tomorrow do you think God would still love you?

Let's pray