

Title: “Do you love me?”

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Romans 4:1-8, 13-17 & John 3:1-17

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Lesson: *We see God's love not as an unconditional action towards us but as a reaction to how we present ourselves to Him. We define this relationship in a worldly context because that's all we know. We have no other model of this type of love that we can relate to, that we can look to for understanding. It makes no sense to us that someone who we rebel against, who we turn away from so regularly, who we show animosity towards so often, could love us so deeply.*

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

There were two young children sitting on the school playground talking during one recess:

Girl: “Do you love me?”

Boy: “Yes, Dear.”

Girl: “Would you die for me?”

Boy: “No. Mine is an undying love.”

That took a left turn. Now, the conversation is humorous, but these young children were on to something extremely important, and what they were subconsciously reaching for aims at the very heart of our passages today. You see, the girl asks if the boy loves her, and he answers in the affirmative, but she's not satisfied with just that answer; she wants more. You see, to her, she knows that love is much more than a feeling; she knows that to *love* means to *do*. Without action, love is just a word. And so, she asks again. She says, “If you love me, how will you show me?” She places his love on trial, in a sense; she offers nothing herself, comes with empty hands, and she asks him to provide the evidence, to show his love for her. “Do. You. Love. Me?”

If we play this conversation out differently it might go like this:

Girl: “Do you love me?”

Boy: “Yes.”

Girl: “Why do you love me?”

The boy would probably answer that he loves her because of who she is and how she makes him feel. He would list all of her characteristics: her humor, her beauty, her kindness, her patience with him. And all he lists would serve as evidence of his motivation to love her. To put it another way, his love is a response to who she is and how she acts towards him. So, in many of our relationships, we approach love the same way. We give our love based upon who that person is in our life: our spouse, our child, or even our friend. We don't give our heart and soul to someone whom we have no relationship with, and we struggle to accept the fact that Jesus has a relationship with everyone, knows everyone, even those that we don't think are worthy of being known by him. You see, our

love, the love we give, is conditional; it's impossible for it to not be, because we live in a sinful world, and we are a sinful people, and we can't comprehend love in any other way.

So, when we read today that "God so loved the world" and we internalize it to "God so loved us" we see his love through these same sinful lenses. We see his love not as an unconditional action to us but as a *reaction* to how we present ourselves to him. We define this relationship in a worldly context because that's all we know.

Girl: "You don't love me!"

Boy: "I love you completely! Why would you say that?"

Girl: "Because I won't share my snacks with you."

It makes little sense to us that someone who we rebel against, who we are selfish towards, could love us so deeply. But we read about it in passages like this and we try to convince ourselves of its truth, but deep down inside we doubt. But we want to believe it, we have to believe it, because we know it's the only hope we have. So, what do we do?

Boy: "But I love you, even if you don't share your snacks with me!"

Girl: "OK. You said you love me, so you love me."

But she doesn't believe it. And so, she carries around this burden, this guilt. She shares her snacks with him regularly at first, and then occasionally, and finally.... Never. And all the while the guilt keeps building and building until she can't carry it any longer. And its then that she approaches him:

Girl: "You say you love me, and you keep saying it, but I know it's a lie because... because... just look at me. There is nothing good about me. There is nothing I do that deserves your love. I don't even share my snacks with you."

We do the same thing. We list all of our shortcomings, all of our failures, and all of our sins. And take inventory of every single reason why God shouldn't love us, and we package them all up and place them on our shoulders - ready to carry them ourselves. But at some point, they get too heavy and so, just like the girl to the boy, and just like Nicodemus to Jesus, we travel the cover of darkness because we don't want him to see us as we truly are. We slip into his chamber through a back door and hesitantly approach his throne, hoping that in the darkness he won't see the burdens that we carry, the sins that we have committed against him.

And just like the little girl, we call out ". There is nothing I do to deserve your love."

But in that moment, his light shines on us brightly and exposes our true identity. And instead of punishment, he comes down from his throne and he takes the burden from our shoulders and places it upon his own. And he reminds us that he has already carried it up the cross where he suffered the consequences for us. And then he embraces us and whispers into our souls, "I. Love. You. This is not a love that is conditioned upon your love for me. It is not a love that is a reaction to who you are. This is a love that is one way, only. And it is a love that promises you salvation, an eternal life with God, our Father." But he doesn't stop there. He wants us to understand his love not just know *about* his love; he wants us to experience the reward which he suffered and died to earn

for us, and so he sends to us the Holy Spirit. And into our hearts it finds residence and it gives to us the faith to believe this love.

And we come to understand these words:

¹⁶“For God so loved the world,¹⁷ that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

And just like that little girl, we ask, “Do you love me?”

And Jesus replies, “Yes, I do.”

And we ask, “Would you die for me?”

And he says, “I already did.”

This is the action of God’s love. This is how we know that he loves us. The only question left is how we will respond to it. How will we show ourselves that we are loved by God? How will we show the world that we are loved by God? How will we show the world that *they* are loved by God?

Please pray with me.

When I think of God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
On that Cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee
How great Thou art.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And lead me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow with humble adoration
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

In your name we pray. Amen.