

## In the Land of our Sojourn: A New Kind of Love

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on August 10, 2014

### Introduction

- ❖ We've been discussing a lot in the past few weeks about what sets apart Christians from the rest of society. As we've been going through the book of 1 Peter, we've seen how, just like first-century Christians, we're living in a day and age where our non-Christian colleagues and neighbors are likely to consider our beliefs and values rather strange and even freakish. We're no longer a privileged majority in this country operating out of the cultural center.
  - We're being pushed to the margins. That's pretty clear, but that's no reason to fret or fear. Because, in the margins, we can better resonate with the early church, with Peter's audience. We can better identify with their trials and tribulations. We can share their identity as "elect exiles", as a prophetic minority tasked to speak a message of hope and grace to a lost people living in this land of our sojourn.
  
- ❖ We've been talking a lot about about what sets us apart. What makes us holy. Different. Strange. I think *stranger* and *exile* do a good job defining Christians in contrast to our dominant culture. Those labels tell what Christians are *not* like.
  - But today I'd like to come from the other angle and ask what Christians *are* like. We're not just defined by what we aren't. It's also by what we are. *So what are we?* This is the direction Peter starts to take in chapter 1:22. **Here in our text he begins to define Christians and Christian community as a loving family.**
  
- ❖ Peter has already alluded to this concept in a number of places. Addressing God as our "Father" (1:2, 3, 17) and Christians as those who are "born again" (1:3) and as "obedient children" (1:14). So the whole idea of Christians being born into a new family with God as Father has been fairly established. And now Peter builds upon this family motif in order to describe our relationship with each other – specifically the kind of love we share.
  - **There's a new kind of love that characterizes Christian community.** A love that continues to set us apart from the rest of society. *So what kind of love are we talking about?* That's what we'll consider today. I've got another three points. 1) Christian love is a brotherly love. 2) It's a miraculous love. 3) It's a gospel-rooted love.

### Christian Love is a Brotherly Love

- ❖ First, Christian love is a brotherly love. See v22, "*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.*" The primary command here is for Christians to love one another. To love each other with earnest, in purity, from the heart. Love is what you were saved for. Peter says, "*for a sincere brotherly love.*"
  - We're talking about loving each other as if we're family. **That's brotherly love and that ought to characterize our relationship with other Christians.** Jesus taught this to Peter. One day someone told Jesus that his mother and brothers were looking for him, and Jesus asked that man, "*Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?*"
    - Then he stretched out his hand towards his disciples and said, "*Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*" (Mt. 12:46-50).

- ❖ Peter was there when Jesus said that. That lesson stuck with him and now shapes the way he characterizes Christian community. **We're a family so we ought to love each other like family.** We may not be related by blood, but we're related by spirit, which runs much deeper.
  - On another occasion, Jesus taught Peter and his friends that when they love as he loves and direct that love towards one another, then all people will know that they are his disciples (Jn. 13:35). Brotherly love makes us stand out in the eyes of the world. It sets us apart.
  
- ❖ The second-century Greek historian **Lucian**, who had little respect for Christians, couldn't help but be impressed by their brotherly love. He wrote, "*It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator Jesus has put it into their head that they are brethren.*" **They had the idea put in their heads by Jesus and by his apostles like Peter that they were brethren.** That they're family.
  
- ❖ Let me ask you: ***Do you have other Christians in your life with whom you share a sincere brotherly love? Have you developed relationships with other believers that are deep enough, significant enough, to be characterized as sincere brotherly love?***
  - I'm not just asking if you have friends at church. We've all experienced those kind of friendships at church where you really like each other, you really enjoy each other's company, you meet together regularly, you worship together, learn together, pray together. You genuinely love each other as friends...*as friends!* But not as brethren. Not as family.
    - *Have you developed that kind of relationship with other Christians where you can sincerely say that you love him like a brother, you love her like a sister?*
  
- ❖ **When you love someone like family, there is a level of sincerity that you don't typically find among friends.** That word for "*sincere*" literally means without hypocrisy. We're talking about a love that has no pretenses. Where you're not putting on a face.
  - That's how we are with family. **You are most like yourself when you're with family.** Now that could be an encouraging or depressing thought for you. But it's true. When you're with family you're less guarded. You don't usually put on a face.
    - **But with friends at church or in small group, we're often putting on faces.** Pretending like our lives are more put together than they really are. Yes, we love each other but is it a sincere love? Is it like family?
  
- ❖ I know some of you are thinking: I just can't do it. That's just not me. Some people have that ease in building these kind of bonds where you love like family, but I just don't have it in me to love that way. I'm too introverted and reserved. I'm too insecure and self-conscious. I don't have the personality or temperament to love like that. That's just not me.
  - But I think you've misunderstood Peter. **He's not assuming that anyone has it in themselves to love like this.** He's not assuming that all he has to do is give the command to love one another earnestly and people can pick right up and do it.

- ❖ **Notice how before he gives the command to love, Peter assumes that his readers have already been radically changed.** That they've already had their souls purified by their obedience to the truth. The word for "*purified*" shares the same root as the word for *holy* and the word for *sanctify*. It was used in the context of temple worship where an object or person was set apart as ceremonially clean and now able to be used in the worship of God.
  - So the phrase "*having purified your souls*" in v22 is another way of saying, "having set apart your souls from the uncleanness of this world for the worship of God". In other words, having been converted. **Peter is assuming they've all been converted.** He's writing this command to those who have been positionally sanctified. Who have been made positionally holy.
  
- ❖ In other words, Peter agrees you don't have it in you to love like this. That's exactly why you need to be purified first, to be set apart, to be converted, to be saved by faith *for the purpose* of sharing a sincere brotherly love with other Christians.
  - Now think about what this means: **If you can't detect any trace of this kind of brotherly love in your heart, then you probably should second-guess your salvation.** If sincere brotherly love is what we're saved for – but if that purpose is not being carried out in your life – then it would be prudent to question the state of your soul. *Has it truly been purified?*
  
- ❖ And if it hasn't, then how is one's soul purified? Peter says, "*by obedience to the truth*". Truth is referring to the gospel – the good news in v25 that was preached to them. **When they heard the gospel preached, they obeyed that truth.** They obeyed the gospel.
  - I know that seems like a strange way to say it. We usually speak of believing the truth, believing the gospel. Not obeying it. But they mean the same thing. If you look over at chapter 3:1, Peter addresses Christian women whose husbands don't believe. These husbands are described as those who "*do not obey the word*". That is, they don't believe the word of God. They're unbelievers. But Peter is writing to those who *do* believe the good news, who obey the truth.
  
- ❖ So if you don't detect any trace of this sincere brotherly love, then you've got to go back to the gospel – the gospel of God's unfailing love and grace to you through the life, death, and resurrection of his Son. Obey that gospel by believing on that gospel. Submit your will, your life, to that truth. That's how your soul is purified for a sincere brotherly love.
  
- ❖ Friends, if you don't have relationships with other believers that are marked by sincere brotherly love, then your life is really not that set apart from your nonChristian neighbors.
  - ***If the only people you love like family are your actual family members, then how is your life any different than the rest of the world?*** Even tax collectors love family like family. Christians are to be the ones who love non-relatives in that same way.

## Christian Love is a Miraculous Love

- ❖ Now I know what some of you might be thinking. You're thinking brotherly love is pretty awesome, but it's not unique to just Christians. You can think of nonChristians who are really good at showing their friends the same kind of love.
  - And you're right. NonChristians can love their friends just like family. Happens all the time. ***But what about sincerely loving a stranger just like family?*** What about sincerely loving someone who shares none of your interests? Who is coming from a completely different culture and speaks a totally different language? What about sincerely loving someone who sincerely hates you? Who has it in for you?
  
- ❖ I think we'd agree that if you can love someone like *that* with sincerely brotherly love, then that's unique. That's different. That's a kind of love that the world simply can't explain. It's nothing short of a miracle. And that's exactly what it is. Christian love is not just a brotherly love. It's also a miraculous love. That's our second point. **Christian love is a kind of love that can only be explained by a miracle.** More specifically, by the miracle of regeneration.
  
- ❖ Let's start reading in v22 again, "<sup>22</sup>*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, <sup>23</sup>since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable.*"
  - The key word there is "*since*". You've been commanded to love one another earnestly from a pure heart, *since* you have been born again. **Your new birth precedes your brotherly love.** In other words, this kind of love only flows out of a reborn heart.
  
- ❖ Now when Scripture refers to being born again it's just a way to describe God's sovereign act and prerogative in saving you. Back in chapter 1:3, Peter states that God is the one who causes us to be born again. No one causes their second birth. Just as no one causes their first birth. They're both miracles – a miraculous work of God. Scripture calls it the work of regeneration (Tit. 3:5). The word literally means a *new genesis*, a new beginning.
  
- ❖ Just think about the book of Genesis and the miracle of creation – of God's sovereign work of creating everything out of nothing. He spoke and light appeared. With a word, planets, stars, and galaxies popped into existence.
  - So when it comes to God's work of *re-gensis* – of causing new birth in a sinner's life – it's just as miraculous. **God speaks and that creates new life in us.** With a word, we become new creations, the old has gone, the new has come.
  
- ❖ Notice how Peter highlights the word of God and its role in our new birth. Look back at v23. There Peter says that we have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable seed *through the living and abiding word of God.* **So the word of God is the instrumental cause that he uses to cause me to be born again.** The word of God is powerful!
  - **Peter describes it as *living* in the sense that it has life and the power to create life and change lives.** It has the power to bring about something out of nothing AND the power to transform something into something even better.

- ❖ This is how someone is born again, how you become a Christian. It starts with hearing the word of God – more specifically, in v25, it starts with the good news being preached to you. God uses that preached word to work a miracle. By it he raises the dead to life. By it he calls sinners out of darkness and into his marvelous light (2:9). **By it he makes them new creations with new hearts and a new love that defies explanation.** It's a kind of love that can only be explained by a supernatural cause.
- ❖ In the third-century, a devastating plague swept across the ancient world. And remarkably it was the Christians who were caring for the sick, usually at the risk of contracting the plague themselves. Meanwhile, their pagan neighbors were throwing infected members of their own families into the streets even before they died. The brotherly love of Christians stood out in stark contrast and defied explanation.
- ❖ And it still does today. There's been a lot written in the news about the **two Christian missionaries who contracted the Ebola virus** while in West Africa providing medical care to other victims of the rapidly-spreading disease. Kent Brantly and Nancy Writebol have returned home for treatment making history as the first two Ebola patients on American soil.
  - Some people consider them heroic. But others, not surprisingly, consider them to be fools who are reaping the consequences of their foolishness. Donald Trump and Ann Coulter both made news by reacting to these missionaries with scorn. Not only did they question the wisdom of bringing them home for treatment, they even questioned the motives of the missionaries for going on such a dangerous trip in the first place.
    - *Why in the world would these Americans leave their families behind and risk their lives to help Africans they don't even know?* Clearly it must be for fame, to make a name for themselves, to gain the respect of the secular culture.
- ❖ Love wasn't even an option. Christian love is so strange in our day and age that it's not considered as a plausible explanation. *Why in the world would a Christian risk contracting a deadly plague just to help someone you don't know, someone who is sure to die anyway?* It doesn't make any sense. Because short of a miracle, it shouldn't.
- ❖ This is where we need to ask ourselves the hard questions. ***When you consider your small group or fellowship, do you think the world is easily capable of explaining your love for one another?*** When the culture looks and sees how we care for each other, support each other, love each other like family – can they explain that? Does it make sense to them?
  - **The sad fact is that when you consider most of our small groups/fellowship groups, the world gets it.** They look at us and say, *“Yeah I totally understand why you guys all love each other. You have so much in common. A common culture, a common ethnicity, a common career, a common education level, etc. I feel the same way with people from my own culture, my own ethnicity, my own colleagues and peers.”* That's what the world thinks when they look at Houston Chinese Church.

- ❖ I do find it troubling by how easy it is to explain our love and fellowship. What binds a church together should *not* be naturally explainable. **That's why I long for the day to be a part of a loving community here in this church that can only be explained by a miracle, by the supernatural work of regeneration.**
  - Don't you long for that day when nonChristians will be baffled by our love for one another? When they'll look at our small group or fellowship and ask, "*Man, why do guys love each other? You're so different. I wouldn't have expected you to be friends. Much less to love each other as family!*"
    - Then we have a great opportunity to point to the God of the gospel who caused us to be born again, who gave us a new heart with a new capacity to love in a new kind of way. **God becomes more real to our neighbors and colleagues because he ends up being the only explanation for our love.**
- ❖ May he speed that day. But in the meantime we can do our part. That would involve inviting people into our lives, into our homes, into our groups – where it doesn't matter their nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic class, etc. **Inviting them simply because God has put them in your life and on your heart.**
  - And that'll mean doing whatever is necessary to create a space, an environment, in your small group or fellowship that is welcoming, inviting, affirming to people who look and think and live nothing like you.
    - *Wouldn't that be awesome?* If a visitor came to your small group and witnessed firsthand your interaction with each other and then left scratching his head wondering where the love comes from. What a huge testimony that would be to the power of God and his gospel!

### **Christian Love is a Gospel-Rooted Love**

- ❖ If you're with me on this, if you want to see our church characterized by a brotherly, family-like love, a miraculous, unexplainable love, then we need to be deeply drinking from the gospel of grace. Because Christian love is ultimately a gospel-rooted love.
  - That's our third point. **If we want to be characterized by sincere brotherly love, if we hope to grow in this love, then we need to be rooted in the gospel.**
- ❖ I see this in chapter 2:1-3, "<sup>1</sup>*So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. <sup>2</sup>Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation – <sup>3</sup>if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.*"
  - Peter lists some sinful traits of the old life that tend to quench or smother brotherly love. Malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander. If we want to put these things away and put them out of our relationships AND become a community characterized and growing in love, then we need to desire the gospel like newborns crave milk. **You need to be feeding/drinking of the gospel if you want to grow up into Christians who love like this.**

- ❖ **This is why it makes no sense to me when Christians exhort other Christians to a life of sincere brotherly love by simply calling them to imitate Christ.** "Enough of all this theology talk. All this talking and preaching and teaching about gospel doctrines – substitutionary atonement, propitiation, expiation, justification, sanctification. Enough already with doctrines and dogmas. Let's get to loving. Let's get to being like Jesus. What would Jesus do? Go and do likewise. Be like him."
  - That'll mean loving your neighbor as yourself. That'll mean turning the other cheek and not retaliating against your enemies. That'll mean answering hate with love, even if that gets you nailed to a cross. That's what Jesus did. As his followers, that's the kind of life of love we're to imitate.
  
- ❖ Now don't get me wrong, imitating Christ is a great thing. The world would be a much better place if more people imitated Christ and his love. But here's the problem: **No one, absolutely no one, is capable of doing so if you simply appeal to their will. If you just tell them to follow Jesus' example. No one can love like he loved.**
  - If Jesus, while hanging there on the cross because of love, if his last words were "*Imitate me*" – that would not be gospel (good news). That would be bad news. Because I could never do it. Neither could you. Thank God that his last words were not, "*Imitate me*". No, his last words were, "*It is finished*". With his dying breath, Jesus didn't call us to action. He completed an action.
  
- ❖ He completed the atonement of your sins by his blood. He completed the propitiation (satisfaction) of God's holy wrath. He completed your redemption, your ransom, freeing your will from the enslavement to sin and self. He completed your reconciliation to God and secured your regeneration and adoption on the day all his saving benefits are applied to your life by his Spirit. Jesus finished it. "*He suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.*" (3:18)
  
- ❖ **This is the gospel and it is the root, the fuel, the food and drink for growth in Christian love.** It's in this gospel of grace that you're reminded of how Jesus (holy God) loved to the point of death, even death on a cross, those who were infinitely different than himself (unholy sinners). **This is what empowers you and compels you to love out of a reborn heart those very different from yourself – to love them as sincerely as family.**
  - When you're rooted in the gospel, when you're feeding and drinking from it daily, then a call to imitation makes sense and is actually possible. Then a call to be like Jesus and do as he did is no longer a veiled form of moralism with a Christian veneer.
  
- ❖ **Brothers and sisters, if you have indeed tasted the gospel and seen that the Lord is good, then keep drinking and keep desiring that pure spiritual milk.** Now I realize there are other references in the NT to *spiritual milk* where it's described as something we shouldn't be content with. Where Christians are chided for still drinking spiritual milk and not having grown up and grown a taste for spiritual meat (1 Cor. 3:2; Heb. 5:12-13).

- ❖ But Peter is not using the metaphor in that way. He's not suggesting that his readers are immature in the faith and can only handle the gospel, spiritual milk. **Rather he's using the metaphor of a hungry nursing child and suggesting that growing Christians are those who have a craving for the gospel.** Those who want to grow in Christ and grow in love should aim to be like infants in their longing for *pure spiritual milk*, the gospel.
- ❖ Think about how central the gospel is: Without the gospel being preached to you, without you hearing the gospel and obeying the gospel, you couldn't be born again. You wouldn't be a newborn Christian. **And if you are one, you won't grow up or grow in Christian love without the gospel being preached to you in a manner that lets you feed and drink deeply of it on a regular basis.**
  - In what practical ways are you feeding and drinking of the gospel? Are you committed to sitting weekly under gospel preaching? Have you joined an church and invited others to keep you accountable to the gospel, especially the call to repentance? Are you part of a group of believers that are committed to brotherly love and to exhorting one another to live in obedience to the gospel?
    - *Are you a member of a church? Are you a member of a small group of believers? Why have you put it off?* Perhaps that's the reason you feel stagnant, that's the reason why you're not growing in love. Joining a small group or joining our church would be a step in that direction.