

Remnant Life Church

May 26, 2019

## **The Story of Love: Introduction**

John 3:16; I John 4:16

What is the Bible as it relates to what we will be exploring?

- In the most simple and basic terms, the Bible is a love story
- The love of God for His creation
  - A love so great that the entire Old Testament is the story of a people set apart – the Jews
  - A love that would be extended to all people, even those not of that chosen race, both Jew and Gentile
  - A love so great that interwoven in those 39 books of the OT is the foretelling of the One to come who would make the final atonement sacrifice for the sin that separated us from God
  - A love so great that God sent His Son to die for the sins of man
  - And the 27 books of the New Testament tell the story of His Son as well as the books that teach us how we are to live as a forgiven, restored, and loved people

Love is a word that has the most intimate, most profound and deepest emotion within its definition

- Many strange things have been said about love
  - “Love is an itch deep down that you can’t quite scratch”
  - “Love is oceans of emotions surrounded by expenses”
- It is a word that is used freely with little or no thought given to its true meaning
- We love our new jacket, love our job, love our car, love pizza, love our favorite sports teams...
- And yet with that same word we express the most intimate and deepest feelings
  - love our spouse, love our children, love Jesus

Love is certainly more than words or emotion – love is also a verb, it must have action just as we read in **I Cor 13**.

- This is why I have said to so many that to love someone is what you show them not just what you say
  - Yet saying it is also very important
  - Love is not either/or it is both/and
  - Love is fully encompassing of every aspect of our lives

But love is also a choice

- In the depths of our God-created human psyche, all of us want to be chosen by love
- But there is a sense in every one of us that we don’t really deserve to be loved
  - After all, what merits that love be given to me?
  - Who or what makes that determination for each life?
- All of the very best love stories have this somewhere in their core
  - What must be sacrificed, given, lost, or required for love?

- Whether it Shakespeare's comedy about confusing choices in *Much Ado About Nothing*
- Or the doomed choices of love in *Romeo and Juliet*
  - The power of a love story is about how much is riding on love's choice
- And there is virtually no chance of figuring love out
  - 17<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher Blaise Pascal said, "Love has reasons which reason cannot understand."
  - Yet love is inescapable – it is how we were created to exist within the experience of our lives
- More books, songs, poems, movies, novels, and plays have been written about love than any other subject

Surely, the greatest love story of all time is the story of God's love

- It is as grand, as wide, and sweeping as all of creation
- The story of God's love is more powerful than any human mind could have conceived or written
- And it is deeply personal for each and every one of us
  - For He is the author, the creator of love
  - Not just by words, or deeds – how we are restricted in our expression
  - *God IS love! (I John 4:16)*

Since God is love, it is critically important that we know what we believe of God and His love and why

- It is our very limited understanding of this fundamental component of the character of God that sets the course, the direction, and the definition of love in our lives
- Our own love stories are powerful, but still faint echoes of the far greater love story of God's love for all of His creation

The word "love" is used in the NIV Bible nearly 700 times

- Not lovely, loved, lover, loving or any other derivative of the word – just "love"
- So what verses might we think of first?

**John 3:16-17** - *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

- We hear in these words of God's great love as well as see the action taken because of His love for us

**Luke 15** – the story of the prodigal son and his father's unconditional love

**John 13:34-35** - *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*

**Rom 12:9-10** - *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

Each of these passages demonstrates the fullness of love that is not only spoken but also acted on

- That is the blue-print of God's love for us
- given to us in a way that we can understand and should incorporate in our own lives

God's act of love is demonstrated most powerfully for us at the very beginning through marriage

- Created, instituted, and ordained by God
- **Genesis 2** – just after the creation of the world has been completed God establishes His first demonstration of active love
- **Gen 2:23-24** - *The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*

This is also why marriage is under such constant and unrelenting attack by the enemy

- It began with the ease at which a marriage can be dissolved
- Then it was the attempt to remove marriage completely as people then thought it was unnecessary and an antiquated concept – a piece of paper!
- Now marriage is being eroded even further as men marrying men and women marrying women
  - This is not a personal opinion – it is the Word of God
  - The word "wife" in the original Hebrew is Ish-shah
    - It is a feminine noun
    - Every usage of the word is female
    - There can be no other definition
  - Marriage is between a man and a woman – period!

And a further casualty of these demonic assaults on marriage is our idea, our concept, our understanding of what love is

Here is the story of God's love, the foundation of what we know love to be, and His choice to love His people unfolding in their history

In the beginning, God displays his love for all humanity by providing a perfect and beautiful world for us. Beauty isn't necessary for function, but God's love went beyond the pragmatic. He made a beautiful world, and then created us to be attracted to that beauty. Adam and Eve loved one another, but ultimately, they were created to be attracted to God, the most beautiful person in their experience.

Unbelievably, Adam and Eve reject God's love when they decide to reject his Word. What's truly unbelievable, though, is that their rejection of God's love doesn't bring the story to an end. God excludes them from the garden, but he continues to love them. He places enmity between them and their greatest enemy, the serpent who deceived them. He then reunites the two of them in love, and in practicality, loves them in the simple act of covering their shameful nakedness with clothes.

God continues to love the descendants of those who first rejected him. Though Cain and his heirs are rejected by God, Seth and his sons after him are loved by God down the long generations to Noah. While humanity's wicked hatred of God finally culminates in the flood, still God's love is

not extinguished. He chooses to save Noah and his family from destruction, and then specifically blesses Noah's son Shem, and the line that descends from him. Notice the pattern here. God loves all by giving all life. But he also seems to love some specially. Seth, not Cain. Noah, not all those around him. Shem, not his brother Ham.

In **Genesis 12** the story comes into sharper focus with God's call of Abram out of idolatry and into friendship and covenant with Him. He promises Abram that He has chosen him and that his descendants will become a great nation. And God fulfills that promise. He sets his love on Isaac, then on Jacob, and eventually on Jacob's descendants, who become the nation of Israel. He rescues them from their slavery in Egypt and sets them apart. He also gives that nation a covenant and calls them to be a blessing, an expression of love to the whole world. At Mount Sinai, God betroths the nation of Israel to Himself as His own special and uniquely loved people. Again, notice the pattern - a covenant is given to the ones He specifically loves.

Like Adam, Israel rebels against God by turning to other lovers, idols that their hands have made. God responds by judging Israel. But throughout the judgment, God continues to love His people. Perhaps the best picture of God's reconciling, patient, forgiving love occurs in the book of Hosea. There God tells the prophet to take a wife named Gomer. She is a prostitute. When she returns to her prostitution not long after their wedding day, God tells Hosea to go and reconcile with her. This, says God, is what His love for His people looks like and feels like.

Incredibly, God's people continue to spurn his love, preferring their idols instead. So God leaves them. He refuses to live in the house with her and her lovers, like a husband jealous for his wayward wife's affections. Ezekiel is given a vision of this heart-breaking event - God leaves His temple. As the Old Testament draws to a close, the temple stands empty, the prophets fall silent, and the throne is vacant. As the New Testament opens, almost all the tokens of God's love are gone.

Suddenly, into this seeming picture of loves lost labor, comes the greatest demonstration of love the world has ever seen. God sends Jesus, the Son He has loved from all eternity past.

Jesus lives the life of loving obedience toward God that we should have but didn't. Then he takes upon Himself our penalty for spurning God's love by dying our death on the cross. He calls it a new covenant in his blood. Wonderfully, death cannot hold him for as it is written in Song of Solomon, "love is as strong as death." In love Jesus rises from the dead, so that whoever repents of their sin and turns in faith to this Savior will be forgiven of his or her sins and welcomed back into God's loving embrace. Through Jesus, God proves His faithful love to His unfaithful people. Again, there is a covenant for God's special people.

Interestingly, the New Testament, especially John's gospel, lets us peek into the story behind the story. The story of God's love doesn't begin with creation, but with the eternal love that God the Father has for the Son, and that God the Son has for the Father. Jesus says in **John 5**, "*the Father loves the Son and shows Him all He does,*" and in **John 17**, "*Father glorify me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.*" God's love for a special people, it turns out, is wrapped up in His love for his Son.

Today that love still transforms unlovely people, sinners like you and me, into the radiantly beautiful bride of Christ, the church. Now we wait and hope once more for the demonstration of god's love to return. On that day, Jesus will take his bride home to a new heaven and a new earth, truly a world of love. That is the story of God's love.

- Our concept of love is taken from this expression of God's love
  - God' love is the very definition of unconditional

- It is not based on what we have done
- **Rom 5:8** - *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- Those who will not or cannot express their love most likely never had love expressed to them
  - But we are not bound to that poor example
  - The love of God goes deeper than the love of another person – even a neglectful or cold parent
- To accept, embrace, and reflect the love of God in your life is to love in a way that not only touches others but fulfills the longing of your own heart
- God created us to be loved and to love others
- But how do we do that when there are such perverse and self-centered loves all around us that permeate our lives every day?
- We will begin to look at that question in the weeks to come – giving all glory to God for His perfect love given freely to each and every one of us