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Dying to Love

1 John 3.16-18

Series: Blessed Assurance (Communion Series)

The Village Church

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I. Introduction

- A. One of the most debased words in the English language is one of its favorites
 - 1. It's the word "love"
- B. We're familiar with the phrase, "Love is a many-splendored thing"
 - 1. "Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing" is one of the first songs written exclusively for a movie, in this case, the 1955 movie of the same name
 - 2. It won an Academy Award for the best song that year
 - 3. The movie is set in Hong Kong and is a romantic drama featuring a widowed Eurasian doctor, played by Jennifer Jones, who falls in love with a separated American journalist played by William Holden
 - 4. They have their romantic encounters on a wind-swept hill for a brief period of time, and the conflicts occur when the character played by Jones is ostracized by her Chinese family
 - a. And when the American goes off on assignment to the Korean War
 - b. Their romance then continues by letter
 - 5. Eventually, she receives word that her lover has been killed in the war
 - a. But on the same day she receives his final letter to her
 - 6. In which he encourages her to be grateful no matter what happens to him because they were able to experience "that many-splendored thing" which most people never do
- C. Now what makes this movie and phrase an effective illustration for how the word "love" has become so debased is that in spite of the obvious on-screen chemistry the two actors appeared to share, the facts are that William Holden and Jennifer Jones couldn't stand each other
 - 1. Holden complained about nearly everything Jones was doing in her character portrayal
 - 2. That Jones was rude and arrogant to nearly everyone on the set
 - 3. And he even claimed that Jones chewed garlic before their romantic scenes just to be as off-putting as possible
 - 4. By the end of the production, they were not even speaking to each other
 - 5. Love is a many-splendored thing, indeed!
- D. One of the problems with the English word "love" is that it is so capable of manipulation and distortion
 - 1. In English we have this one word, "love", which is meant to cover a range of meanings

2. As C.S. Lewis pointed out, in Greek there are four distinct words for “love”
 - a. One of those words is the word **eros (Gk)** which refers to sexual love
 - b. It’s the word from which we get our English words like erotic
 - c. By the time the NT was written, eros had become so degraded by pagan idolatry that the word does not appear in the NT
 - d. Another word in Greek is **storgē (Gk)**; it refers to the love of family
 - e. That word is also not in the NT, though it arguably could have been
 - f. A third word is **philia (Gk)**; it involves the love of friendship and brotherly affection
 - g. We get our English words Philadelphia and philanthropy from philia
 - h. And we do find philia in the Greek NT; it represents, perhaps, the best kind of love humans can muster on their own
3. But the fourth word, and the most important NT word for love, is **agapē (Gk)**; while the verb form of the word, agapao, does appear in Greek literature before the NT, the noun form of agapē only first appears in the NT
 - a. And the significance of the word is that this kind of love is characterized by an abiding love, a love which does not vary
 - b. And is applied even when the object of that love is decidedly unlovely and unworthy of favor
- E. One of the great strategies of the enemy of our souls is the use of language
 1. Satan and those he influences love to take perfectly good words, words which evoke positive emotive responses, and bastardize them
 - a. Applying to them things that mean the opposite of their original meaning
 - b. And the way our culture plays fast and loose with the word “love” is a case in point
 2. Our culture likes to apply the word “love” to all kinds of illicit relationships, relationships that the Bible describes as abominations to God
 - a. “Love” indeed!
- F. That is why Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, takes a whole chapter to define and illustrate by example of what agapē really means
 1. And that kind of love raises the bar of the true meaning of the word
- G. And in our text this morning, which is 1 John 3.16-18, John, in his own unique way, encapsulates the meaning of agapē in as clear and concise way as possible
 1. Here’s what he says:
- H. Text
 1. **1 John 3:16–18** (ESV) —
 - a. 16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.
 - b. 17 But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?

- c. 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
 - I. It's most important to observe that this agapē love is rooted in the sacrificial death of Christ on behalf of believers
 - 1. And that this idea of love is meant to flow from the believer in a sacrificial way to others
 - a. Particularly to others who are in need
 - J. We return this morning to our communion series entitled Blessed Assurance, based on our study of 1 John
 - 1. The purpose of this epistle is stated clearly by John
 - 2. 1 John 5:13 (ESV) —
 - a. 13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life.
 - 3. So John's desire is that every true believer in Jesus Christ would be assured of his or her salvation
 - a. That we "may know that you have eternal life"
 - K. John has been fulfilling his purpose by providing several evidentiary tests
 - 1. Tests which if we are able to see in ourselves these evidences, we are able to be encouraged in our faith, confident that we truly belong to the family of God
 - 2. Tests
 - a. The Test of Love – that if we truly love our brothers and sisters, we can be assured of our salvation
 - b. The Test of Obedience – that if we obey the commands of Christ, we can be assured of our salvation
 - c. The Test of Truth – that if truly acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Son of God, we can be assured of our salvation
 - d. The Test of Abiding – that if we continue in our commitment to follow Christ we can be assured
 - 3. So once again, John elaborates on the Test of Love and gives us even more detail of what this love looks like as he seeks to assure us of our salvation
- II. Knowing Love
 - A. 1 John 3:16 (ESV) —
 - 1. 16 By this we know love...
 - B. The first thing we see in this text is that we can truly know love
 - 1. And the Greek word for know is ginosko (Gk)
 - a. It's a word that embodies, not just sensory perception, but knowledge that includes the experience of the object of knowing
 - 2. In other words, in Jesus Christ we can truly participate in and experience genuine love
 - 3. This is no academic understanding of an abstract concept
 - a. This is knowing love in a way that enables us to experience the love of God
 - C. And this is the love of God that we're talking about here

1. For agapē is unique in the NT because it emanates, not from any human origin, but from God
2. That is what ultimately sets it apart from the other types of love the Greeks understood
 - a. It's character is that of an abiding, unfailing, unalterable love
 - b. Which can only come from an eternal, wholly faithful and dependable Being
3. The origin of agapē is God
4. **1 John 4:8** (ESV) —
 - a. 8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**
5. **1 John 4:16** (ESV) —
 - a. 16 So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. **God is love**, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

III. **The Standard of Love**

- A. And then the text lays out for us *the* standard of love
- B. **1 John 3:16** (ESV) —
 1. 16 **By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us...**
- C. So the ultimate identification of genuine agapē love is self sacrifice
 1. And the ultimate self sacrifice is that of Christ Himself
 2. We can know this true love because it comes from God
 - a. And we can know its character because Jesus Christ laid down His life for us
- D. This, of course, is the very act of love that we observe – and participate in, and experience – in our sharing in the Lord's Supper
 1. And John says – and we can see it illustrated in the elements of communion – this is how we know genuine love
- E. It's interesting that in most of the places where the Bible speaks about the love of God, it speaks of the cross
- F. **John 3:16** (ESV) —
 1. 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.
- G. **Galatians 2:20** (ESV) —
 1. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- H. **Romans 5:8** (ESV) —
 1. 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- I. **1 John 4:10** (ESV) —
 1. 10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- J. So, *the* standard of love for us, *the* standard of agapē, for us is the death of Christ for all those who would ever believe in Him
- K. When we come to this communion service, we are coming for the express purpose of knowing and participating in the love of God
 - 1. Don't miss it!

IV. **Our Standard of Love**

- A. Now, all of that is wonderful – knowing, experiencing, the love of God in Christ Jesus as exemplified in the cross of Christ
 - 1. But John doesn't leave it there
 - 2. We might wish he'd have left it there, but he does not
- B. **1 John 3:16** (ESV) —
 - 1. 16 **By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.**
- C. Wow!
 - 1. Christ laid down His life for us!
 - a. But what does that mean?
 - 2. It means that we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers!
- D. John takes *the* standard of love – the death of Christ for us
 - 1. And turns it into *our* standard of love
 - 2. We too must give of ourselves in a like manner
- E. Now let's understand what that doesn't mean
 - 1. Christ's death for us atoned for our sins
 - a. His sacrifice was a propitiation
 - b. A wrath removing sacrifice
 - 2. We can never accomplish that for anyone else
 - a. We don't qualify to save anyone
 - b. We don't even qualify to save ourselves!
 - 3. Only Christ could take upon Himself all the sins of all those who would ever believe in Him
- F. But that doesn't mean that we're not called for the same kind of self-sacrificial love on behalf of others
 - 1. The kind of sacrificial love that gives up our own rights and prerogatives for the welfare and benefit of others
- G. And that's not a new concept in terms of the NT
 - 1. **Romans 12:1** (ESV) —
 - a. I I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
 - 2. We are to be living sacrifices
- H. In fact, this is the kind of lifestyle Jesus taught us to pursue
 - 1. **Matthew 16:24–25** (ESV) —
 - a. 24 Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

- b. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
 - 2. That is the essence of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus
 - 3. **John 13:34–35** (ESV) —
 - a. 34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.
 - b. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
 - 4. “As I have loved you...”
 - a. How did Jesus love us?
 - b. By dying for us
 - 5. That’s how we are to love one another
 - a. By giving up our rights and prerogatives, our desires and aspirations, our preferences and interests
 - b. And instead seek the welfare of our brothers and sisters
 - c. And that’s how, not only we, but the rest of the world will determine if we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ!
 - 6. When we engage in that kind of self-sacrificial love for others it identifies us with Jesus
 - a. Why?
 - b. Because His sacrificial love is *the* standard of love
 - c. Which then makes it *our* standard of love
- I. I want you to understand how rare that is in our culture
 - 1. Practically anything the world presents to us as some kind of so-called “love” involves a kind of transaction
 - a. In which I give up something in order to get something in return
 - 2. Rarely does someone give up his or her rights or prerogatives without anything in return
 - a. When that does happen, it is truly attention-getting
 - 3. And it is so rare that the world will take notice

V. **Practical Love**

- A. But what does this mean in practical terms?
 - 1. Well, John gets right to it
 - a. He says, “Let me tell you what this looks like
- B. **1 John 3:17** (ESV) —
 - 1. 17 But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?
- C. I think it’s interesting that John presses the point with a very provocative rhetorical question
 - 1. If you have something, and your brother needs it, and you don’t provide it, how can you presume that the love of God is in you?
 - 2. Ouch!
 - a. That’s hitting pretty close to home!

- D. But John is not alone in pressing this case with the 1st Century believing community
1. James 2:14–16 (ESV) —
 - a. 14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?
 - b. 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,
 - c. 16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?
 2. This is the antithesis of assurance of salvation!
 - a. James wants us to understand that to be lacking in this area is to place our very faith in question
- E. Most of us find ourselves living in a bubble where we are relatively unaware of the needs around us
1. At the same time at TVC we present numerous opportunities to give and to volunteer to help others in need
 - a. We have benevolent partners, thoroughly vetted and qualified to receive support
 - b. And regularly provide avenues of support to needy people
 2. But this is not about a program
 - a. This is about an attitude and disposition to help
 - b. So that when we put ourselves in a position to see others in need, are we ready and able to supply those needs
- F. I remember vividly when we first moved to Morgantown, WV
1. We had a number of needs the first couple of years and didn’t have the resources to cover those needs
 2. We had to move a household of furniture when we were house-sitting, and no place to store any of it
 - a. And didn’t have two nickels to rent any kind of storage facility
 - b. And there were three people who came to us and let us put our stuff in their places gratis
 - c. And they were all doing it because they were in this church that took seriously what Jesus said about denying self, taking up His cross, and following Him
 3. One time I borrowed a chain saw that I needed from a guy in that church
 - a. He was very willing to let me use it
 - b. When I offered to give him some money for its use, even to have the chain sharpened after I used it, he refused it
 - c. Why?
 - d. He said it was Jesus’ chain saw, not his
- G. So, the love of Jesus – *the* standard of love in dying for His own sheep
1. Becomes *our* standard of love in dying for our neighbors
 2. Which manifests itself in practical ways when we see need around us, have the capacity to give, and willingly follow Christ in sacrificial love

VI. Complete Love

- A. So then, how does John bring this passage to a conclusion?
 - 1. He brings it all together in an admonition
 - a. An admonition to not just talk the talk, but to walk the walk
- B. 1 John 3:18 (ESV) —
 - 1. 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.
- C. It's interesting that in this final admonition John uses a tender term of endearment
 - 1. "Little children" he says
 - a. Teknion (Gk)
 - b. This is nursery term for a small child – a toddler!
 - c. It's used in the NT metaphorically, of course
 - d. But always as a tender term of endearment
 - 2. So in this final admonition, John is the loving grandparent
 - a. Pleading with his precious spiritual grandchildren
 - b. Knowing that they need desperately to follow his lead
 - c. And care for their brothers and sisters around them
- D. So he says, "let us not love in word or talk"
 - 1. Now, he doesn't mean don't speak loving words of encouragement to others
 - 2. He means, don't *only* use words to express love
- E. And then he says, "but in deed and in truth"
 - 1. Like James, he says, put your actions where your mouth is!
 - a. Deeds are necessary to communicate genuine love
 - 2. But he also adds this interesting dimension
 - a. "But in deed and in *truth*"
 - 3. There is a truth dimension of this kind of love
 - a. Our giving must be wise
 - b. We can exercise due diligence in making sure the resources God gives us are applied for the purpose for which they are intended
 - 4. That's why we are careful in our benevolent ministries to qualify and evaluate the ministries we support
 - a. Because we want to love, not only in words, but also in deeds and in truth
- F. That's how this love is made complete

VII. Conclusion

- A. Remember where we've been
 - 1. We can know, experience, participate in – the love of God
 - 2. We know it by the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf – whose death we celebrate this morning in our Lord's Supper
 - a. That is *the* standard of love
 - 3. But *the* standard of love becomes *our* standard of love
 - a. We too are called to give of ourselves sacrificially for others
 - 4. That is exhibited practically when we see needs and respond to it for the benefit of others

5. And then John admonishes us to put our resources – our very selves – where our mouths are
- B. When you look at these elements of our Savior's death, is not your heart warmed to come near to Jesus and experience His love?
1. But now when you look at these elements of our Savior's death, do you not also see your own death to self?
 - a. Your own self sacrifice on behalf of your brothers and neighbors?
 2. Is that not the main way our world will become acquainted with who this Jesus is in truth?
- C. So when you come to this table, when you come to Jesus
1. See the death of Jesus for you
 2. And see also the standard of love for us all to practice