

208. The Gospel of John 20:1-14

Lessons in True Love-Part 2
A message by Pastor Phil Ballmaier
(2-5-23)

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We have come to the final chapter in John's Gospel—an 'epilogue' or a 'postscript' which John inserted so that his readers would know what happened to Peter after his denial of Jesus and how he was restored by the Lord to his apostleship.

If John had not included chapter 21—we wouldn't understand how Peter became so prominent as a church leader in the opening chapters of the Book of Acts.

But not only that, this chapter teaches us some very important lessons about true love (the love of God)—what it looks like and how it works its way out of our lives to touch others around us.

And so, this section is defining true love from God's perspective—and it could be applied to our marriages or to any other human relationship that we have as Christians.

I. True Love is not Words—it's a Commitment.

John 21:1–3 (NKJV)

¹ After these things Jesus showed Himself again to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, and in this way He showed *Himself*: ² Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the *sons* of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples were together. ³ Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We are going with you also."

It appears to me that when Peter said, "**I'm going fishing**"—he was really saying is, "*I'm going back to fishing. It was an exciting three years guys—but it's over. It's time to go back to our old lives and careers—I'm going fishing.*"

Peter had verbalized his love *for* and commitment *to* Jesus on the night before His crucifixion in the upper room.

It was then that he made a promise to Jesus that he would be loyal to Him even if it cost him his life that he would never deny his Lord (John 13:36-38)—and yet we all know that that was a promise he failed to keep.

True love (God's love) doesn't just tell people you love them with words only—it has to be demonstrated thru commitment—i.e., '*faithfulness*', '*loyalty*' over the long-haul.

But you see, even before Peter promised Jesus to be loyal to Him by never denying Him—three and a half years *earlier* he entered into a commitment with Jesus that was supposed to last for the rest of Peter's life.

It was when Jesus first called Peter to leave his fishing business to follow Him as one of His disciples—promising Peter that He would make a fisher of men.

And yet here in John 21 we see that Peter broke that commitment to Jesus by leaving the ministry and going back to fishing.

Part of the restoration process was for Jesus to teach Peter that saying you love someone and promising to be faithful to them is great (words are important)—but if it's not backed up with actions (commitment) it is really meaningless.

This was not only an important lesson for Peter to learn with regard to his relationship with Jesus—it is an important lesson for all of us to learn with regard to our relationships with each other especially in marriage.

A strong marriage is built on true love which is all about sacrificially commitment, where a man and a woman commit themselves to staying with each other through good times and bad, in sickness and in health—until death separates them.

You see, feelings (which although important)—can't be the main thing a marriage is built upon.

A marriage based on *feelings* is *Hollywood's* definition of marriage—which is why so many Hollywood marriages fail. (Comment)

A marriage has to be built on commitment if it's going to weather the storms of life.

Let me use this analogy: Marriage is like a ship (let's call it the '*good ship marriage*') that a man and a woman enter into on their wedding day as they embark on a journey together for the rest of their lives—a journey that will include both sunshine and storms, smooth sailing and rough seas.

How can husbands and wives stay together when the storms come and the marital seas get rough?—the answer is commitment.

It's commitment (not feelings) that will bind you together and allow your marriage to weather the storms life brings your way.

And yet feelings have become the basis for almost everything in our culture today—and marriage is the main arena where this is played out.

I hear people saying things like, "*I don't feel any love for him anymore—I think it's time to find someone new.*" or "*She doesn't treat me like a wife anymore—I feel our marriage is over.*"

What we as Christians need to remind ourselves of is that—love (God's love), is the basis for a strong marriage—but God's love is not a feeling.

It's the commitment we made to each other on our wedding day—which began with a promise (a solemn vow) to love and be loyal to each other for the rest of our lives.

You see feelings come and go, they ebb and flow based on whatever outward circumstances we are experiencing at any given moment.

Sometimes the passion is flowing and your relationship with your spouse feels like your still on your honeymoon; and other times your relationship feels cold and formal—like partners in a business arrangement instead of two people in love.

When your passion for one another cools—that is not the time to *chuck* the marriage and go looking for someone new.

No—it's time to fall back on the commitment you made to each other when you first stood before God, family and friends and pledged to love each other (to remain committed to each other) for better or worse, in sickness and in health for the rest of your lives—even when you don't feel like it!

It's the commitment, not feelings, that will bind you together and allow you to weather the storms of life—which will eventually pass.

Allow me to use this to segue into Acts 27 which technically has nothing to do with marriage—and yet the lessons we can glean have everything to do with marriage!

After being falsely accused by the Jews of being a “rabble-rouser” and a trouble-maker and after jumping through legal hoops in Caesarea—Paul was finally sailing to Rome (at the expense of the Roman Government) to plead his case before Caesar.

On the way, a violent storm arose that threatened the lives of the two hundred seventy-five soldiers, sailors, and prisoners on board with Paul.

One night, after they had been tempest-tossed in the grip of this raging storm for two weeks, an angel appeared to Paul and told him that the ship would be lost but God would spare the lives of everyone on board. However, not long after Paul shared this with the captain of the ship and the Roman Centurion in charge of the prisoners—several of the ship's crew secretly tried to jump ship:

Acts 27:30-32 (NLT)

³⁰ Then the sailors tried to abandon the ship; they lowered the lifeboat as though they were going to put out anchors from the front of the ship. ³¹ But Paul said to the commanding officer and the soldiers, “You will all die unless the sailors stay aboard.” ³² So the soldiers cut the ropes to the lifeboat and let it drift away.

I believe Paul's words, even though not directed at marriage, express the heart of God for us today with regard to our marriages.

You see, just as these men found themselves in a situation where they had to stay *committed* to each other and work together in order to survive the storm—the same is true in marriage.

There are times in marriage (maybe you're in one right now) where the wind is howling, the storm is raging, and you find yourself saying, *“I'm out of here. I'm jumping ship. I can't take this marriage one more day.”*

But if you jump ship know this—not only will you be disobedient to God by breaking the solemn vow you made to Him when you married your spouse—but you will possibly miss the blessing of seeing Him work a miracle.

You'll miss seeing Him take, what seems to be a hopeless situation, and turn it into such a blessing that you will eventually realize—*“This is the one that God truly chose to be my mate for life!”*

Someone has written a book on marriage with the award-winning title, *“Good marriages take time—bad marriages take more time.”*

Listen again to the apostle's warning, *“If you jump ship, no one will make it.”*

I want you to stop and think of your children, if you have any, and how this will affect them.

Many children of divorce suffer the emotional damage of divorce for the rest of their lives—even to the point of suffering one or more failed marriages themselves.

Look, I'm not saying it won't take hard work, sacrifice and a lot of prayer for your marriage to weather the storm you're going through but—*“with God all things are possible!”*

And that's not to say that divorce isn't sometimes necessary in cases of continued infidelity and or physical abuse.

I'm just saying that too many Christian couples follow the example of the world and rush into divorce when the storms hit and things get a rough—instead of honoring their commitment to one another, dying to self and giving God time to work.

I know there are some who are thinking, *“I haven't jumped ship, I've only lowered a lifeboat over the side. I'm gonna give it two more weeks, or three more months, or one more year.”*

Listen, if you keep an escape option open in your mind—I guarantee you will wind up using it!

If you keep thinking about divorce—you will eventually end up divorced!

No marriage can survive a strong marital storm as long as you've got one foot in the “lifeboat” contemplating jumping ship.

Get rid of the lifeboat. Cut the ropes. Stop planning your escape. Tell yourself—*“Divorce is not an option!”* God can work a miracle if you will trust Him, obey His Word and commit yourself totally to His will for your life.

Remember, God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16) which means that all the power of God is at your disposal for saving your marriage—so don't jump ship!

Now, for the rest of our time let me address the other side of this subject.

Because marriage is hard and because so many marriages are either failing or have failed in our country—many young people have opted to live together without getting married.

As I said earlier—if a marriage is going to work and stay together for the long-haul—it must be built on commitment and not feelings.

And yet today, many couples are seeking to escape making that commitment to each other by side-stepping marriage altogether—and just living together.

They have *feelings* for each other or else they wouldn't be together—but it isn't true love.

Again, true love (God's love) is all about commitment—and that alone is the only foundation a marriage can be built upon that will allow it to weather the storms of life.

Without the commitment—their relationship is nothing more than ‘roommates’ having sex!

They claim that they don't need a piece of paper to prove their love for each other—and while it's true that a piece of paper (a marriage license) won't *make* two people love each other—without it they don't love each other either. (Hurt—hospital; die—life insurance)

There are different reasons why people just live together without getting married—but the basic reason is so that they can bail on the relationship easily and quickly if things get rough or if someone ‘better’ comes along.

These are the kinds of people who love themselves more than anyone else—those who are committed to themselves and to whatever makes *them* happy.

These are the kinds of selfish narcissists that are always on the lookout for ‘a better deal’ and if and when someone comes along who is better looking or who can give them more in the way of financial prosperity—they dump their current partner in favor of this new person.

But they realize the ‘dumping’ would be messy, expensive and drawn out if they had to divorce them—so it just makes more sense to live with them without getting married so as to keep the door open for a quick escape if someone better comes along.

John 2:23–25 (NKJV)

²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

The reason Jesus didn’t commit Himself to these people wasn’t because He didn’t love them—it was solely on the basis of *them* not really loving Him, of them not wanting to go all the way in their relationship with Him.

You see, they wanted to ‘hangout’ with Jesus and have a superficial relationship with Him—I mean they might need His help someday so it’s smart to keep Him close!

But like so many today—they didn’t want to go all the way and commit themselves to Him— *“for better or worse, in good times and in bad”* for the rest of their lives—as a marriage covenant demands!

Jesus Christ loves people—all people—so much that He is proposing marriage to them, but without the other person accepting that proposal and making a commitment to Him—it is meaningless.

And again, that’s why Jesus didn’t commit Himself to these people—He wants a real relationship based on loving commitment.

He already proved His commitment to us by dying for us—that’s total commitment—and He wants the same from us. (*“If you want to be My disciples, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me.”*—Explain)

Now look, the Lord Jesus doesn’t mind a person ‘checking Him out’ before making a commitment to Him—in fact, He actually encouraged that when He challenged potential disciples to first *“count the cost”* before starting to follow Him.

But make no mistake about it—Jesus isn’t looking for a perpetual, casual ‘dating’ relationship with you.

He’s looking for a relationship based on a life-long commitment—in other words, He wants to marry you!

But again, many church-goers are satisfied with simply dating Jesus but are not interested in taking their relationship deeper by making a commitment to Him.

A commitment to love Him, serve Him, and to stay loyal to Him no matter what life brings their way—whether blessings or hardships for the rest of their lives.

This is the kind of commitment Jesus is looking for from those who are thinking of following Him—but some people aren't interested in entering into that level of commitment with Him.

Many today say they 'believe' in Jesus—when they say that to me I like to ask them, *"What exactly do you mean when you say you believe in Jesus?"*

Do you mean that you believe in the *facts* of Who Jesus is and what He did—in other words that He is the Son of God, Who died and rose from the dead?

The Bible says that even the demons believe that and tremble! (James 2:19)

To be saved you must take your 'passive' faith and bring it to the next level and make it 'active' faith—which means believing to the point of commitment.

Let me use the kind of commitment that goes into marriage once again and how it relates to entering into a saving relationship with Jesus.

A person can believe in the beauty and validity of marriage but unless they actually believe to the point of commitment by pledging their life to a member of the opposite sex, standing before God on their wedding day and vowing to love and be loyal to that person for the rest of their life—until they have done that they haven't actually entered into marriage—regardless of how much they believe in it as an institution.

The same is true when we talk about Jesus and salvation.

A person can believe who Jesus is and in what He did for them but unless they take the next step and enter into a relationship with Jesus where they believe to the point of commitment (where they pledge to love Him above all others and to be committed and obedient to Him for the rest of their life)—until they have done that they haven't actually entered into salvation.

It's the commitment that brings about the relationship that puts you "in Christ" which is what being saved is all about.

That's why the Bible talks about salvation in marriage terms calling Jesus our Bridegroom and Christians the Bride of Christ.

You don't become a Christian until you're willing to enter into the deepest kind of relationship with Jesus that two people can enter into—the marriage relationship.

The problem with many church goers is they want to 'date Jesus' but are not really serious about making a commitment to Him (which is what saving faith is all about).

Here the Lord is proposing marriage to them (salvation) and their response is—*"I just want to be friends Jesus."*

But there can be no salvation without believing in Jesus to the point of commitment and receiving Him as your Bridegroom—as well as your Savior.

John 2:24-25 (NKJV)

²⁴ But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

One of the most astonishing fact about God's omniscience is that—He knows *every* detail about us, yet He *still* loves us and is proposing marriage to every person on this planet.

Some of you married a person that you thought you knew only to find out after you were married that—they weren't the person you believed them to be.

And even though God can touch and save them—if you'd have known back then what you know now you probably wouldn't have married them.

But Jesus *knows* us (v.24 and 25 is a Greek word that means '*intimate knowledge*')—and He still wants to have a committed relationship (marriage) with us.

Jeremiah 31:3 (NKJV)

³ The LORD has appeared of old to me, *saying*: "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.

Why are you following Jesus and what kind of relationship do you want with Him?

Many people want to have a relationship with Jesus purely for what He can give them (or what they can get out of Him).

There are names that we have given to men and women who pretend to love others of the opposite sex—but who are only interested in them for their money or for what they can get out of them—the men we call '*gigolos*' and the women are called '*gold-diggers*.'

Jesus will never commit Himself to people like these.

But to anyone who truly loves Him and wants to spend eternity with Him—He is ready and willing to make a commitment to you in marriage—if you are willing to make a commitment to Him.

Next week we'll continue our series which we've entitled, "*Lessons in True Love*."

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).