

Hello Listeners; February is the month of love. It may not be the month that we love, because of the cold weather we usually have at this time of the year, but, we do celebrate Valentine's Day during the month of February, and Valentine's Day is supposed to be a celebration of love. So over the next four weeks, that's what we're going to be talking about: about love.

It's so important for us to understand what love is. For all the talk that we hear about love, for all of the romantic movies that have been made, and all the love songs and love poetry that's been written, the Bible says, You don't really know what love is. That's something that you have to learn, and you can only learn it from God.

How can the Bible say that? What do you mean, "We don't know what love is"? We know all about love. We know that people fall in love, and, sometimes, they fall out of love. Actually, that happens quite a lot. We know that love is a very powerful emotion. It's so strong that it's almost irresistible. We know what happens when people fall in love, they want to be around each other all the time; they enjoy each other's company; they spend hours and hours talking; they love to do all kinds of things together. And we know that love is blind. Love keeps us from seeing our partner's weaknesses and shortcomings; when we're in love, we don't see any of that. We only see what we want to see; we only see the things that endear us to each other.

But sometimes, there comes a moment when the feelings subside, when we come down from the emotional high that we were on. Our eyes are opened, and we see the other person for who he or she is. We see things that irritate us. And our love grows cold. We can't remember anymore what it was that attracted us to the other person. We fall out of love. Sometimes it just means that our relationship ends; we both agree that we're not meant for each other after all. We don't love each other. Sometimes it's a lot worse; the other person gets on our nerves, and we start to hate them. But one way or the other, that's just how things work out, and there's nothing that you can really do about it.

Still, the Bible says, If that's how you think about love, you don't know what real love is.

John wrote, By this, we know love: that He laid down His life for us. John is talking about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It was only six weeks ago that we celebrated Christmas. Christmas is the festival of the birth of Jesus Christ. Christmas is the celebration of Christ's love. In Philippians 2, the apostle Paul wrote, "Though He was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being found in the likeness of men." The Bible says that Christ is the Son of God; He was equal with God; He had glory and unlimited power. But He emptied Himself. Another translation of these words says, He made Himself nothing. In other words, He gave up His place of power and glory.

Paul explains that by saying, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped. He means, Jesus didn't think that equality with God was something He should hold onto at all costs – and especially, at the cost of our salvation. Jesus had a choice. He could hold onto His power and His glory, and leave us in the mess that we had made for ourselves. Or, He could make Himself nothing; He could set aside His own interests, His own happiness, the place that He deserved and enjoyed, and become one of us.

One of us! We think it's amazing if a great person, a great athlete or a powerful person in business or politics notices us. We talk about the time we actually saw some movie star in person, or when the prime minister shook our hand on a visit to our town. When billionaires give a million dollars to charity, it makes headlines. But those things are nothing compared to what Jesus Christ did. He emptied Himself. He made Himself nothing.

I'm not knocking billionaires who donate millions of dollars to help other people. But how many billionaires ever moved out of their estates in New York or their penthouses in Los Angeles or their mansions in Toronto, and went to live on the street, or in an AIDS shelter in Africa? How many of them ever gave up all of the privileges and the protection and the security that their fortunes gave them, and exposed themselves to sickness and starvation, where there was no help available, no escape when disaster came?

I'm not saying that they have to do that. I'm not criticizing them for not doing that. They have the right to live in their beautiful homes, and they have the right to make use of the privileges that their wealth provides them. They don't owe it to the poor people or the people in the third world to give away all their money and come and live with them.

That's actually the point of what Paul says, and what John says, about what Jesus did. He didn't owe us anything. And the mess we were in was the mess we had made for ourselves. It was all because of choices that we made. And not just what we might call, bad choices. We're not in a mess because we made bad choices; we're in a mess because we made selfish choices, and malicious choices.

I don't know about you, but when people who've made a mess of their own lives by their foolish and selfish choices ask for help, I'm reluctant to help them, to say the least. And if they don't ask for help, I'm not very likely to give them any. You know what? Even when I'd like to help someone, it often seems like their problems are too big and too complicated for me, or for anyone, to solve.

But that's what Jesus did. He came into this world, and He became one of us, even though we had brought all of our suffering and sorrow on ourselves by our sin. Even though our problems were all our own fault. Even though our problem was so big, and so complicated, that the only answer was for Him to lay down His life, to die for us.

We've never heard of such a thing. There are lots of other religions out there, besides Christianity. But they all preach that we have to save ourselves. That's what everyone says. Some offer us a religious or spiritual solution, and some say that more money, or better education, or improvements in science or medicine is the answer. But we've been trying all of those solutions for thousands of years. And we haven't really solved a single problem. We haven't fixed whatever's wrong with us. Our problem is way too big, and way too much for us to solve. Because the problem is us. And we can't fix ourselves.

But, John says, By this we know love: that Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And Paul says in Philippians 2, Being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

That's love, John says. That Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. That He treated us in a way that we didn't deserve to be treated. That He laid down His life for our salvation.

We've never known that kind of love, and we've certainly never shown anyone this kind of love. It's not something we're naturally capable of. It's way more than a feeling. It's way more powerful than any

emotion. Love is a radical commitment to the wellbeing, to the good, of someone else. Of someone who doesn't deserve it. Of someone who actually gives you every reason to be frustrated with them, to be disappointed by them, to want nothing more to do with them. Of someone who gives you every reason to hate them. That's what Jesus Christ did: He loved the unlovable.

Sometimes a husband or wife might ask their spouse, why do you love me? Or one of them might say to the other, this is what I love about you. In other words, there's something that makes you loveable, there's something that attracts me to you, that draws out my love for you. There's something about you that makes me love you. Of course, that shows us that often, the feeling or the attraction that we call, love, is more about what the other person does for us, or how they make us feel, than about what we want to do and to be for them.

But the love of Jesus Christ for us has no explanation. There's nothing about us that makes us loveable. He doesn't love us because of how we make Him feel, or because of what He thinks we can do for Him. He loves us not because of who we are, but because of Who He is, and what He's like. He loves us because He's committed to our salvation.

Just before Jesus went to the cross, He celebrated the Passover with His disciples. And as they were about to eat, John says, Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. He loved them to the uttermost, says another translation. He came to them as their servant, as a slave; He knelt down in front of each one of them, and washed their feet. That was an illustration of Jesus' whole ministry, of why He came into the world, and why He went to the cross. He loved us to the uttermost; He loved us with an extreme love.

This is the great surprise of the gospel. It is unimaginable; it is completely unexpected. That Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would lay down His life, for us. This is the good news that no human heart has ever imagined, and no other religion has ever proclaimed.

Paul said to the Ephesians, I pray that you will have the strength to comprehend "what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge". That is our prayer for you, listeners: that you will come to know this love that surpasses knowledge, and to trust in His death as the sacrifice for your sins.

Thank you for listening – until next week..