Love Like Jesus – Part 1

# In the Heat of the Moment

# (John 11:1-5)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. We’re so glad to have you with us here this morning as we begin a brand-new message series entitled “Love Like Jesus.” Today’s message is entitled, “In the Heat of the Moment” and I’m excited to share a thought about the love of God, because I believe with all of my heart that the Bible is a love letter from God and that the main point of the Bible is God’s love for humanity.

Now, some religions teach a message of an angry God, of impending judgment, and without a doubt there will be a day when all of creation will stand before the throne of God. The Bible says that we will give an account for everything we’ve done, but as followers of Christ, we need to remember that we don’t face this judgment alone, that we’ll stand before the throne of God under the covering of Christ who paid the price for our sins. And so, Jesus didn’t come to earth 2000 years ago simply to enlighten us and warn us of a coming judgment. His primary purpose in coming to earth was to save us from our sins and like in the game of Monopoly to be our “Get out of hell free card”. That’s why when John the Baptist was baptizing people in the Jordan River, when he saw Jesus coming toward him, he said,

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

And he did. Jesus came to seek and save what was lost and then he demonstrated his love on the cross. That’s what the Bible tells us in Romans chapter 5,

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

And so, Jesus Christ came into the world to bridge the gap between us and God, and his death on the cross provided forgiveness for our sins. So, through this amazing demonstration of God’s love, your sin can be washed away, your guilt removed, and you can live in freedom because you’re no longer held in bondage or slavery to fear. That’s why the apostle John assures us that there is no fear in love,

“But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. And the one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

But we are those who’ve been made perfect in love and therefore we can say with confidence, that number one, the defining characteristic of our God, our lives, and his church is love.

## 1. The Defining Characteristic of Our Lives and His Church Is Love

It’s this characteristic of God’s love that separates us from every other religion and so understanding not just God’s love for us, but our love for God is extremely important. In fact, one time a Bible teacher approached Jesus and asked him,

"Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:28-30).

And most of us know this, we understand this, and so we don’t resist this concept, but where we sometimes drop the ball is with the addition, where Jesus said, “Oh, and by the way,” “The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself…” (Mark 12:31).

And it’s for that reason that Jesus followed up later, he reminded his disciples saying,

"By this (one thing) all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

And we try, don’t we? We try to let people know that we’re his disciples… but usually we go about it the wrong way, because what I’ve noticed and maybe you have too, is that we’re known not by our love, but by the things that we’re against. And so, the point that Jesus makes is that it really comes down to this one thing and the Bible says it this way,

“Let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God… because God is love” (1 John 4:7-8).

And so, we’ve been commanded to love, first to “Love the Lord your God” and then secondly “Love your neighbor as yourself”. We’re to love God above all else, but the love that we demonstrate for others is not of a lesser quality, lesser degree, or lower grade. Jesus is merely talking about the priority of love, it’s the very same kind of love, it’s a sacrificial love and it’s a choice that we make. That’s why John says, “Let us love one another, for love comes from God.”

Today, as we begin this series “Love Like Jesus” I’d like to talk to you about the character of love, and so to begin illustrating this we’re going to look at John chapter 11. Now, we’re going to begin here today, but we’re just barely going to begin to scratch the surface, and so we’ll return to John chapter 11 again next week to get a deeper understanding. But this morning, we’re going to look at just the first five verses of chapter 11 to see how we can apply this to our lives today. Let’s begin reading in verse one where John tells us,

“Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick." When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus” (John 11:1-5).

During the years of Jesus ministry on earth he had three close friends whom he liked to visit, three people whom the Bible tells us that “Jesus loved” and yet it was these same three people whom Jesus loved so deeply who found themselves in a season where you could say that life had turned up the heat. And it’s in the heat of the moment that Mary and Martha are going to discover that the truth as they know it, the truth as they understand it, just naturally flows out of their mouths much like it does ours.

In fact, I read a story about a man who was driving down the road when he was pulled over by a state trooper. As the officer approached the car, the man who was obviously flustered and concerned asked, “What did I do wrong officer?”

The officer replied, “Sir, you didn’t do anything wrong, as a matter of fact, you were driving very cautiously and that’s why I pulled you over. You see, we’re actually having a special campaign this month in which we’re giving away “excellent driving” citations to those who show caution and good judgment behind the wheel. Along with this citation comes a $250 visa gift card, and so, if I could just see your driver’s license, I’ll get your information and you’ll be free to go.”

The man said, "Wow! Thank you, officer, that couldn’t have come at a better time."

The officer asked, "Oh, what do you intend to do with the money?"

The man said, "Well, my driver’s license was suspended due to outstanding traffic fines, and so I’d like to pay them off and see about getting my license reinstated.”

Needless to say, the officer was shocked, but he was even more shocked when the man's wife leaned over and said, "Don't pay any attention to him, officer. He always talks crazy when he's drunk."

Just about that time, their passenger who’d been asleep in the backseat, woke up, and seeing the state trooper, said with exasperation, "See! I told you guys we wouldn't get far in a stolen car!" The officer was just about to arrest them all when he heard tapping coming from the trunk and a muffled voice asking, "Have we crossed the border yet?"

Now, these people managed to talk themselves into quite a bit of trouble, didn’t they? But they’re not alone, because we do it all the time. In fact, maybe you’ve heard it said that in the heat of the moment, you say things you shouldn’t have said or do stuff without thinking because you’re angry or maybe you say something you don’t mean because you are excited. But Jesus had a different perspective, in fact, he said it this way in Luke’s Gospel, he said,

“What you say flows from what’s in your heart” (Luke 6:45, NLT).

In other words, in the heat of the moment, you actually say things that you really believe, you say what you mean, because it just kind of slips out …it’s the overflow of your heart. And so, when stress levels increase, circumstances get difficult, you’re tired and life has gotten complicated, number two, what you really believe, how you really feel, just seems to come to the surface.

## 2. When Life Gets Difficult What You Really Believe Comes to The Surface

It’s at this point, in the heat of the moment, that we find Mary and Martha, tensions have escalated, their brother Lazarus is deathly ill, they’ve tried everything they could, and in their minds he’s hours from passing into the presence of God. And so, they recognize there’s only one answer, they need a miracle and they need it now. But there’s only one miracle worker, his name is Jesus, and he’s not there. So, they come up with a plan to send a note to Jesus, they’re going to write this note, they’re going to give it to a runner, which is what you would call a first century mailman, and their hope is that when Jesus gets this note that he’ll be compelled to drop everything and make the trip to save Lazarus’ life.

Now, we’re about to discover what Mary and Martha really believe about the love of God. The heat is on, it’s a matter of life-and-death, and what they believe about Jesus is about to come to the surface. Just think about this for a moment, if you had one chance, one opportunity to save someone’s life by writing a letter to God, wouldn’t you really overdo it, maybe even exaggerate a little? You know, wouldn’t you list their contributions, their value to their family, their significance and importance to the community? I think we’d all put a little bit of effort into it if someone that we really loved was dying, but listen to what they wrote in verse three,

“Lord, the one you love is sick” (John 11:3).

Just one sentence, one power packed verse, and yet contained within this verse is what Mary and Martha believe, this is what they hope will move the heart of Jesus. “Lord, the one you love… is sick.” Did you notice the emphasis of that phrase? Did you recognize how they focus on Jesus’ love for Lazarus and not Lazarus’ love for Jesus, but isn’t that the gospel? Isn’t that the essence of what we believe? Isn’t that what the Bible tells us in John chapter 3,

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

You see, the Bible tells us that Jesus came to save us because “God so loved the world…” John 3:16 doesn’t say, “We so loved God that he gave his one and only son…” No, it doesn’t say that, and so Mary and Martha request Jesus presence because God so loved Lazarus. They said, “Lord, the one you love… the one you love… is sick.”

You see, Mary and Martha knew that Jesus didn’t come to save us because of our love. They knew that he didn’t come because we were so good, he didn’t come because we deserved it. They knew that he didn’t come because we were fasting, praying, and seeking him day and night. No, the Bible tells us, the gospel is this, that “God so loved the world….” In other words, God was so head over heels in love with us, so passionate about people who couldn’t get it right, who messed up over and over again, that he put on skin and bones and came to earth to die so that as verse 16 says, “whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Now, that’s just off the charts unbelievable, that God so loved the world that he gives his Son on the idea, the concept, or the principle of “whoever.” Isn’t that amazing to think that God could love a whoever, which would include the people who don’t acknowledge him, the people who couldn’t care less about him, and yet that’s exactly what the Bible says, “that whoever believes.” It’s all inclusive and that’s what makes God’s love so amazing, that’s what makes him so unmistakably God, because he doesn’t make sense, he’s shrouded in mystery, his ways are higher than our ways, his love is greater than our love.

And so, God chooses to love, because God is love, and he gives us the choice to love, because number three, without that choice, without being able to choose to love, we lose the definition of what love really is.

## 3. God gives us a choice, because without choice we lose the definition of love.

In fact, we see this so much in our culture today, it’s called control or manipulation, it’s a forced love, it’s how you go to jail, because it’s often labeled abuse. But God is not forceful, he’s not abusive, but he gives you the choice to acknowledge his love or to ignore his love, but all along it’s God who first loved us. You see, the Bible defines love this way, the apostle John said,

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

In other words, God is the initiator, he’s first, and that’s how the Bible starts isn’t it? God is first, “In the beginning God…” (Genesis 1:1) and so there’s no context, no background, because God was before the beginning, he was in the beginning, and he just started creating. Mary and Martha understood that it’s not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and they make it very clear as they sent word to Jesus,

“Lord, the one you love… is sick” (John 11:3).

And I think sometimes that we miss the point, because we become so obsessed with trying to get it right, but what Mary and Martha wrote was, “The one you love…. is sick”. You see, we get so caught up in loving God based upon our performance, our deeds, and our efforts, but that kind of love is based upon an exchange, you know, you do this and I’ll do that, you give me this and I’ll give you whatever, because that’s the way the world works, but God doesn’t love like that. God has a love that’s exclusively his. Love flows from the core of his being, it’s his character, it’s the essence of who he is. And so, God’s love is sacrificial, it’s not just affectionate, but it’s a love from another realm, a spiritual dimension, and so God always acts in ways that are higher than our ways but are consistent with his character to love. Isaiah says it this way,

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9).

In other words, God’s love is agape love, it’s unconditional, relentless, persistent, and even aggressive. You could say that God’s love is like the salesman who won’t take no for an answer. God’s love is like that telemarketer that calls every night at dinner… His love is higher than our ways, it’s unrelenting, it’s sacrificial, it’s unqualified, and you are the object of God’s relentless obsession.

This is the lesson that Mary and Martha teach us in this simple note, this is what you and I need to come to understand, that God is totally obsessed with you. Therefore, it doesn’t matter how bad you’ve been, it doesn’t matter what you’ve done, because God loves you and he can’t help himself. The Bible says that you can run, but you can’t hide. This is what David discovered, he discovered that God’s overwhelming love never lets him go, that he’s always near, and recognizing this David said,

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too great for me to understand! I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me. I could ask the darkness to hide me and the light around me to become night— but even in darkness I cannot hide from you” (Psalms 139:6-12, NLT).

Now, I know there are times when it feels like God isn’t near or that he doesn’t hear our prayers, because we have false expectations and things don’t always go the way we want them to. And so, when life gets tough it feels like God is uncaring, too far away to help, too far away to hear what we’ve got to say, but that’s exactly why Jesus told his disciples in their final moments together, don’t get discouraged, don’t give up,

“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

You see, Jesus wanted them to remember that there’s no place you can go where God isn’t, even in the midst of your worst day, even in your times of greatest heartache and loss, God is always near, he always hears, and he’s always within reach. David said, even if, “I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.” And Psalm 139 is a reminder that God loves you with a love that will never let go. Even when you were at your worst, he sent his very best, his only Son, to die on a cross so that you might live. You see, there’s nothing that can ever separate you from his love. In fact, the apostle Paul said it this way,

“I’m convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

And so, my prayer is that as we go from here today, that each one of you would be overwhelmed, not by your own successes or failures, but overcome by God’s amazing love for you. His love for you that has always been, always remains, and never fails, because God is love and God is faithful.

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