Uncommon Love

## (1 Corinthians 12.27-13.8)

I want to welcome all of you and wish you a happy Valentine’s Day. I have a message for you that I believe is probably one of the most important messages I could ever preach and yet at the same time it’s one of the most difficult messages for people to receive. This is an important message because there are many people who are carrying a burden they were never intended to carry, so many of us have been hurt, betrayed, and let down, and so my prayer is that today by the grace of God things will change in our lives. And I believe that God is going to speak to many of you today, and so if you have your Bible or your Bible app, would you open it to first Corinthians chapter 13.

For some of you, this is going to be a familiar passage of Scripture, it’s known as the love chapter, it’s almost like poetry and it’s all about love. But as we come to this passage in chapter 13, we need to understand the context, because the apostle Paul is not describing the marriage vows of an unknown couple. In fact, he is actually talking about the diversity of spiritual gifts in the church and he stresses the fact that none of the gifts are more or less important than any another. He says that every member of the church is necessary, and even though there are those members that are less noticeable, they are all of equal importance. And so, in chapter 12, he is encouraging unity in the church and teaching the Corinthians to respect and appreciate one another for whatever gift they have.

As the Apostle closes this chapter, he encourages them to seek a particular virtue as a way to qualify the greatness of a gift. And so, we’ll begin reading in chapter 12, at the last half of verse 31 where he says,

“And now I will show you the most excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31).

And that’s a good way to start isn’t it? That’s our context, and so he says,

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails...” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Love never fails and that’s so important because sooner or later you’re going to be hurt, you’re going to be talked about, you’re going to have a conflict with somebody, and it’s probably going to be somebody that you love. In fact, it’s often the people that you love the most that will hurt you the most because you won’t expect it. And some of you probably have a name in your mind, you’re thinking of somebody right now, and that’s why Jesus warned us,

“Offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” (Matthew 18:7, NKJV).

And so, it’s going to happen, in this world you will have trouble, you’re going to be offended, you’re going to get in the fight with somebody that you love. You see, it’s easy to get along when you see things the same, when you have the same theology, the same lifestyle, but what do you do when you don’t agree?

This is what I want to talk about today, you’ve got to have an uncommon love, because sometime you’re going to be hurt, somehow, you’re going to be offended, and somewhere you’re going to be wounded. “Offenses must come” and so we’ve got to rise to the occasion, seizing the opportunity to love with an uncommon love.

The Scriptures are full of examples for us to consider, like Joseph, the son of Israel. The Bible says,

“Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him” (Genesis 37:3-4).

And things went from bad to worse, Joseph’s brothers threw them into a pit intending to leave him to die, but then on second thought they sold him to slave traders who took him to Egypt. In Egypt, they sold him to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh’s officials where he was promoted and then demoted, he’s incarcerated and exalted, and then there was a drought in the land. It’s a long story, but everybody’s starving, and now he’s got the keys to the kingdom, he’s second in command, and his brothers come looking for food. They don’t recognize Joseph and at that moment he had to make a choice. He could pay them back and take revenge for what they’d done to him, but instead he made the decision to love them with an uncommon love. Joseph said to them in Genesis chapter 50, verse 20,

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them” (Genesis 50:20-21).

Joseph chose to love his brothers with an uncommon love, saving his family from starvation, and he was restored with his father.

Or then, there was Moses who saw his people being treated unjustly, he stepped up to help, attempting to help a brother who was being abused. Unfortunately, he only made things worse, because he ended up killing a man and running for his life. And so, Moses spends 40 years in the desert hiding from Pharaoh, feeling sorry for himself, and thinking about the injustice of it all. Until one day God comes to him in a burning bush and says,

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering… So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt” (Exodus 3:7-10).

And so, Moses is like, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh? Oh Lord, I don’t want to go back there, please send someone else." But God said, "No, I want you to go back to your brethren. Don’t worry about the details because I will be with you." And so, Moses went back with an uncommon love and led his people out of captivity.

Or then there was David whose father didn’t believe in him and whose brothers looked down on him and demeaned him. His oldest brother mocked him saying,

"Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is…" (1 Samuel 17:28).

Even his wife mocked him as he worshiped and despised him in her heart. His father-in-law was tormented in his soul and the Bible says,

“While David was playing the harp, Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him…” (1 Samuel 19:9-10).

Even his children were dysfunctional, his son Absalom killed his brother Amnon leaving his father David weeping and broken. Absalom returned sometime later with the help of his cousin Joab in an attempt to steal the throne from his father.

Some of you thought your kids were crazy and your family was messed up, but no matter what they do you’ve got to make up your mind to love them with an uncommon love. And so, you just refuse to allow your family to cause you to become negative, bitter, mean, and angry. You just make up your mind beforehand that you’re going to love with an uncommon love.

But what do you do when it’s not a spouse, or a son or daughter that breaks your heart, but when God isn’t doing what you think he ought to do?

I am thinking about Job, the Bible says that in one day Job lost everything. One after another, three different servants came to him reporting that his oxen, donkeys, and camels were carried off in enemy raids; his sheep were struck by lightning and killed; and yet another messenger came and said,

“Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:18-19).

Of course, Job was broken hearted, he knew what had happened, but he didn’t know why it happened. And the Bible says that as he was mourning his loss, three of his friends came to visit, but instead of comforting him they did nothing but make accusations of his character. They told him that the reason why he lost everything, the reason why he was in this condition, was that he had sinned and the judgment of God was upon him.

You would think that things couldn’t get much worse when his wife started in on him. She said,

“Are you still holding onto your integrity? Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9).

When Job had every reason to be rude and lash out with anger, he determined to love with an uncommon love. The Bible says he fell to the ground in worship and said,

"Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing” (Job 1:20-22).

And when you love like that, trusting God to fight your battles for you, loving with an uncommon love, and not taking revenge on somebody who has done something against you, the Lord God will bless you.

The Bible says that Job prayed for his friends and at the end of the book, chapter 42 says,

“The Lord made him prosperous again and gave him twice as much as he had before… The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first… (Job 42:10,12).

By forgiving his friends and praying for them, Job opened himself to receive the blessing of God back in his own life. God gave Job double for his trouble and it’s important that we understand that we only hurt ourselves when we refuse to forgive others.

I want you to consider the example of Jesus for a moment. Can you play that video for us Travis? Check out this video.

How can we love better?

Jesus was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. The prophet Isaiah said,

“The Lord God has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isaiah 53:6-7).

Jesus was afflicted, beaten, and wounded; it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer. As he hung on the cross looking down on his accusers, he finally lifted his voice, he didn’t wait for them to come begging to him for forgiveness, but he made a decision to forgive, because forgiveness isn’t an emotion it’s a choice. And so, he’s hanging there in anguish, looking down on the crowd of onlookers who had condemned him to death and he loved them with an uncommon love. He prayed,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

In spite of his suffering, he loved them with an uncommon love, making his life a guilt offering, and loving the very people who had unjustly convicted him.

What if we could love the way Jesus does, forgiving like Jesus forgave, and loving with an uncommon love? I believe this is so important today because many of our homes and families are a mess simply because we don’t really know how to love one another. But if we would choose to love with an uncommon love, we could literally rewrite our legacy, because following Jesus is a lifestyle, but even more so it is a lesson in forgiveness. And so, to love is to forgive, and yet even in the church we find brothers taking brothers to court, people suing one another, and parents who are estranged from their own children. So many times, we draw the proverbial line in the sand, cutting off a brother or sister, son or daughter, because they’ve made poor choices, and yet nothing could be further from what God has called us to do as Christians.

You see, our God who is rich in mercy took the first step and every other step necessary to be reconciled with us. The Bible says,

“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them, and he has committed to us the message of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19).

That means that sometimes I’ve just got to keep my opinions to myself, sometimes that means looking at your spouse, your kids, or a brother or sister that has messed up and loving them anyway. It doesn’t mean that you agree with their decisions or approve of what they’re doing, but it’s to love like Jesus who said,

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

It’s an uncommon love, it’s not always going to be easy, but the Bible says love is patient, love is kind, it’s not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs, it always hopes, always perseveres, and this is so important,

“Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:8).

You see, this kind of love is amazing, it’s an uncommon love, it’s the kind of love Jesus demonstrated for us on the cross. It’s a poured-out kind of love, holding nothing back kind of love, it’s what he described as the blood of the covenant…

“Which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

And so, he poured out his love into our hearts, becoming an example for us, teaching us about forgiveness so that we would have a ministry of reconciliation. In other words, so that we would take the first steps toward that person that offended you, being willing to talk about it, opening the door to forgiveness with that brother or sister, a spouse or a parent, and making things right. It doesn’t mean that you’re going to be best friends, but you’re willing to let go the offense and be open to reconciliation in your relationship.

You see, the thing about forgiveness is that you’ve got to be willing. When somebody does something that offends you, you love them with an uncommon love, you forgive them just like you’ve been forgiven, because that’s how forgiveness works. In fact, one time Peter was trying to figure this out, just trying to wrap his mind around this forgiveness thing, because he struggled with this, he was one of those guys who would cuss you out in a heartbeat. And so, he was a guy who needed a lot of grace and he came to Jesus and asked,

“Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me?” (Matthew 18:21).

You see, Peter wanted a mathematical formula for forgiveness, and since the teachers of the law taught that three times was the magic number; even quoting the Bible, “Thus says the Lord:”

"For three transgressions of Damascus, (but) for four, I will not turn away its punishment…” (Amos 1:3, NKJV).

And so, Peter thought he was going to be super spiritual, and he doubled it and added one. He said,

“Up to seven times?” (Matthew 18:21).

But Jesus answered him,

“I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times” (Matthew 18:22).

In other words, not seven times, but seven times seventy, and with the Hebrew understanding of numerology, the number 490 helps us to recognize that forgiving makes us complete. Forgiveness isn’t about keeping score; it’s about losing count, and so forgiveness is the key to perfecting our hearts.

For us to love with an uncommon love is to “keep no record of wrongs.” And so, to hold onto a grudge keeps you from having a true understanding of the finished work of the cross. That’s why Jesus taught us to pray,

“Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:11-12).

Forgiveness is not an option; we must forgive because we’ve been forgiven. And so, extending forgiveness to others literally sets us free, it’s living out our faith with an uncommon love.

As we close today, I want to pray for you and your families, because this message of uncommon love is really a message of reconciliation. Somewhere today, there is a husband or a wife, a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, who God lets hear this message so that you would say, “I’m not done, I’m not giving up, I’m not through with this relationship, I’m not through with my family, I’m not through with this marriage.” And so today I want to encourage you to love with an uncommon love, so that you can experience a move of God like never before. I believe there are some of you who are open for a miracle. There are some of you who are ready to pray, ready to forgive, and willing to keep on forgiving. And so, may God give you the grace right now to forgive in Jesus name. Let’s pray.

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