

VALENTINE'S DAY LOVE

I John 3:16, 18; 4:12-17

I John 4:7-12 (ESV): "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him.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 [sacrifice by which our sins are paid for and forgotten].¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us."

I John 3:16, 18: (ESV): "By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

INTRODUCTION

Each year, the 14th day of February moves millions worldwide to present their beloved with flowers, chocolates, and other heart-sent gifts. A new survey from the National Retail Federation (NRF) projects U.S. consumers will spend \$18.2 billion on their valentines this year. Over \$4 billion will be spent on jewelry, \$2 billion on flowers, and billions more on nearly a billion Valentine's Day Cards, or on clothes or a nice evening out together. Other countries have developed traditions of their own to add to the celebration of Valentine's Day. In Japan, men are the only recipients of Valentine's Day gifts. A month later, however, on March 14, men are expected to shower gifts in return upon the women who bestowed Valentine's upon them. Taiwan, which is world famous for its flowers, celebrates both February 14th and July 7th as Valentine Days. Men are expected to give bouquets of flowers to their beloved. According to Taiwanese tradition, the color and number of flowers conveys important messages. A bouquet of all red roses tells the girl she's the man's "only love," 99 roses of any color expresses "forever love," and 108 roses signifies the man is popping the question, "Will you marry me?"

According to legend, the reason behind giving sweethearts a special day traces back to a kindly cleric named Valentine who died more than 1,700 years ago. The details of his life are so shrouded in mystery that it's impossible to insist on what the precise facts are. But what can be said is probably true of St. Valentine and his demonstration of true love to Christ and others make a look at his life worthwhile.

The story of St. Valentine has two different versions: a Protestant and a Catholic one. Both versions agree upon Valentine being a bishop in Rome in A. D. 268 when Claudius II became Emperor of the Roman Empire. The golden era of the Empire had waned. Political corruption had placed numerous incompetents in positions of provincial administrators. Declines in education, increased taxation, and shortages due to slumping trade led to frequent civil strife. Rome's Empire also faced threats on all sides—from Gauls, Slavs, Huns, Turks, and Mongolians from Northern Europe and Asia. The Emperor grew desperate to recruit enough soldiers and officers to protect the Empire from takeover. Claudius II believed married men were so emotionally attached to their families they would resist defending the Empire's distant borders for long enlistments. He therefore issued an edict forbidding soldiers to marry.

Bishop Valentine realized the injustice of the edict. He asked, "How can any devout soul accept a ban that goes against the decree of God Almighty who instituted the first marriage in the Garden of Eden" (**Genesis 2:18-24**)? Valentine also testified, "Christ attested to the sacredness of God-ordained marriage" (**Matthew 19:4-6**). To relieve frustrated young lovers desiring a Christian wedding, he put his life on the line by choosing to counter the Emperor's decree and uniting them secretly in marriage. Claudius eventually learned of this "friend of lovers" and had him arrested. Valentine's jailer, a man named Asterius, brought his blind daughter to Valentine hoping she would receive healing. Catholic legend declares the daughter's eyes were miraculously cured. The Protestant version says Valentine

healed her soul by filling her life with the love of learning and music, and teaching her the value God set upon her by sending His Son **Jesus** to die in her place and open the door to her to everlasting life in a body of perfect health. Their times together gave rise to a deep affection in an age centuries before celibacy of Christian clergy was mandated. There is one story line of Emperor Claudius (who did not persecute Christians) demanding to meet bishop Valentine and being so impressed with him that he attempted to woo him away from his faith in Christ to Rome's pagan gods. In exchange, Valentine could have been free to wed the jailer's daughter. But he remained steadfast in the priority of his devotion to **Jesus**. Just before the Emperor's orders to have him executed were carried out, Valentine asked the jailer for a pen and paper. He signed a farewell message to the daughter, "From Your Valentine"; a phrase that has lived ever after. Valentine is believed to have been executed February 14, 270 AD. This is why February 14 became a day to celebrate all lovers and handwritten greetings of affection addressed to those who are beloved became known as "Valentines."

This morning, our Scripture verses for today can deepen our understanding of love, as demonstrated, in part by Saint Valentine. We will make a running contrast between the selfless love that is God-centered and selfish love that is self-centered.

GOD-CENTERED LOVE

There are strange notions in America today about what true love is. A group of social professionals asked a group of 4-to-8-year-olds, "What does love mean?" They received broader and deeper answers than anyone could have imagined. Here are a few examples: "When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn't bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis too. That's love"—Rebecca, age 8. "Love is when a girl puts on perfume and a boy puts on shaving cologne and they go out and smell each other"—Karl, age 5. "Love is what makes you smile when you're tired"—Terri, age 4. "Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen"—Bobby, age 5. "If you want to learn to love better, you should start with a friend you hate"—Nikka, age 6. "There are two kinds of love: our love; God's love. But God makes both kinds of them"—Jenny, age 4. "I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones"—Lauren, age 4. "I let my big sister pick on me because my Mom says she only picks on me because she loves me. So I pick on my baby sister because I love her"—Bethany, age 4. "Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well"—Tommy, age 6. "You really shouldn't say 'I love you' unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget"—Jessica, age 8.

At the time of Christ's birth, three types of love were commonly spoken of in the Greek language that had become the universal tongue of most of the Western world: 1) *phileo*: friendship love; 2) *eros*: romantic love; and 3) *storge*: family love. The fourth kind, *agape*, the ideal of unconditional, selfless love, was celebrated but rarely used in the pre-Christian world. Based upon **Jesus Christ's** stunning demonstration of selfless, sacrificial love, *agape* love became the standard to distinguish the quality of love practiced by followers of **Jesus** from all others. *Agape* appears in some form over 300 times in the Greek of the New Testament to express the depths of God's "love" toward us, and is featured in today's text. **I John 4:10-11**, "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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." **I John 3:16, 18**, "By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

Jesus told us in **Matthew 22:37-38**, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command." Using the word LOVE as an acronym, we will highlight how the first two letters challenge us to demonstrate *agape* love in our

relationship toward God. **Jesus** immediately added, "The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself." ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands" (**Matthew 22:39-40**). We will highlight how the last two letters in LOVE challenge us to demonstrate *agape* love in our relationship toward our fellow human beings.

A. LOYALTY:

Love is the moral and spiritual glue of the Universe that attaches angels and humans in heartfelt loyalty to our Creator God. Paul's exquisite description of *agape* love in **I Corinthians 13** closes with this declaration in **vs. 13**: "Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love." After we pass from this Earth into Heaven's Glory, we will behold the Lover of our soul, "Jesus Christ, . . . the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth. . . . [W]ho loves us and has set us free from our sins by His blood" (**Revelation 1:5**). When we leave Earth, we enter into "the hope reserved for [us] in heaven" (**Colossians 1:5**), wherein our Heavenly Father will fulfill every promise made to those who embraced His Son as Savior and Lord. Will "faith," which **Hebrews 11:1** (ESV) describes as, "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" or "hope" be needed when we are in God's direct presence and surrounded by Heaven's glories? No. But will the loyalty of faithful love toward the Lord still be important? Yes!

"Lucifer" (literally "light-bearer"), probably the supreme worship leader of the angelic hosts prior to creation of our world, a being "perfect in beauty" and displaying "the seal of perfection" (**Ezekiel 28:12-18**), became "Satan" when his love grew so cooled by his ungrateful, prideful desire of *being* worshiped as "the Most High" God instead of *leading* worship of the one true God (**Luke 10:18; Isaiah 14:12-14**). Lucifer may have led up to "a third" of the angels in his rejection of God's love and rebellion against God's authority (**Revelation 12:3-4**). Lucifer's betrayal of "the Lord GOD" involved repeated assertions of his "I will" over God's will. The Son of God on earth never asserted His "I will." Instead, He announced, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (**John 6:38**). Will you echo our Savior by pledging your faithful loyalty to our Creator and Heavenly Father in the words of **Deuteronomy 13:4** (NASB)? "You shall follow the LORD your God and fear Him; and you shall keep His commandments, listen to His voice, serve Him, and cling to Him."

Of course, we can find creative ways to evade attention to God's will, while making it appear we are being sensitive to His wishes. We can also deceptively evade true attention to the wishes of our sweethearts. A wife woke up one morning and said, "Honey, I just had a dream that you bought me a new gold bracelet. What do you think it means?" "I don't know," he replied, "but Valentine's Day is coming soon. Tuesday, you'll know." A few nights later, she again woke up after having a dream, "This time, I dreamed you gave me a pearl necklace. What do you think it means?" "You'll know Tuesday," he replied. The night before Valentine's Day, she again woke up telling him about her dream. "This time I dreamed that you brought me a diamond broach. What do you think it means?" "Honey, be patient. You'll know tonight," he said. That evening, the husband came home with a package and gave it to his wife. Delighted, she opened it—to find a book entitled, "The meaning of dreams."

We will continue this sermon next week.

CONCLUSION

In February of 1941, Maximilian Kolbe, a Franciscan priest, was put in the infamous death camp of Auschwitz, Poland, for helping Jews escape Nazi extermination. Months went by. In desperation an escape took place. Camp rules insisted 10 people would be rounded up randomly and herded into a cell, where they would die of starvation and exposure as a lesson against future escape attempts. Names were called. A Polish Jew, Frandishek Gasovnachek, was called. He cried, "Wait, I have a wife and

children!" Priest Kolbe stepped forward and said, "I will take his place." He was marched into the cell with nine others. H managed to live until August 14. This story was chronicled on an NBC news special several years ago. Gasovnachek, by this time 82, told his story while tears streamed down his cheeks. A mobile camera followed him around his little white house to a marble monument carefully tended with flowers. The inscription read: "IN MEMORY OF MAXIMILIAN KOLBE / HE DIED IN MY PLACE."

Every day since 1941, Gasovnachek lived with this thought uppermost in his mind: "I live because someone died for me." Every year on August 14, he travels to Auschwitz in memory of the Franciscan Priest whose unswerving loyalty to the Lord faithfully fulfilled **I John 4:10-12**, "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. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us." This God-centered priest also exemplified the selfless love of **I John 3:16, 18**: "By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."