

Love's Definition

Oulu International Evangelical Fellowship
Bastian & Hanna Fähnrich, Sermon on 13 October 2013

Welcome Words

Children's Address (Hanna)

Song "Seek Ye first the Kingdom of God" (590)

Reading & Opening Prayer: Ephesians 3:16-21 (Hanna)

"I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

Sermon (Bastian):

Love's Definition. What does love look like? This will be the question for today!

Let's start with an exercise:

What does love look like? How do you see love?

Please get together in pairs and define what love looks like from your perspective:

What does love look like?

You have about 2 minutes time for this exercise.

After you've finished, let's share: What does love look like?

What definition of love do you have?

Give a word or short description.

Results: God is love, love is loving enemies, love is giving, love is caring, love is patience, love is personal connection, love is food etc.

Song "Arms Wide Open" by Misty Edwards

Let's listen to Misty Edwards's song "Arms Wide Open."

In my eyes, Misty Edwards gives a wonderful and biblical answer to the question:

"What does love look like?" is the question I've been pondering; "What does love look like?"

"What does love look like?" is the question I've been asking of You

I once believed that love was romance, just a chance

I even thought that love was for the lucky and the beautiful

I once believed that love was a momentary bliss, but love is more than this

All You ever wanted was my attention, all You ever wanted was love from me

All You ever wanted was my affections, to sit here at Your feet

Then I sat down, a little frustrated and confused; if all of life comes down to love

Then love has to be more than sentiment, more than selfishness and selfish gain

And then I saw Him there, hanging on a tree, looking at me

I saw Him there, hanging on a tree, looking at me

He was looking at me, looking at Him, staring through me

I could not escape those beautiful eyes, and I began to weep and weep

He had arms wide open, a heart exposed

Arms wide open; He was bleeding, bleeding

Love's definition, love's definition was looking at me

Looking at Him, hanging on a tree, I began to weep and weep and weep and weep

This is how I know what love is, this is how I know what love is

And as I sat there weeping, crying, those beautiful eyes, full of desire and love

He said to me, "You shall love Me, You shall love Me

You shall love Me, You shall love Me"

With arms wide open, a heart exposed

With arms wide open, bleeding, sometimes bleeding

If anybody's looking for love in all the wrong places

If you've been searching for love, come to Me, come to Me

Take up your cross, deny yourself, forget your father's house and run, run with Me

You were made for abandonment, wholeheartedness

You were made for someone greater, someone bigger, so follow Me

And You'll come alive when you learn to die

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2ZCip0HiRo>

Summary & Conclusion (Bastian)

Let me now summarise and draw conclusions of this song and our exercise:

Sometimes in our life we're standing puzzled, as in Misty Edward's song, asking ourselves: "What does love look like?" What is love? How does it look like?

We may try to put it in words or picture it like in our descriptions.

We may be going and looking around to get an overview and insight into love, as Misty Edward's song suggests, and as we did when looking how each of us views love.

When going around in this world and this room, perhaps we will spot bits of love here and there.

We may be looking for love from and in other people, things, or places.

We may be looking for love from within ourselves.

We may try to define love from our perspective, and keep it only in our own selfish view.

We may see love as "romance, as a chance", within reach and perceivable only by others, or only for "the lucky and beautiful ones", as Misty Edwards describes in her song.

It may look like that we can never totally spot love, focus on it, or get hold of it.

For as soon as we've spotted love, it gets out of focus, we cannot hold on to it. Even our greatest visions and efforts to grasp love are not sufficient.

As a consequence, we may perhaps come to see love as something that is not real, that never lasts, that is incomplete, "a momentary bliss" at most.

We may struggle against this view, but all in all I believe that we desire true and perfect, unfailing, everlasting love (Proverbs 19:22).

So, we may keep looking for love, and go on, go around and around. But sooner or later we come to see that we're running in circles, or go astray. Eventually we lose sight of love, even of what we are actually looking for.

As in Misty Edward's song we could then stop going around. We may sit down. Just as you are seated right now, when you're listening to me, or when you listened to Misty Edward's song.

As we're seated, we realise that we are "a little frustrated and confused".

But then! What's going on?

God is stepping into the picture. *"God's love is ever before me"*, says the Psalm writer (Psalm 26:3). We are *"not cut off from his sight"* reads Psalm 31:22.

God reveals himself, and we begin to see, you and I begin to see: *"Love comes from God"* (1 John 4:7).

Misty Edward says in her song: *"I saw Him there, hanging on a tree, looking at me."*

Do you realise this? Do you see this?

God is looking at you. He is looking at me. He is looking at us.

God *"looks on the heart"*, as the Bible says in 1 Samuel 16:7. He knows us, me and you.

God knows that we are looking for love, an unending, perfect, everlasting love.

Now we simply need to look back, look at God, as in Misty Edward's song. By looking back to him, by looking to Jesus, the suffering Christ on the cross, we can only come to see that *"God is love"* (1 John 4:8 and 16).

Jesus Christ is *"love's definition"*, as we hear in Misty Edward's song and also may read from 1 John 4:9-10: *"This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:8).

Misty Edwards puts it in her song with the words of the Bible:

"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." (1 John 3:16, see also Ephesians 5:2). There is *"no greater love than the love of Jesus Christ"* says John 15:13.

Perhaps thus far our sin has prevented us from clearly seeing God and his love – the definition of Love!?

So, look at Jesus! And finally *"grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and know this love that surpasses knowledge"* (Ephesians 3:18-19).

Know this love that *"covers our sins"* and *"all wrongs"* (1 Peter 4:8, Proverbs 10:12), including also all the wrong perspectives or views on love and God.

What follows then? Do we remain seated and start meditating on God's love (Psalm 48:9).

Or do we stay and weep and shed tears of joy and gratitude?

Perhaps we'll stay at the feet of Jesus for a little while, see also the account of Mary and Martha, when Mary is contemplating at the feet of Jesus (Luke 10:38-42), and later anointing Christ (John 11:1-12).

But in the long run?

Misty Edward's song has an answer to that question as well: *"You shall love Me" – "Love the Lord, your God"*. This commandment and desire of God in his holy word (Deuteronomy 6:5, 11:1, 13:3,22; Mark 12:33) opens up new perspectives in our pursuit of love:

The love of God should not only stay with us. And we should not stay in a mode of contemplation, and again – only see and experience love as a *"momentary bliss"*. We love God back!

We love God in return by following Jesus *"wholeheartedly"* and by *"abandoning"* everything that keeps us from seeing His love and sharing it with other people in this world and life.

Like in Misty Edward's song: Jesus receives us with *"arms wide open and a heart exposed"*, but he also releases us with arms wide open, that is, with our arms stretched out to others, and our hearts changed, for He has *"poured out his love into our hearts"* (Romans 5:5).

We thus should *"follow God's example, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us."* (Ephesians 5:1-2). As *"dear children"* the example of Jesus means to *"let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth"* (1 John 3:18).

So, eventually we may get up to follow Christ and *"walk in obedience to his commands. As we have heard from the beginning, his command is that we walk in love"* (2 John 6, see also Joshua 22:5).

Following Jesus, walking in his footsteps, is a journey by which we see God's love working in many ways and lives. We can surely let go everything else, if we only walk with Christ and remain covered by his love and directed by his Spirit. We should even let go our own lives (John 12:25), for *"God's love is better than life"* (Psalm 63:3).

In our walk with Christ let us remember and rest at times acknowledging that *"we love because God first loved us"* (1 John 4:19). Don't let anything come between you and Jesus, for *"we know what love is"* (1 John 3:16), and we know that we are loved by Him with an unending, eternal love!

Let me conclude and pray with the words from 2 Thessalonians 3:5: *"May the Lord direct our hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."* Let's always *"keep ourselves in God's love"* (Jude 1:21). *"To him who is able to keep us from stumbling and to present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and for evermore! Amen."* (Jude 1:24-25).

Song “There is a Redeemer” (673)

Announcements

Fellowship Time