

Grace, Love and Compassion James Shepherd

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that we get to gather here this morning, that we have been set free by your wonderful gospel. Through your son's death and resurrection, we might have life and salvation in him.

And we thank you that right now we have the privilege and the joy to hear from your word. And so we pray that what you have to teach us this morning, we would take in and we would go back out into our world, onto our front line, and live faithfully for you.

And we pray this in your son's precious name. Amen. We exist in a world that loves to love. We use the word love to describe just about anything that gives us any slight sort of affection or joy.

You might have people say, I love my car. I love my bike. I love my iPhone. I love pizza. I love, I love, I love. We use the word I love so frequently and so much that we kind of forget what it means. We're a world that loves to love. Love is one of the most dominant themes in books, TV shows, and movies. We love stories about love, especially when love is victorious, because they are stories that tap into an innate desire to be loved and to love.

[1 : 21] For us to love and be loved is to celebrate being accepted, included, to feel value and worth, to be part of something that feels right and to feel good.

The problem is, as a society, we don't always agree upon what is good and what is right, and therefore what is ultimately loving.

A very clear and recent example of this has been Malcolm Turnbull's call for an independent review of the Safe Schools program. This program is accused of trying to influence the thinking of young children to accept LGBTI views as the norm, even if it contradicts the values and views these children have themselves, or the values and views their parents have taught them.

There are many ways the program has been accused of being unsafe for some, but we don't have time to go into it. But what I want to point out is that it's very clear that there is a profound concern on both sides for the safety of our children.

But there is a clear divide about how best to make a program that keeps these kids safe. We are divided as a community as to how to love these kids best, and we've seen both sides accuse the other side of being unloving.

[2 : 46] During Bill Shorten's press conference, Cory Bernardi came out and called him a homophobe. Sorry, Bill Shorten called Cory Bernardi a homophobe, and Bernardi and others believe that the program is about brainwashing our kids towards a socialist Marxist agenda, if you will.

Those who oppose the program are called unloving and homophobes, and they are accused of persecuting those who are for the safe school program. And those who are for the program are called unloving and intolerant.

They are accused of extremism, liberalism, and brainwashing. The thing is that both sides claim and desire to love these kids. Both want safe schools for kids.

Both sides completely, though, disagree about what that looks like. And therefore, both sides accuse the other of being unloving.

We're in a world that loves to love. But in reality, our world loves conditionally. That is, we love because. Because you make me feel good.

[3 : 57] Because you agree with the way I think. Because you act and speak like me. Because your views don't stop me from having my views and doing what I want.

Anything that might be perceived as a threat or an attack on someone's freedom, autonomy, beliefs, does not and cannot be loving.

Now, how have Christians responded? You may have heard of a church called Westboro Baptist Church. A very vocal church in America that is well known for promoting how much God hates sinners, which is, for them, everyone except them.

They have a strong message of hate. They are not at all interested in loving those who disagree with them. And they don't view any other Christian action, apart from their own, as loving.

They picket funerals of soldiers. Their signs say, God hates gays. God hates you. And in their eyes, their signs are supposed to be loving somehow towards you.

[5 : 06] Go figure. Their response to the world is to remain in their holy huddle and judge. And by judging, they presume they think they are loving.

Whilst Westboro Baptist is an extreme example of this, there are still a number of Christians and churches who think the best response to this kind of world is to not take part in it, to not engage in it, to remain in their little holy huddle, to love each other, but not to love those who are outside their congregation, to love those who are outside their holy huddle.

They view that their responsibility is to hide away until Jesus returns and just take care of each other. Now, at the other end of the spectrum, there are churches and Christians who have abandoned biblical principle and truths in order to love those who otherwise disagree with them. In their mind, you can't love and accept outsiders without doing away of old, archaic dogma. They justify this by concluding simplistically that the whole Bible is about love.

And if one thing is remaining in our society, that is love. So therefore, the priority of our lives as Christians is to love above all else. So therefore, some Christians have begun denying core beliefs of our faith, like the Trinity, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, his death for our sins, is even his own deity.

[6 : 41] Much of the Anglican Church outside of Sydney is moving in towards this direction. With examples such as Reverend Rod Bauer up at Gosford, who is constantly making headlines about being pro-gay marriage, and also doesn't believe that Jesus died for our sins.

Even one of our previous Anglican primates of Australia, he didn't believe in the resurrection of Jesus. Christians head in this direction in order to make outsiders feel loved.

They are not just going against their own conscience in order to fit in. They truly believe, these guys truly believe, that love is the central aim of the Christian faith.

And then everything else in the Scripture is relative towards achieving that aim, towards love. We exist in a world that loves to love.

But I think it's fair to say we struggle to actually love each other, even Christians. How do we love people without acting like self-righteous jerks remaining in our holy huddles?

[7 : 55] Or how do we love people without abandoning all biblical principle and eventually inspiring out of control into something that doesn't even look like Christianity?

How do we love those who disagree with us? How do we love those who don't want to love us back? When we go to work on Monday, or what do you do tomorrow?

How are we going to love those on our front line? How are we going to live and love in a world that struggles to love? We're in a series called Fruitfulness on the Front Line.

The whole point of this series is to show that our faith extends beyond the Sunday gathering, extends beyond our Christian gatherings throughout the week. That there is no such thing as a secular, sacred divide, but that we are called to live for Christ, to worship Him in our daily lives with whatever it is we've been called to do throughout the week.

And because Jesus' death and resurrection not only saves us from our sins, but inaugurates the reconciliation of all things to come, it's making all things new and perfecting all things, including our work, we can then enjoy knowing that what we do each and every single day in our workplace, in our homes, in our schools, where we volunteer, has immense dignity.

[9 : 20] And it's not a waste of time. Indeed, our duty is to work and involve ourselves in this world, to engage with the world, reflecting the proper order of God's creation as we do it, and therefore showing the world our wonderful and great God that we serve, who made us to work and to rule over this creation, this good creation, giving the world a taste of what it's like to be known by God and what the new creation will look like that is to come.

One of the things our world is so desperately in need of tasting is love. Not love in the way the world loves, but love in the way Christ loves.

And this morning, we're going to see how we are called to love in such a way on our front line, to give our world that is thirsty and hungry a taste of true love.

We're going to see what it looks like and how we're able to do it. So firstly, what does Christ's love look like in this world? The parable of the Good Samaritan read out before us is to show us what God demands of those who follow Him.

Jesus' aim is to point out that the central calling of our life is to love God and to love our neighbor. This is the pattern of life that the law talks about.

[10:47] It is to love. But the extent to which we are called to love is immensely challenging. Jesus tells the parable in order to show that our neighbor from time to time may be someone we least expect.

In fact, it might be our worst enemy. We're going to read out that parable once more. So please open your Bibles again from verse 30. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.

Now by chance a priest was going down that road and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him pass by on that other side.

But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was and when he saw him he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.

This is an incredible parable. Jesus flips our expectation upside down. The idea of Samaritan exemplifying what it was to love your neighbor is completely unexpected.

[11:58] The fact that the Samaritan outshone the exemplary Jews, the priest and the Levite, is absolutely insulting towards the Jews. To give you some context, the Samaritans and Jews hated each other.

They hated each other. Samaritans were considered fake Jews from the north who had mixed up with other races. They were considered dirty, considered unclean, like pork for the Jews.

They were equated with the dirty pork. Jews hated the Samaritans. They were absolutely racist towards them. You could liken the hate the Jews had for Samaritans with the hate a white supremacist had for black people.

It's that insane. That's how much they hated Samaritans. Jesus paints a very challenging picture of what it is to love our neighbor.

It might seem so foreign in our world and so backwards to our culture, but it's the very picture we needed painted for us. Indeed, our world has begun trying to paint its own picture of what it is to love, to love conditionally, claiming we don't need God to know what it is to love.

[13:17] We can do it ourselves, but the reality is we love in a very corrupted way and this is why we find this story incredibly challenging and shocking.

It turns our version of love and the way we view love completely upside down. The picture Jesus paints tells us what it is to truly love your neighbor.

It's to show that love is unconditional. It's not conditional love. It's not because love. It's love that seeks their well-being no matter what.

This parable is to say that if you want eternal life, you must love God and your neighbor and your neighbor could be at times your worst enemy.

This unconditional love that Christ calls us to have for our neighbor means being able to see your worst enemy potentially lying half dead in front of you and instead of feeling rage and bitterness and anger and maybe a bit of joy about their plight instead you feel compassion.

[14:24] Imagine that. Imagine if that was your first reaction to seeing your worst enemy lying before you half dead. Your first reaction was to have compassion on them.

This is what it means to love your neighbor. Not conditional. Not because type love. Unconditional. But the question is how are we able to do this? How are we going to love our neighbor when they turn out to be our enemy? The reality is we really can't if we're honest because sin has so corrupted our world and has so corrupted the way that we love that we don't even know what it looks like and truly means to love unconditionally.

People would be looking at this story and going that is wrong. That is not right. That is not loving for that Samaritan to love that Jew. That's foolish. It's impossible for us to be able to love our neighbor in such a way which is why when we read this we're so taken aback and we want to challenge it.

We don't want it to be true. But the great reality here that this is not only a depiction of how we're ought to love this is a depiction of how God loves us.

[15 : 48] Remember the parable's purpose is to illustrate what it is to love the Lord your God with all your heart mind soul and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself. It's supposed to be a depiction of the law of God and unconditional love is what characterizes this law than it also would be what characterizes God himself.

Our God then is a God of unconditional love and we have seen this haven't we through his son. Romans 5.8 says this but God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2 says this all of us also lived among them at one time gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following his desires and thoughts like the rest we were by nature deserving of wrath but because of his great love for us God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions it is by grace you have been saved.

When we were God's enemy Christ died for us while we were lying on the road helpless victims of our own rebellion against him Christ came and he did not pass us by he stopped and he had compassion on us.

That word compassion is *splagitsomai* in the Greek and what it means is for your gut to actually go out for you to actually feel sick when you see someone in pain and who is hurting.

[17 : 21] That's the kind of compassion that Christ had for us. He saved us from our sins by taking our place on the cross even though we were his worst enemies he died for us and through his death he gave us new life.

What does the love of Christ look like? It's unconditional. While you were his worst enemy he died for you. We enjoy eternal life and peace with God and fellowship with each other here this morning because of Christ's unconditional love for us.

So we then who have been brought into relationship with God who experience the incredible unconditional love of God through his son and have seen how good it is and how right it is have the privilege to reflect this love to a world that is so broken and a world that is so corrupted in the way it loves.

We don't do this in our own strength but we do it in the strength of Christ knowing that we are deeply loved by him set free in him resting in his assurance of forgiveness and eternal life enabled by his spirit to love others even those who might be considered our enemies who might be so unlovable and so hard to love but the question is how does this play out practically?

If we can do this in Christ strength then what does it look like practically to love those who could be our worst enemies who are on our front line who are difficult and hard to love?

[19 : 03] So we come to our second question how do we live our lives on the front line in such a way that reflects the unconditional love of Christ? How do we love those in our world who would least expect it without compromising what it is we believe?

Showing unconditional love whilst continuing to hold tightly and firmly to the faith that we confess to the things that we believe in scripture and not compromising it or abandoning it even though we're in a world that wants us to abandon those things how do we do that?

The answer is not a simple one I'm sure you'll be able to think of situations where you won't know what to do exactly but I think the best thing we can do is model our Lord Jesus Christ himself as we see how he loved in the gospels and do our best to follow his example in our world today and I think there are two particular things that we see Christ model to us in the gospels that will help us to love our neighbour whoever that might be firstly we see that Jesus was not afraid to associate with sinners all throughout the gospels Jesus loves to hang out with sinners and those who are rejected from the community and showing them love and grace but a particular story I want to look at is in Luke 5 which was our second reading Jesus meets Levi a tax collector and he calls Levi to follow him Levi then he's so stoked about following Jesus decides to throw a massive party in his honour and Levi invites tax collectors and other people along as well now tax collectors kind of like Samaritans were also hated by the Jews because they were people who worked for the Roman Empire who took money from the Jews and then took even more than they owed for themselves they were considered traitors of the Jewish people and so people again would not want to be associated anyway with these tax collectors with these sinners and yet here we have Jesus once again hanging out with these unlikely people it would be like this situation our Archbishop Glenn Davies being invited to the house of the Auburn City Council's mayor Salim Mahajah for a party now

you can imagine what kind of party that might be like Jesus goes and spends time with these people with these sinners associating with them presumably having lots of fun with them and not afraid of what the Pharisees thought even though they were questioning his disciples about why he was doing this and his response was this in verse 31 those who are well need no physician or doctor but those who are sick

I have not come to call the righteous but sinners Jesus isn't afraid to associate with sinful people indeed it's his purpose for coming down to earth to associate with them and love them in order he might save them we are not concerned we are not called to hide away from the world to disassociate ourselves from the world and the concerns of the world to remain our own holy huddles and focus on each other no Jesus has called us to engage with these people to love them to extend mercy and grace even if they are undeserving of it in our own eyes we do this because for we have been saved by grace for we have been experiencing the unconditional love of God through his son if it were our purpose to just remain this little holy huddle right here and avoid the world then there would be no point for us in being on this earth but we are here because it is our privilege and our joy to exhibit the love of Christ has shown us to the whole world as Jesus says it's not the healthy who need a doctor it's the sick who need a doctor and so therefore there's a particular need for us to go out and love those who might seem unlovable to love those who no one else will love to love and associate ourselves with those who really in the eyes of the world don't deserve our love but we do this because we see our world is in desperate need of the love of Christ and it's through us on our front line we are able to reflect it the second thing we see that Jesus exemplifies to us is that Jesus' purpose in being with them and loving them was for their salvation you may have noticed

[23 : 58] I left out two words in that last quote of Jesus when he responded to the Pharisees the very last two words are probably the most important in fully understanding how Jesus loves sinners and why it is he's actually hanging out with these people I'll read it again for us those who are well have no need for a physician but those who are sick I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance Jesus understood his purpose in being there in being at this party his profound unconditional love for them is seen in his desire to see them repent of their sin and follow him in the eyes of the Pharisees Jesus looked like he was compromising it looked like he was going in just to join in on the fun sinful party I wonder how many of us here have had eyes like the Pharisees and have secretly judged our Christian friends for going out to the pub after work for always posting photos online with a beer in hand for being around our non-Christian friends a lot

I wonder how many of us have thought of them as compromising on their faith because they are with sinners as we saw before we're not to fear associating with the world but we need to know why we are doing so our unconditional love for our neighbor is expressed in our desire to see these people repent and follow Jesus if we were joining in on the sinful activity or abandoning biblical truth in order to make it easier to love then it would be compromising the thing is it's an illusion to think that we are loving by even being like that it's not unconditional love to compromise on what it is that we believe in order to make people feel comfortable it's not unconditional love to sweep people's sin under the carpet and act like it doesn't matter that's the opposite of loving people might love you in this life for how flexible you are in your beliefs and in accepting you are of others but Christ's love for us looked beyond this life towards eternity and we must do the same our way of love is hard calling people to repent is hard living a life of faithfulness to the scripture especially on the front line is hard but the unconditional love that we exhibit in the end is eternal and therefore worth it and that's where it will count whether we're at the pub at work after work in mother's groups throughout the week in the lunch room in the office talking to mums and dads at the school pickup in our book clubs and rotary meetings we are called to profoundly love these people by calling them to repent to remember that our purpose in loving them is to see them come to know and to love Jesus now that doesn't necessarily mean that we stand up in the middle of our workplaces and start preaching and calling them to baptize and such but what it does mean you can give it a go if you like but what it does mean is living life of gracious love that seeks to engage with these people with where they are at not afraid to associate yourself with them and yet at the same time not compromising on your faith drawing the line that line might be hard to find at times but we ought to do our best because in the end it is seeking to love them and to do life with them as you are both part of the same world the same world that God made and as they seek to share their life with you you'll have an opportunity to share your life with them and that's where you'll have the opportunity to

share the love of God and call them to repent and there is not a better way to love people by telling them the wonderful love and truth of Jesus love for them and by living it out as you live your life on the front line as I said it's not always that simple it's not always that easy and clear how to show that love of Christ in this world but where we do have the opportunity to love it will speak volumes where we can give the world taste the love of God has lavished upon us and how that transforms our life on our front line it will speak volumes a couple of weeks ago a lady named

Ingrid Williams was killed in a car accident in Oklahoma City she was hit by an oncoming car that killed the driver instantly and then she was killed a day later in hospital Monty Williams her husband had every reason to be filled with anger you might expect that he was had a sense that he was robbed that what happened was unjust and not fair but at the funeral when he gave his eulogy he said this as a part of it he said this I want to close with this and I think it's the most important thing we need to understand everyone is praying for me and my family which is right but let us not forget that there were two people in this situation and that family needs prayer as well and we have no ill will towards that family in my house we have a sign that says as for me and my house we will serve the

Lord we cannot serve the Lord if we don't have a heart of forgiveness that family didn't wake up wanting to hurt my wife life is hard it's very hard and that was tough but we will hold no ill will toward Donaldson family and as we group and we as a group brothers united in unity should be praying for that family because they grieve as well so let's not lose sight of what's important we cannot serve the Lord if we don't have a heart of forgiveness that right there is someone who is exhibiting on their front line how the unconditional love of God has transformed them in every single way enabling him to love forgive and pray for the family whose member killed his wife love of this is what it is to love our neighbor to love those on our front line it can seem quite daunting quite intimidating but this this story should encourage us to see that the

[31 : 27] Christian life has so much to offer in this world as we engage with the world not compromising our faith but loving a world that desires to see people we interact with come to repentance where you are right now and whatever you are doing it is so important what you're doing is so important whether you are working full time at home looking out for the kids full time studying or at uni full time volunteering playing sport whatever it might be wherever God has placed you it is so important because he wants you to live out a life of faith where you've been placed showing how your whole life your work your relationships have been transformed by Jesus as Jesus transformed Monty Williams to live in such a way in unconditional love to give those around you a taste of the kingdom of heaven that is to come as you live out and exemplify the love of God in your work and in your life

Amen