**HIS GREAT LOVE PART 2 JCC JULY 6, 2014**

The topic of last week’s message was ‘Our Loving Heavenly Father’, and it was given in a different way – as a love letter from our Father, using many verses to describe the great love He has for you and me. Our Father has many admirable character traits, and we saw just how much time He spent thinking about each one of us and in planning our lives well in advance of our birthday. I felt to continue on this theme, **‘His great** **Love’** so we can gain a greater and deeper understanding and appreciation of just how marvelous His love for you and me really is. I came across this wonderful description of His love**: ‘Agape love, our Father’s love towards us and that same love extended to others – is an undefeatable benevolence, an unconquerable goodwill, is an unending flow of mercy, grace and forgiveness, that always seeks the highest good of the other person, no matter what he does. It is a self-giving love that gives freely without asking anything in return and does not consider the worth of its object. Agape love is love by choice; it refers to the will to love rather than a passing emotion. This is the unconditional love of the Father for every one of His created** **beings.’** Until we have a greater revelation of His great Love; until we allow His love to permeate our lives; until His love so engulfs and overwhelms us, we will not love one another as we have been commanded to; we will not love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves; and the world will never see His great Love shining in us and through us.

Jesus words should ring in our ears, **‘A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ John 13:34,35** As we think about Jesus’ words, we see that this is a command, not an option for our Christian walk – this is not if I feel like loving them, or if that person likes me, or if they laugh at my jokes, or if any other ‘feel good’ option – it is not about my personal preferences – it is what I must do and what I must show in my relationships with others. This must be my decision, my commitment and my lifestyle of personal behavior. The world will see and know that we are Christ’s followers because of our loving care; our careful consideration; our deep concern for each other. Our demonstrated love for each other is the Father’s glue that binds us together; it is what keeps us in good relationship with one another; this love will restore relationships within the Body and keep them healthy. Disputes, back-biting, gossiping tongues, unkind criticisms, character assassinations and defamations are part of satan’s kingdom and have nothing to do with the Kingdom of God – ask yourself, whose kingdom am I building? We all have the great responsibility to guard our minds, our thoughts – what we think about our brothers and sisters – we need to guard our tongues – what we speak about our brothers and sisters.

**‘As I have loved you.’** How did the Father, how did Jesus love you, love me? There were no conditions attached to His love – if you love me I will love you. So often in our personal relationships we decide who we will like and befriend by who it is that likes us and treats us well. But His love for us was unconditional. **‘But God demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’ Romans 5:8** These are amazing words when you stop to think about it. God sent His only Son to die for us, not because we were good enough; not because we could earn His love or deserved His love, but simply because He loved us so much. If you ever find yourself wondering about your Father’s love for you, remember that He loved you so much – well before you ever thought of turning to Him. We did not have to make ourselves righteous or become a better person before God decided to send Jesus as a sacrifice for our sin. We now rejoice in our new relationship with our Father all because of Jesus’ obedience in going to the Cross and shedding His blood for us, making us friends with our Heavenly Father.

Since it is not by warm, fuzzy feelings that we are to love others, then how are we to love others as Christ loved us? By helping others when it is not convenient or easy or when we don’t feel like it; by giving when it hurts us to give; by sharing what we have with the unlovely; by devoting our energies to others rather than to our own selfish desires; by thinking of others needs before we supply our own wants – thinking of others more and thinking less about ourselves; by absorbing hurts from others without complaining or fighting back – humility – not demanding our own ‘rights’. This kind of loving is hard to do, in fact, humanly impossible. That is why we need power from our supernatural source of God, His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Then people will see the great love of God shining through us – then they know we are truly His disciples, by our demonstrated love for one another. Then they will be drawn to Christ and give glory to our heavenly Father. Just think of it – it is not only our prayers that effectively draw people to Christ; it is not only our public witnessing and good examples that win the lost; it is the ‘agape love’ received from the Father and then given freely to our fellow believers that they will see and want for themselves; that is what they will want to be a part of. No one wants to be a part of fighting, chaos and confusion – they have enough of that at home or at work - but everyone is drawn to God because of His true love and because of our demonstrated love for each other. I know that Robert and Tanya’s family members – their sons and mother and father – are being drawn to Christ, because of our demonstrated love for Robert and Tanya on their moving day. We all pulled together; we worked together showing our love for them and for each other, and they are impressed and drawn to the ‘Christ of love’ who is in us.

God’s love is the greatest unifying force on the face of the earth – and we have it, so let us live it, walk in it and share it. **‘How great is the love** **the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God.’ 1John 3:1** As His children, we should become reflections of our Father, we should be developing into His likeness, we should be acting more like He acts. Have you ever noticed how a son emulates and becomes like his father; how he wants to be like his Dad and do what his father does? We should be growing in resemblance to our Father, His ways and His actions. Knowing that we are His children should encourage us to live as His Son and our Brother Jesus lived; we are trying to live purely even as Christ lived a pure life. This is the day by day process of development we are all involved in – some days we do well and other days not so good – but we don’t give up.

The love of the Father has been described as unspeakably amazing. I can’t understand it, but I have experienced it and I wholeheartedly embrace it, and I know that I can never be separated from it. **Romans 8:38,39 ‘For I am persuaded That neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come. nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’** I have often said that there is nothing that can separate us from His great love – except you, except your decision to leave Him behind or to set Him aside. After all, it is your life, your choice, and your destiny. It does not matter the depth of the trial you are going through; the amount of suffering you are experiencing; the hardships and difficulties of life you have or are experiencing; the pain, illness or sickness you may have; the persecution or imprisonment or even death you may face – God has not left you, He has not abandoned you or deserted you, because there is nothing that can separate you from His love and care for you. Jesus knows about you – Jesus cares and understands, and when things go wrong, you just fall down on your knees – He will meet you there. God tells us how great His love is for us so we will feel totally secure in Him and so we will not be afraid or apprehensive about our futures. His presence is constantly in us and with us.

Our Father’s love is unending – it is available for us for every day or our lives here on earth and it will be with us for all eternity! **Jeremiah 31:3 ‘Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.’** His loving kindness is motivated by His deep love for His children, you and me. He is eager and anxious to do the best for us if we will let Him. He lovingly draws us closer to His heart. And His love is extended to us for all eternity! God is love.

Our Father’s love is completely unselfish. He asks for nothing in return for His love. Because of His great love for each of us, we love Him in return. **1John 4:19 ‘We love Him because He first loved us.’** How much did He love us? This much! (opened arms as wide as possible) Our Father’s great love is the source for our loving Him back, and then the source of our love for each other. As our Father has served us such great love, so it is that we serve others with the same great love that we have been shown.

**Our Father’s love, when it is present in each of us, will be visible in the following areas:**

1) We will demonstrate a love for the **Savior.** **‘If you love me, keep my** **commandments.’ John 14:15** There are blessings for obedience.

2) We will demonstrate a love for the **Scriptures. ‘You search the scriptures, for you believe they give you eternal life. And the scriptures point to me.’**

3) We will demonstrate a love for the **Sanctuary. Psalms 122:1 ‘I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the House of the Lord.’**

4) We will demonstrate a love for the **Saints.** **John 13:35 ‘Your strong love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.’**

5) We will demonstrate a love for the **Sinners. 1Peter 3:9 ‘God is not willing that any should perish.’**

**Finally, 1Peter 3:8-12 ‘And now this word to all of you: You should be like one big happy family, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don’t repay evil for evil, don’t snap back at those who say unkind things about you. Instead, pray for God’s help for them, for we are to be kind to others, and God will bless us for it. If you want a happy, good life, keep control of your tongue, and guard your lips from telling lies. Turn away from evil and do good. Try to live in peace even if you have to run after it to catch it and hold it. For the Lord is watching His children and listening to their prayers, but the Lord’s face is hard against those who do evil.’**

Our Father’s love is more than just receiving His love – it is about giving His love away, it is about opening our lives to Him so the He can love others through us. This is how the world will be reached for Him. I invite you to join me today as I pray and ask the Lord to help me to love the way Jesus loved.