



Royal Oak
VICTORY CHURCH

July 9, 2017 ~ Pastor Sheldon Ball Love Does Part 1

This morning I am excited to start our brand new summer sermon series entitled Love Does.

The theme of this series is designed for all of us to discover how incredible life can really be if we only pause for a few moments and see the incredible lessons that can be learned in the ordinary happenings of our daily routine.

Let's pick up right where Pastor Dave left off as he finished the chapter entitled, *The Story*, and I want to ask a simple, reflective question.

Now this question is not meant to be morbid, but it does help bring some perspective if we truly ponder the answer to it as it pertains our lives.

The question is this, "*When someone in the future reads my obituary, what will it say about my life?*"

Will it be filled with incredible stories, rich with adventure and compassion, or it will it read more like a typical history stats line outlining important dates and related people, but nothing more.

The interesting thing about this question is that we have a say as to how it will read – but we have to choose what actions we are going to take. We have to decide if we are going to be fully engaged, or are we just going to let life happen to us.

Have you ever noticed how children seem to have an easier time living life fully engaged?

But then they slowly lose that ability over time as logic begins to develop and the daily routines of being an adult kicks in?

I got a wakeup call in this regard recently when I observed my children playing.

In our backyard we have this Little Tikes plastic pirate ship that we set up for the kids. When we got it I thought to myself more than once that it was an annoyance, as I had to constantly move it around the yard because it was killing the grass or because I had to mow the lawn.

But to my kids it isn't a plastic pirate ship...it's a real ship!

The adventures they have, the stories they tell, the joy that they exhibit make me realize every time that they play on it that having a little fun in life is something that we as adults should try once in a while.

I know the fulfillment I feel as a father when I see my kids off on one of their imaginary adventures, and I have to think that God, our father, feels the exact same thing when he looks at each of us doing the same thing.

It's why he gives us big dreams; it's why he gives us passions and gifts and talents, because he wants us to use them to live a life full of fun and adventure.

Somewhere along the way we lose our ability to act on our dreams; to respond to whimsy, as Bob Goff says in his book.

J Paulsen is quoted as saying, "The cost of not following your heart is spending the rest of your life wishing you had."

So how do we move past the ordinary and truly engage with life? How do we progress to action?

We have to learn that application is everything.

Unfortunately there is an epidemic in the western church of individuals who say they love the Bible, attend church every Sunday, maybe even connect in small groups, but have not put love into action.

They are okay with casual and comfortable Christianity, and God is calling them to step out and into love in action.

Some of you here today know that God has been calling you into something but there has been a hesitation because there is risk associated with it.

But I truly feel that the time has come for the church to step out of inactivity and prove to the world that love isn't idle, but love does.

Think about it – we don't go to the doctor because we are sick, get medicine, and then go home and not take it; the healing comes from the application.

We don't desire to get healthy and go the gym and just stand observing the equipment thinking that just by looking at that we will get fit; the exercise and its benefits comes from the application.

The same is true of faith; the same is true of love.

An incredible life in an ordinary world requires that I devote myself to action.

When James wrote his letter to the church he warned about the same inactivity, but he also provided tools for us to use to be able to overcome this apathy and move into what God has called us to do.

In your Bibles, turn with me to the book of James.

If you are new to the Bible you will find James near the back of the book. Find Revelation, the last book of the Bible, and go backwards through the short letters by Jude, John and Peter and you will find the letter written by James.

Starting in Chapter 1, Verse 22...

“But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.

“For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.

“But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.”

In this passage, James teaches us three things that we must do in order to be able to devote ourselves to action.

The first is that we have to...

Listen

If we look at this passage, there is an implicit expectation that this step is already occurring, when James writes, “But don’t just listen to God’s word.”

That means that many of us are already started on this journey, maybe without even realizing it, because the fact is when presented with God’s word we have three options: to not listen, to listen only, and to listen and act.

The first of these three options means ignoring everything that the Bible says, but more specifically it means ignoring love. It means ignoring God and his call on your life altogether.

The third option is what we are trying to explore today; how to move into action.

The second option, the one to listen only, is where many of us progress to and then get stuck, but this shouldn’t be discouraging, as it is the first step to devoting ourselves to action.

In the Chapter Pastor Dave read from Love Does, there is a quote that really caught my attention in this regards.

Bob Goff writes, “If Adam is right about memories being reserved for folks who don’t do anything cool anymore, then I don’t want to just collect memories anymore.”

In this statement is a recognition that there is a tendency in human nature to stop acting; that at some point in time we get to a comfortable spot in life where we are happy with what we have and what we have accomplished (or maybe we are just too tired or too busy to go any farther).

And it is at this point that we shift backwards from an attitude to listening and acting, to just listening.

But he also recognizes in this quote that it is time for us to move and to act.

Proverbs 19:20 says, “Get all the advice and instruction you can, so you will be wise the rest of your life.”

In other words, listen.

The reason for this is that being in a state of listening **only** leads to forgetfulness.

Let me show you how this works practically.

By a show of hands, who was here last Sunday for our Canada Day Celebration?

Of those of you that were here, who remembers that we sung Oh Canada, that we had balloons drop from the ceiling in a big crescendo, that we had a birthday beaver mascot, and a BBQ?

Of those of you that were here, who here remembers all four of Pastor Dave's points from his sermon, without cheating and looking at your notes?

There is a stark difference in who responded to those two questions.

Now I think all of us can agree that there was value in what Pastor Dave said. That at certain points while he preached that we were listening, that we laughed, or that we nodded in agreement. That is because there is value in listening.

But the reason we remember more about the event itself than the words that were spoken is because of engagement. We had an active part to play as we stood and sang, as we ate and drank.

And that was only a week ago.

How much more do we forget the things that were preached, or that our boss or loved ones have said to us, when it was weeks or months ago?

The problem with listening without action is that we can't retain all of that information indefinitely, but when we tie emotion, engagement, and action to those words we have better recollection of the information.

Which leads to the second thing that James outlines in this passage, and that is that we have to...

Learn

When we listen to the words of God, we have to take time to reflect on what is being said and think about how we can take that and apply it to our lives.

This time for self-application is the necessary middle step for us to move from listening only to listening and doing.

But we can't ignore this step.

If we go right from listening to doing there is no connection between what we have heard and how we act, and we may end up acting in way that is contrary to what we are really supposed to be doing.

A 2006 medical study revealed the stark reality of this when they looked at what happens when people ignore this step.

When a heart bypass patient comes out of surgery, as part of their recovery they are instructed on how they need to live their lives from now on, and specifically they are instructed on the things that they are not supposed to do so they can avoid a similar surgery in the future.

In other words they are taught how and what they have to do to live.

This includes things like changing their diet, making sure that they exercise, and if they are smokers to stop smoking.

Every patient listened, but when they went back to these patients two years later, they discovered that 90% of the patients were not acting on the advice – they had not changed.

These patients listened, but they failed to learn, and they just kept on doing the things that were in fact hurting, and in some cases, killing them.

James writes, “But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.”

In the Greek, the word for “*carefully*”, or in some translations it says to look “*intently*”, means to study, to stoop to something in order to look at it in detail.

We have to take those moments when we hear God speaking to us - whether it’s personally, or through Scripture, whether it’s through a sermon, our personal devotional time, or whether it’s from a trusted individual - and evaluate what is really being said.

We have to stop the words from going in one ear and out the other, and the only way we can to do that is to study it and to learn it.

James says if we fail to move past listening, we are only fooling ourselves.

Another way we can read this sentence is that 'I am making a gross miscalculation about the intention of God's words and its direction for my life'.

Proverbs 1:5 says, "Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance..."

And Proverbs 10:17 says, "Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof [correction] leads others astray."

Again, there is nothing wrong with sitting here in church every week listening the words of God, but unless we move past sitting - unless we learn - we will never act, we will never engage, and we will never discover the incredible life that He has planned and prepared for each of us.

I heard it explained to me once in this way.

People will listen and respond in one of five ways...

1. Wishers – those that hear but never try,
2. Talkers – those that talk about what they intend to do or did in the past,
3. Dreamers – those that plan and prepare but never act upon their intentions,
4. Dabblers – those that start but never finish, and
5. Doers – those that listen, learn, and (finally)...

Love

We have to move to action, but more than that, we have to make a commitment that we are going to act – all the time, every day.

Sometimes to act appropriately means to do nothing, but more often it leads to living a life that influences others through our loving responses to the things that life throws at us, and to what life throws at those around us.

How we respond, and how we act in spite of it, is what shows His love in us and our love for others.

The thing about choosing to act, or in our context, choosing to love, is that it is a natural progression of the acceptance of the words God speaks into our life.

When we read the Bible, throughout the New Testament there is an assumption that action must follow; that obedience to God is paramount to life.

James says it like this...“For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.”

It seems kind of ridiculous when he puts it this way because nobody glances at a mirror and then forgets what they look like.

In fact I would say all of us looked in the mirror intentionally this morning to make sure that we were ready to go out into public.

Considering no one here is still in their pajamas, and this crowd looks pretty put together, that this is probably a pretty safe assumption.

Just as we don’t forget ourselves after we look at ourselves in a mirror, there is an expectation that loving action is the natural progression and *our natural response* to God speaking to us in His variety of ways through the Holy Spirit.

Chuck Swindoll gives us a good illustration of this, in his book, *Improving Your Serve*.

“Let’s pretend that you work for me. In fact, you are my executive assistant in a company that is growing rapidly. I’m the owner and I’m interested in expanding overseas. To pull this off, I make plans to travel abroad and stay there until the new branch office gets established. I make all the arrangements to take my family in the move to Europe for six to eight months, and I leave you in charge of the busy stateside organization. I tell you that I will write you regularly and give you direction and instructions.

I leave and you stay. Months pass. A flow of letters are mailed from Europe and received by you at the national headquarters. I spell out all my expectations. Finally, I return. Soon after my arrival I drive down to the office. I am stunned! Grass and weeds have grown up high. A few windows along the street are broken. I walk into the receptionist’s room and she is doing her nails, chewing gum, and listening to her favorite {radio} station. I look around and notice the wastebaskets are overflowing, the carpet hasn’t been vacuumed in weeks, and nobody seems concerned that the owner has returned.

I ask for you and someone in the crowded lounge area points down the hall and

yells, “I think he’s down there.” Disturbed, I move in that direction and bump into you as you are finishing a chess game with our sales manager. I ask you to step into my office (which has been turned into a television room for watching afternoon soap operas).

“What in the world is going on?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, look at this place! Didn’t you get any of my letters?”

“Letters? Oh, yeah – sure, got every one of them. As a matter of fact we have had a letter study every Friday night since you left. We even divide all the personnel into small groups and discuss many of the things you wrote. Some of those things were really interesting.

You’ll be pleased to know that a few of us have actually committed to memory some of your sentences and paragraphs. One or two memorized an entire letter or two! Great stuff in those letters!”

“Okay, okay – you got my letters, you studied them and meditated on them, discussed them and even memorized them. BUT WHAT DID YOU DO ABOUT THEM?”

“Do? Uh – we didn’t do anything about them.”

Jesus said, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24-25)

It takes the application of what we have been taught, what we have been urged to do, for love to be truly expressed.

We have been called to lean into love; to show it through our obedience to God (*for that is what it means to love God with all of our heart, mind, soul and strength*) and to express it in our actions towards our neighbours.

In today’s chapter of *Love Does*, Bob Goff writes, “I’ve come to understand more about faith as I’ve understood more about whimsy. What whimsy means to me is a combination of the “do” part of faith along with doing something worth doing.”

To me, it is about seeing the adventure in everything, including a plastic pirate ship in my backyard, and then responding to the call of that adventure by listening, learning and loving as God has called me to.

Really, Jesus was no different.

He would listen to God the Father, learn what he could, and then engage with the crowds, with the widows, with the sinners, with those seeking forgiveness and freedom.

He would engage.

He would love.

Today we are going to conclude by partaking in Communion together.

I want this to be a dedication to love. Communion is a remembrance of this very thing through the obedience and actions of Jesus on the cross.

For us, I want us to dedicate ourselves (or rededicate ourselves) to the understanding that action must come as an expression of the love God has for us and the love he wants us to express to others.

Because an incredible life in an ordinary world requires that I devote myself to action.