

Unexpected Love

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: John 4:7-12

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How many of you remember the old game show that debuted on TV in 1973 called The Match Game? You guys remember this? It had a really creepy host. I don't remember his name, but he just looked a little creepy. I don't know why it wasn't my favorite game show, but I remember watching it. And the premise of the game is that you would have these two contestants that were playing against each other and they had to try to match their response to the question.

It's either a fill in the blank or kind of a word association with celebrities that were kind of on the panel. And they weren't A list celebrities. I don't think they were B list celebrities. They were like C and D list celebrities. And the most matches you could get, you would get points and that's how you would play the game. If you don't know much about me, you don't know that I love game shows. Always have, always will. Loved watching game shows, all of the old game shows like Press Your Luck, Card Shark, the Match Game was probably one of my least favorite ones.

It was just kind of a little weird. And I find it interesting that all of these game shows have come back. Have you noticed this? There's now a new iteration of Pressure, Luck and Card Shark and actually The Match Game, which I haven't watched because again, I don't really like this one that much. But one of my favorite game shows growing up was The Price is Right, which is still going, of course. And some of you maybe know this about me or don't know this about me, but actually I love game shows so much and wanted to be on them that I convinced my wife for our honeymoon to go out to Rancho Mirage, California, near Palm Springs, so that we could try to be on the prices right now.

We did go out there and we did try to get on the prices right, but we didn't even make it in the studio. But we enjoyed our honeymoon nonetheless. We had made shirts that said flight this much and Hotel this much and being on The Price is Right for your honeymoon priceless. But we never even got on, so we don't have the shirts anymore, needless to say. But let's play the match. Game. That's why I talk about all this. Let's play the match game. If I were to say what is the first word that comes to your mind when I say the word Christmas, what are some of the ideas that you would come up with?

I would imagine tree lights, maybe things like snow. If you're thinking about the season, maybe presents as you're thinking about that, some of you might think about Frosty the Snowman or rude off the red nose reindeer or Santa. Maybe those are the things that come to mind. Others of you, if you're more holy you might think things like BMP, right? That might come to your mind when you think about Christmas or no, maybe Jesus or Manger, some of those things would come to mind.

But how many of you, if you were playing this game and I said the word Christmas, the first thing that would come to your mind would be the word love. Some of you are thinking love, okay, I kind of know where you're going with that. And if you answered love and we were playing the match game, I would be angry at you, all right? Because there were so many better options, and some of you right now even have a song playing in your head, right? What's love got to do with it? Right? What does love have to do with Chris?

There you go. Okay, they're going to play it this time. You guys know the song, right? Come on. All right. They turned it off on me. All right. The answer is a lot. Love has a lot to do with Christmas. Love is actually all about

Christmas. As we continue in our series this week, the Unexpected Messiah. We started that first week talking about how when Jesus came, he came in the most unexpected way.

He was born as a baby to two teenagers who had no clue what they were doing, with no influence in the town of Bethlehem. And they were expecting their Messiah to come as a military leader, a ruler that was going to restore the nation of Israel, the prominence. They wanted an earthly kingdom, but Jesus had come to establish a spiritual kingdom, a heavenly kingdom.

And so we talked about the hope that he brought to those first century Jews, an unexpected hope that he was going to change everything. And as you and I enter the Christmas season, we talked about the fact that we all need that hope during this Christmas season. And then last week, we talked about the unexpected joy that comes during Christmas, the unexpected joy that Jesus brings. And I shared with you that joy is a choice. It's a decision you make.

It's not like happiness. It's not a feeling. It's a decision. And I also shared that joy, true joy, can only come from God. And so someone sent me a really good email that had a question in it last week, and I wanted to share that question with you. This person asked me, how do you reconcile saying that joy is a decision and also saying that joy is from the Lord? If it's a decision but it can only come from the Lord, then how do those two go together?

Let me give you the short answer, because this was last week's message, not this week. But I want to answer that question because it was good. Here is the short answer. You and I choose joy when we choose to submit to Jesus. That is how I reconcile those two things. It's a choice. I am choosing to submit my life to Jesus. And in so doing, I can receive the joy that only comes from Him. And then every day thereafter, I choose to submit to Him.

And so I know that my salvation comes from Him. That is my joy that comes from the Lord. It's a great question. And now today I want to talk about the unexpected love that comes from Jesus during this Christmas season. Did you know that the word love actually shows up in our Bibles over 300 times? There are over 300 scripture references where the word love is used. And so I thought it would be good for us today to take some time to look at every single one of those references.

I'm just kidding. Some of you smiled before I even got to it. No, but we're not going to look at everyone, but I have chosen a few. So if you have your Bibles, I encourage you to open up with me to First John, chapter four. First John, chapter four. We're going to start in verse seven. If you're watching online or listening on the radio and you use the you version Bible app, you can open that up and it will have the scripture there for you to read and the NIV version. If not, you can open your Bibles. First John, chapter four, verse seven. And then let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we gather before you today. We thank you for your love. We thank you for your grace and your mercy and your forgiveness. We know that we don't deserve or earn these things, but they're gifts that are given to us by you.

And so today, as we look at this unexpected love that you have given to us, I pray that our hearts, our spirits, our souls would be open to hearing from you and that we would truly spend time praising you and thanking you for the good gifts that you have given to us. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen. Love is actually a strange word in the English language.

It's strange all of the different ways that we use the word love. I think about myself and how many times I use this word and it means something different every time I use it. I say things like, I love ice cream. 1 second. You ever had a sneeze that you think is going to come? God took it away. That was good. All right, thanks for the prayer. Someone just prayed that I wouldn't sneeze in the microphone, but I say things like I love ice cream or I love Michigan football.

I had to put this up here, guys, back to back big Ten championships. All right. Yep. Thank you. It's not often I get to do that, but I love Michigan football. I love golf. I say things like I love woodworking, but then I also say things like I love my kids, I love my wife, I love Jesus. Does this word love mean the same thing the whole time? Do I love my wife the same way that I love golf? Of course not. It's close, but I'm joking, I'm joking.

It's different, isn't it? You see, if you've ever had the opportunity to study other languages, you'll recognize that the English language, even though it's very hard to learn because all of the rules and then the rules are all broken. It's very elementary, really. We don't have a lot of words. And so we use this word love to mean a lot of different things. Let me give you an example, and we've talked about this before. The New Testament is written in the Greek language. And in the Greek language, there's three different words that we have for love.

And we translate them all the same, but they all mean something a little bit different. And you've heard of these before. We have, eros love. And this is an intimate love, like the love between a husband and wife. And so instead of just saying I love my wife, I would say, I eros my wife. That's the type of love. It's different than the way I love golf or other things. Then there's another word that's philia, which, you know, Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.

philia is this brotherly love. It's a friendship love. And so you would use this to talk about things like Michigan football and golf and woodworking. I love it in that way. It's not an intimate love. It's completely different than the way I love my wife, but I enjoy it, this philia love. And then there's the final love, agape love. This is almost the deepest love because it's a selfless love, it's a giving love. And the best way that we can understand that, as it's used in the New Testament, would be God Agapes us.

He loves us in a selfless and in a giving way. And so we have this word love that means so many different things. So when I say that Christmas reveals to us an unexpected love, what type of love am I talking about? We're going to find out in one, John, chapter four. So let's look at this first, verse one John, chapter four, verse seven. John tells us, Dear friends, let us love one another.

For love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Right off the bat, John is telling us that love is just like joy in the fact that it comes from God, that love comes from God. It can only come from Him. This type of love that he's talking about, this wouldn't be the type of love that means I enjoy woodworking, I enjoy golf, I enjoy Michigan football.

That's not the type of love that John is talking about. He's talking about this agape love, this selfless love, this giving love that can only come from God. Only those that have been born of God can love in that way and even understand what that is. Only those that have been created in the image of God can have agape love. Now, don't be mad at me. This is John saying this. I know some of you are pet lovers and you have pets and that's great.

But I'm here to share with you that John is saying, listen, pets, other animals in creation, though they can care for each other and they can help each other. They don't truly love each other. They can have feelings, they can have emotions, they can have those things. They can know who you are and appreciate that you take care of them when you come home. And the dogs at the door, I mean, they can appreciate that there's that going on. But they can't love each other in the same way that you and I can love each other.

This agape love, this selfless, this giving love, we go on in verse eight, John says whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. God is love. What is John saying? He's saying that the very definition, the very foundation of love is God. He is a part of it all. God is love.

And so Christmas is a sign of this love. Some of you may be upset by this, but John is saying you cannot truly love one another if you don't know who God is. You can't truly love one another with this agape love. And I'm

not saying you can't have feelings again for each other. Even as human beings, I know a lot of people that don't know God, and I would never look at them and say you don't really know what love is, right?

But in a sense, they don't really know what love is, this agape love. They know about feelings, they know about emotions. And some of those people might even give themselves to somebody, but they don't know the true definition of agape love. So how does God love us? How does God show this love? If he is love, how does he show this? Well, John tells us in verse nine, this is how God showed his love among us. Here's the answer to our question.

God shows his love to us because he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is the answer to our question how does God show his love? He showed his love by sending His Son Jesus into the world so that you and I could have a relationship with a holy God. So why do I say Christmas is about love? It's this unexpected love because Christmas is the sign of God's love.

Sending Jesus what we celebrate, the birth of our Savior is the sign of God's love for us. It's how he shows it to us. Christmas is the proof of God's love. On Christmas, we remember and celebrate God's love. God showed his love to us by sending Jesus into his creation to rescue you and me from the fallen world in which we live. If we are honest when we look in the mirror, you and I have made a mess of things in this world.

We've made mistakes. And the only way that it can be put back together is through the love of God. So how does the fact that God sent His Son into the world, how does that demonstrate love? How does that show love? Well, John's going to answer that question for us in verse ten. This is love. Here's the definition again, not that we loved God, but that he loved us. And again he sent his son. That's the act of love. But why was that an act of love?

It's because he sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. It's the reason that God sent Jesus into the world. It's the reason why he decided that was the best plan. You see, Jesus didn't come into our world in order to rule over us. He could have come as an earthly king that would establish a kingdom here and now so that we all would worship Him and praise Him and submit to Him. But that's not how he came.

Jesus didn't come into the world to yell at us or punish us, or send us to our room. Though that's what we all deserved, isn't it? We all deserve to be sent to our room. Instead, when God sent His Son into his creation, Jesus came into the world in order to be a sacrifice for us, in order to show us an act of love for our sins.

He came into the world in order to take our punishment, to purify us so that the Father could have a relationship with us. I like to view God in this way as a loving parent. A parent that would pay the fine for the accident that we caused. We got in a car accident, we made a mistake, and so we now have to pay a fine. And Jesus came to pay that fine.

Jesus came to serve the time for the law that we broke. We all broke the law. And so a punishment had to be given. Someone had to make a retribution for that. And so Jesus came to serve the time. Jesus came to pay the debt to God that you and I had defaulted on, that we could never pay this act of love. Jesus came to be an atoning sacrifice.

And so what should our response be if we recognize that truth, this act of love? Jesus stepping into his creation to pay the fine that we couldn't pay, to serve the time that we could never serve, to pay the debt that we could never pay? John tells us in verse eleven, so dear friends, since God has so loved us, here's our response. We also ought to love one another since God so loved us, what should our response be?

We ought to love agape, love one another. And we should do this in the same way that he loved us. This means not a feeling, not an emotion. It means loving in a sacrificial way. It means loving in a giving way, a serving way. And so what does this practically look like for you and for me? It means forgiving those who have wronged us, that's the way that God loves us.

It means giving to others, not just from our surplus, but giving so much that it costs us something. This means taking care of others, looking after others in a practical way. And that's why Christmas is a season of giving. This unexpected love that God has shown us as his followers, as his believers, as those that are being transformed into his image, we learn to give in that same way. Sacrificially.

John concludes this section in verse twelve. John says no one has ever seen God, but if we will love one another, then God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. John is saying that you and I, as followers of Jesus, have a responsibility. But it's more than that. It's a privilege, it's an honor that if we will love others in the ways that he has loved us, you and I can be the face of God to those we encounter both giving and receiving.

This kind of love is unexpected. It's unexpected because it's not our human nature. Our human nature is to preserve ourselves, to make sure that we take care of number one, to make sure that we're watching out for us and for who we are and what we need. That is what our human nature is. But when we love others in a selfless and in a giving way, the way that God loves us, it's an unexpected love and it causes people to ask questions.

It's unexpected because it's not natural. And John says that when that type of love shines through us, when God's nature shines through us, we have the ability to love others the way that he loved us. So how do we apply this to our lives as we close today? How do we actively live this out? What are we called to do? Well, first and least important, if you and I are ever playing the match game and the word Christmas is said, you better say love, okay?

Because then we're going to get it right. So we understand that Christmas is about love. That should be the first word that comes to our mind. Remember that on Christmas we are celebrating an act of love by a loving God. He sent His Son into this world in order to provide a way for us to have a relationship with Him. Which leads me to the first question have you ever received that gift? See, the amazing thing about our loving God is that he doesn't force a relationship upon us.

He doesn't force it upon us. He doesn't make us worship Him. He doesn't make us have a friendship with Him. Instead, it's like a gift that is given on Christmas morning. When someone gives you a gift, you have the choice, am I going to receive it? Am I going to open it? Am I going to unwrap it? Or am I not? Now, I don't know many people on Christmas morning. I've actually never been anywhere on Christmas morning where someone has been given a gift and they go, I don't want it.

Most people unwrap the gift. Now, as we get older, we play games, and we're like, oh, you shouldn't have gotten me anything, and whatever else. So we play that game. But Jesus offers us this amazing gift, and the gift is of His Son, Jesus Christ. That's what we celebrate on Christmas, the birth of this baby that is the Messiah that came to take our place on the cross. And so if we want to receive this gift, there's certain things that we have to do.

The first thing we have to do to receive this gift is to admit that we need the gift, admit that we have broken the law, that we have made mistakes, that we are a sinner, and that we need to repent. We need to turn from those things, but we recognize we need a Savior. And so, of course, I will receive that gift because I know that I need Him. The second thing we have to do is to receive that is to invite Him into our hearts and into our lives.

The Apostle Paul says that that if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved. It's an act. It's a response. Receiving that gift means, I am submitting myself to my heavenly Father. And then there's the believing in the resurrection part, which is also very important. As someone who believes in God, who sent Jesus to die in my place, I also believe that that same God raised Him from the dead.

And that's what gives me the hope that we talked about and the joy that we talked about, that if God could raise Him from the dead, then he also can raise me from the dead. So if you're here this morning or you're watching online or listening on the radio and you haven't received that gift, then it's not a coincidence that you're here or watching or listening. Today, God is once again offering that gift to you, the best gift that you could ever receive. And so I encourage you, open your heart to receive that gift.

It's the best gift. The second question. Many of you here have already received that gift. I know you. I talk with you. I know that you have received that gift. You have proclaimed Jesus as your lord and Savior, here is my question to you. How are you and I doing and loving others with that agape love? I know that it's possible because I've experienced it to get hardened and become ineffective in our witness. Think back to when you first received that gift and how excited you were, and you wanted to take it to show and tell with you.

You wanted to tell everybody about the gift of Jesus Christ and what he had done for you. And you thought that everybody would be just as excited as you were. And then you went and shared it with somebody and you found out, well, they weren't that excited. And you get hardened by it. You get numb to it. And so that excitement of what Jesus has done begins to wear off because you begin to take it for granted, just like all of us do. Can I just encourage you, this Christmas season, don't take for granted the gift of Jesus.

Be excited about it again. Share it with family, share it with friends. It's the season that we have to do that. It's built into our culture. Now is the easy time to do that. Let's take some time to talk about who Jesus is and what he has done and the love that he has given to us. Relight your fire. Don't let the enemy make you numb or harden to that truth. The truth of the unexpected love that truly changed everything.

Let me close in prayer. Heavenly Father, may we share that love with others, the selfless giving, sacrificial love that you have shown to us through Jesus Christ as we celebrate Christmas and all the fun that goes along with that, with family and friends and the food and the celebrations and the gifts. May we not allow that to overshadow the reason for the season.

The gift of Jesus Christ and may his name come from our mouths and shine through our faces, to our family, to our friends, to our neighbors, and may we extend that gift to them as well. Thank you for the gift of Jesus. Thank you for your love. It's in Jesus name we pray. Amen.