

Jason Smith – Renewed Series

Part 3 Renewed Love

When we love something or someone, we are eager to talk about it. How often do we talk about Jesus and the things of God? If the answer is very little, maybe it is because we love the things of the world more. Many of us within the church have left our first love in pursuit of lesser things. Just before Jesus' crucifixion, the Bible tells us that even Peter loses his love for Jesus as he denies him three times. Distraught and defeated, he and the disciples go back to fishing after Jesus' death. When Jesus shows back up on the beach, Peter is quick to join him. Jesus reinstates Peter by asking him three times if he loves him. Jesus reminds him that their love for one another can be renewed. If we renew our love for God, it will play out in loving God's people.

Scripture: Revelation 2:4 // John 21:15-17

Today is week three of our current sermon series called Renewed. We believe that God wants each of us to live the full lives that he promises us in John 10:10.

Though the evil one would like nothing more than to kill, steal, and destroy us, Jesus has come to give us the best life possible. For this to be true in us, we must experience renewal.

Week one we discovered a renewed spirit. Though sin causes our spirit to be weary and dark, repentance offers us renewal and a reconnection to God. Week two we looked at how God wants us to have a renewed purpose.

God created us with a plan for us to do good works. He has a better purpose for us than many of us are choosing now.

Today, we want to look at the renewed love that God wants us to develop toward him.

When we love something, we are eager to share it with others. Think about the energy and effort people put into their sports teams.

When you watch a game on television, you often see people dressed up like it's Halloween. They paint on their faces and wear elaborate outfits because of their love for their teams.

There are other things people love as well.

I want to invite you to stand up if these things are people you would say you love: cats, pizza, the beach, morning coffee, and belly laughs.

Clearly, we do not all agree today on what is worthy of our love and affection, but I hope we can agree on one thing today.

That one thing is that God is worthy of our love and affection because he first loved us, and we should be eager to share that love with people around us.

1. WHEN SOMEONE LOVES SOMETHING, IT IS OBVIOUS

When we love God, it should be obvious by the way we live, the things we do and the things we say.

To be a Christ follower is to be in love with God at the core of who we are.

This means that all our actions and thoughts are dictated by this love.

This means all other things pale in comparison to our love for God.

When we have God properly in place as our first love then we are better equipped to love him back and love others as well.

Kyle Idleman, the author of the book Not A Fan, says, ***“We love others best when we love God most”***.

This is true because we were designed to have all of our lives to flow from our relationship with God. We were created to find all we need in a love relationship with him.

Too often we look for validation, significance, meaning, and value through seeking to love and have love in return from things that are all lesser than God. It is the plight of all mankind.

We are looking for something in our sports teams, our cats, a slice of pizza, our spouse or our children that only God can provide.

The need for renewal comes when we neglect our relationship with God and other things steal our attention.

When we don't put God first, we almost always put ourselves first and everyone suffers.

In the final book of the Bible there is a prophetic warning that is issued to the churches in Ephesus.

The book of Revelation is a book that is written as a disclosure of what lies in the future and how God's people can best prepare for it.

Therefore, every warning that is given to the seven churches listed, including Ephesus, should be warnings that we take to heart as well.

Chapter 2 of Revelation begins with praise for the church in Ephesus. They are praised for their deeds, hard work, and perseverance.

They are praised for identifying false apostles and protecting orthodox teaching. But after all the praise there is one issue that God has with this church.

Revelation 2:4

⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.

With all of the good things that the church in Ephesus was doing, they were forgetting something that may seem insignificant, but is of utmost importance.

They had forgotten their first love. They had neglected the passion that they had originally displayed for Jesus. They had lost their zeal.

Other things had occupied their affection. This is a warning that we must be careful to follow as well.

2. A LOVE NEGLECTED IS A LOVE LOST

A relationship with God is very similar to a marriage. When a couple first get married, it is easy to keep the passion alive.

Love is fresh and exciting and neither spouse has to work hard to keep the fire going.

The real test of a marriage takes place years after the two say “I do.” A couple that retains a deep love for one another is a couple who have healthy practices like date nights, open communication, and acts of service.

Maybe you have been a Christian for some time. Do you remember what it was like when you first gave your life to God? You were excited. You talked about God a lot.

You thought about God a lot. You read the Bible. You prayed often. Somewhere along the way your relationship with God became old news and other things took priority. Sin began to creep in.

We lost our God given purpose. Maybe today you wonder how you have ended up in the place you find yourself. Perhaps it is because you have lost your first love.

If this is where you find yourself, you need a renewed love for God.

Of all the disciples in the New Testament, Peter may have been the most zealous.

He was passionate about following Jesus and is known for sometimes acting before he thinks.

His quick responses were usually a result of his love for Jesus. Because of this, it might come as a shock that right before Jesus is arrested, put on trial, and crucified, he predicts that Peter will deny him three times.

Wait, not Peter. He would never do such a thing. And yet, he does.

While Jesus is being taken into custody and led to death, three times Peter is accused of being a follower of Jesus. Each time, he denies the accusation. He says he does not even know the man.

Peter forgot his first love. Out of fear that he too might be arrested, he distances himself from Jesus.

We have a lot of reasons for forgetting our first love too. Sometimes it is laziness. Sometimes it is a love for sin. Sometimes it is disappointment in Jesus.

The truth is that many of us today can relate to Peter. We know what it is like to love Jesus with our whole hearts and at the same time, we know what it is like to keep Jesus at arm's length.

If you were to look back on the last 24 hours of your life, how much of that day would point to your love for God?

Around the water cooler at work do you speak about Jesus? When things are tough do you bring your concerns to Jesus first?

The good news is that the story of Peter does not end with his denial of Jesus. His love is renewed, and it gives us hope that we can be renewed as well.

After Jesus is laid in the tomb, the disciples go back to what they know: fishing. They are devastated that the man they thought was the messiah is now dead.

Peter must have been more distraught than any of them as he just was guilty of denying his love for Jesus. After fishing all night, they have nothing to show for it.

Suddenly from the shore comes a familiar voice. To their surprise, it is Jesus. Peter, overjoyed, leaps into the water and swims to the shore. Jesus made breakfast and welcomes Peter to sit with him.

Jesus is offering Peter a second chance.

3. JESUS OFFERS US A SECOND CHANCE

A renewed love is all about second chances. Recently, we were given the opportunity to perform a vow renewal for a couple who had nearly given up on their marriage.

Both spouses had neglected the relationship and had said and done hurtful things.

After weeks of counseling and repentant hearts, the marriage was given a second chance.

It was a very emotional ceremony as the couple reinforced their wedding vows and promised once again to love each other no matter what.

There is no end to the grace of God. We can not exhaust the love of God. It is extended to us over and over again.

Even though we fail to love God well time and time again, God is always faithful in his love and commitment to us.

On the beach, Jesus renewed his commitment to Peter and gave Peter the chance to do the same.

John 21:15-17

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?”

He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.

It is no mistake that Jesus addresses Peter three times to ask him if he loves him. Three times would be an appropriate number since Peter had just denied Jesus three times.

There is a very important aspect to this story that gets lost without looking at the Greek word within the conversation between Jesus and Peter.

The first two times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, he uses the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* love is the highest form of love and is a love that is sacrificial.

Both times Peter responds he affirms his love by using the word *phileo*. *Phileo* love is a brotherly love that exists between close friends.

As Jesus renews Peter's love, Jesus invites Peter to a commitment of love that has only been demonstrated by the death of Jesus on the cross for all people.

Peter responds with a lesser love as if to recognize his limitations of loving as fully as he could.

The final time Jesus asks about Peter's love he uses the word that Peter has used twice, he uses *phileo*. This third time Peter confirms that he loves Jesus with a love that is equal to the question.

In a renewed love for Jesus, he does not demand a love of perfection. We all fall short of the ability to love Jesus the way Jesus has loved us, but he invites us still to love him as much as we can.

This is why: a sincere love is a love that has the ability to grow over time.

There are more than likely two types of people here today. Either you have never decided to love Jesus in the first place. That is perfectly fine.

You are already loved fully by Jesus. If you are willing, you can respond to his *agape* love by placing your life into his hands.

Maybe you are someone who has been a believer for many years, but your love for Jesus has grown stagnate and cold.

Today you can allow Jesus to bring you a renewed love by remembering his sacrificial love that he demonstrated for you on the cross.

There is no amount of brokenness in our lives that can keep us from the love of God.

4. **OUR LOVE FOR GOD CAN STILL WORK**

There is a story in the book *Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning that tells of a renewed love to inspire our love for Jesus.

You can't blame the doctor. He did everything possible. Yet the damage was irreversible. Richard Selzer, M.D. in his book *Mortal Lessons*, describes removing a tumor from a young woman's cheek.

In the process, the doctor had no option except to sever a tiny nerve controlling the movement to her mouth. As a result, the side of her lip was distorted, sagging noticeably.

Dr. Selzer entered her room. With her young husband at her side, she sat in bed, staring in a mirror. Through tears she asked, “Will my mouth always be like this?”

“Yes, it will,” he answered. “It is because the nerve was cut.”

She nods in silence. But the young man smiles, as if they’re the only two people on earth. “I like it. It’s kind of cute.”

Then Seltzer observed, “Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth and I am so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate hers, to show her that their kiss still works.”

Today I want to invite you to renew your love for God and recommit to fostering a relationship with him. There are some really practical ways to do this.

1. **Create a special time and place to spend time with God.** Choose a location that is free from distractions and start with a small amount of time. Consider keeping a candle in this special place and light it each time you are spending time with God in prayer and reading scripture. If you want to begin to invest in your love for God in this way again, I would invite you to come and grab a candle from up front and take it with you today.
2. **Take part in a random act of kindness.** Choose to express your love for God by expressing love to someone else. Buy someone’s lunch in line. Mow a neighbor’s yard. Write a letter to an elderly person who does not have family around. It is often through service of others that we rediscover our love for God as well.

God has gone to great length by sending his son to die on a cross to remind us that our love can still work. Take time this week to renew your love with God.

Pray