



Theme: Good, Good News!
“Good News and Great Love”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

February 13-14, 2021

Weekly Memory Verse:

16^b God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. — 1 John 4:

VIDEO Sermon Bumper

SLIDE “Good News and Great Love”

My name is Jeff Huber and I’m Lead Pastor at Summit Church and we are so glad you have joined us for this time of worship. Today we continue in a series of sermons on the good, Good News. We believe as followers of Jesus that he came to offer Good News, but it can feel elusive in today’s world as we watch world and life events unfold. This series is about looking at Jesus with some fresh eyes to discover the power of the Good News he proclaimed and lived so we, “might have life and have it to the full.”

One of the things we’ve talked about in this series is that many people are asking today not if the Gospel or the stories of Jesus are true, but if the Good News that he came to proclaim is really good. It can often feel like the Good News of Jesus Christ, that God came into the world to love us and be with us, is something we must earn instead of a free gift which we simply

receive. What we want to do in this series of sermons is remind ourselves of the Good, Good News that God made us to love us and came as this infant, young man, Lord and Savior Jesus to show us that love in a very tangible way.

Today, we are going to focus on how the Good News is about Great Love. We begin I would love for us to say together the Scripture memory verse for this week from 1 John 4.

BIBLE

¹⁶We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.

This is an amazing statement of faith and truth. We might think of God in a variety of ways like righteous, just and merciful. But there is a clear statement from John in this letter that God is love. We are made in the image of God and God lives in us. This means that to be human is to love and it is meant to define our lives. Unfortunately, it is not what defines our world, which is why we have tens of thousands of children who die every day of starvation and malnutrition related diseases. It is why there is so much division in our country and in our world. It is why there is war and conflict. It is why this song has emanated through my heart and mind over the last few months. It was first recorded the year I was born but college students and other young people are still singing it today.

VIDEO What the World Needs Now by Jackie DeShannon

We long for this idea of love but there is something within us which is broken, if we're honest. There is something in the world which is broken. We know that we are called to be loving but we find it really hard to do the loving thing at different times in our lives. Christian theologians and the Bible talks about that as our, "sin nature." It simply means that we missed the

mark we are separated from where we want to be. We know the path and we know the mark we want to hit, but we miss it and we find ourselves separated from God each other and sometimes from ourselves.

Jesus made the mark very simple. Love God and love your neighbor. But we find ourselves drawn away from that and missing the mark, strength from the path and experiencing separation. We want to love but we just miss it. The kind of love talked about in the Scriptures by Jesus is not about romance or what I call, “the tingles.” The New Testament word for love is one that we have all heard. It is meant to be the defining mark of the Christian life and is heard more than 100 times in the New Testament. It is what Jesus came to show us and it is the character and nature of God. We are not talking about warm, fuzzy feelings.

SLIDE Agape = determined love

Agape is a moral kind of love that longs to bless another person. It is determined to seek the good for the other person and put the needs of someone else ahead of ourselves. Agape is determined to seek justice and love kindness and mercy and gentleness and compassion, walking humbly with God and not in arrogance. All these virtues are wrapped up in this idea of love, in which we say, “God is love.”

God is these things and then we are called to love one another. The writer of John’s letter admonishes us and says, “How can we say we love God if we don’t love others?” Love is the central Christian ethic. Long before Joseph Fletcher developed situational ethics in the 1950s, Jesus was teaching that if we are unsure what the right thing to do is, ask a simple question.

SLIDE What is the most loving thing I can do in this situation?

If we asked that question, we would come up with the right answer most of the time. Sometimes it may be complicated, but we do our best to

try and answer this question and we find ourselves walking on the right path, hitting the mark, and not separated from God or others or ourselves.

One of the reasons we are doing this series of sermons is because one of the challenges we find in life is that we often see people who are not religious or Christian living out this moral imperative better than those who profess to be followers of Jesus. Many people in today's world look at the church, and look at Christians, and say basically, "If that is what it means to be a Christian, then I don't want to be that?"

Sometimes we Christians think that being right is the central ethic of the Christian faith, but it's not. Practicing agape, choosing to do the loving thing, is meant to be the central ethic of what it means to follow Jesus. Sometimes we think having the right theology or the right views or the right politics is most important. If we're honest, we don't always know the right path when it comes to politics or controversial topics. We think we know the right answer, but many times we change that answer over the course of our lifetime. We learn from our parents or from our culture or others who have influenced us that being right is the most important thing and we fight for that, forgetting that HOW we share an opinion, and the ability to listen, is just as important as the opinion that we hold. Jesus was very clear on this point.

SLIDE People are more important than opinions.

Our opinions are not made in the image of God, but that person that holds a different opinion from you is. Having the Bible memorized or giving away lots of money or thinking that we speak for God is not as important as asking this question:

SLIDE "Is this the loving thing to do? Will this keep me close to God and close to others and bring peace in my heart?"

So often, as religious people, we get caught up in our opinions and in culture wars and we missed the mark. The prophets in the Hebrew Bible were often speaking against and preaching to religious leaders in their day who had missed the mark, and they were leading people astray. One of those passages is found in Ezekiel. Ezekiel is writing after the Babylonians had destroyed the Israelite homeland that we looked at last week on the map. The Jews have been carried away hundreds of miles into exile, to be used as slaves in Babylon. The temple in Jerusalem is destroyed and left in ruins. More than 1 million people were killed. People were asking why God had abandoned them and where God was when the Babylonians were destroying their culture and their lives. God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 34, these words.

BIBLE

Then this message came to me from the Lord: ² “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: What sorrow awaits you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn’t shepherds feed their sheep? ³ You drink the milk, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. ⁴ You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the injured. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead, you have ruled them with harshness and cruelty. ⁵ So my sheep have been scattered without a shepherd, and they are easy prey for any wild animal. ⁶ They have wandered through all the mountains and all the hills, across the face of the earth, yet no one has gone to search for them.

The things of the religious leaders were supposed to be doing that God is talking about to the prophet Ezekiel are acts of love. Finding those who are

weak, sick, injured, and lost because they have wandered off. What's worse, not only have they not been cared for, but they have been treated cruelly and harshly by the religious leaders. Instead, they were focused on themselves and had become arrogant and selfish.

This passage reminds us that religion can feed into our own tendency towards narcissism, making the world all about us. Every one of us has narcissistic tendencies, because we long to make everything about us. Let's be honest, we all want our way, don't we? It's easy for life to be all about me, which then means my religion becomes all about me. Was God going to do for me now? If I pray hard enough, will God bless me?

The irony is that walking with God is better for our lives, but we have this tendency to make our religion all about, "me and Jesus." I want to be clear that our personal relationship with Jesus is important, but if our religion is all that and nothing more, then we have missed the mark. We have committed idolatry by worshiping ourselves. As far as Christian faith doesn't lead us to love others well, and we're willing to serve others, then it is fake and false according to the Scriptures. James puts it simply in chapter 2 of his letter.

BIBLE

¹⁷ So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

I once again want to be clear that we are not saved by our works, but there must be action that comes out of our faith or it is dead and useless. The good news is that there is great love available not just to us but to the world through us being faithful followers of Jesus, being his presence in the world. In Ezekiel, God says a shepherd will be sent to watch over the sheep who have been lost. He says he will send one like David, and this passage in Ezekiel is behind much of the ministry of Jesus and his understanding of who

he was called to be. He was Jewish and he would've known this Scripture from Ezekiel 34. We read this in Matthew 9 about Jesus.

BIBLE

³⁵ Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

I have no doubt that there is meant to be a connection between this image of Jesus carrying for people who are like sheep without a shepherd, and the passes we read earlier from Ezekiel. Jesus has compassion upon those who are sick and lost and afraid. Jesus spends his time with people who are broken and feel far away from God. Jesus does more healing in the Gospels than anything else, even more than teaching or preaching. We talked a few weeks ago about how often the sermon of Jesus was not about the content of his message, but about his actions.

This was especially poignant for those who felt pushed away from the synagogue and the religious church of their day. They were made to feel like they were second- or third-class citizens, and Jesus is constantly spending time with them because he sees them. This is one of the most powerful parts of the good news for us.

SLIDE Jesus sees us and has compassion in our brokenness.

I have visited with many people over the years who wonder if something they have done can be forgiven by God. They wonder if there brokenness or addiction or hurt is something God has given them as punishment. What is clear in the Gospels is that the good news is that great love has come for everyone, especially as those who feel far away from God.

God sees us as sheep without a shepherd. These passages should define how we do ministry and be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world.

SLIDE We are called to be Jesus Christ to the world.

We put our purpose statement on everything and not because it's just a nice thing, but it's because we are commanded to be this in the Gospels and the letters of Paul. Paul says that the church, you and I together, are the body of Christ. That is not some quaint phrase, but meant to depict that we are the physical representation, the physical manifestation of Jesus in the world. We are meant to be the incarnation and put flesh on Jesus.

Jesus walked upon this earth for 33 years but was crucified, dead, and buried. He was raised from the dead and then spoke to his disciples for a number of days, but then he ascended into heaven. Before he ascends to heaven, he says to his followers, "The things I have been doing now you go and do. This is now your job. I have commissioned you."

Jesus gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit and send them out as the church for the world, to be his presence and continue his ministry. We are now meant to be that good news of great love, choosing to do the loving thing even when it's hard. We are meant to be a continuation of Jesus, individually and together, as the church.

SLIDE Christian = "little Christ"

The word Christian means, "little Christ." That should scare us a bit because it means that if we take that title, we better act it out and the reason so many people have rejected the Christian faith because they don't see a "little Christ" and most people who take the title of Christian. I want to be clear that it doesn't mean we are perfect. We are going to make mistakes, and part of being a follower of Jesus, is owning up and saying we are sorry. I read a powerful editorial recently about one of the real struggles in our

current culture is the inability for people to apologize when they hurt others. Instead, people believe that if we just move on and don't apologize then people will forget. This was a secular article, and I loved the way they ended it.

...maybe we're witnessing the moral decay of a country that's neglected the virtues of contrition and humility...

Sincere apologies produce positive [physiological effects](#) in the receiver, such as lower blood pressure, slower heart rates and easier breathing. [Sociologist Nicholas Tavuchis](#) suggests apologies, accompanied by forgiveness, are truly miraculous: They prevent what is an otherwise unalterable act of betrayal from becoming a permanent roadblock to healing.

And don't Americans want to heal? –Christian Sagers

Incarnating Christ in our communities and our world is learning to forgive and receiving forgiveness so there can be healing. Jesus often offered forgiveness of sins with physical healing because he knew there was a connection. We are called to go out in the towns and villages and be the presence of Jesus, offering grace and forgiveness, even when it's hard, because it's good for healing in the body, mind and soul.

We are not meant to keep our faith inside the building, and it may have been one of the unintended blessings of COVID over the past year. Some of you think I just spoke blasphemy, but the truth is that the pandemic has forced us to take our faith outside the walls of the church. We try to do that anyway, but we have really been forced into that reality in ways that can change us and change the church forever. We can live out our faith in our living room, in the hospital room, or in the parking lot.

We are meant to care about those who hurt and have compassion,

because that is what Jesus did. We are meant to care about people around us who don't know the good news of great love and who feel far away from God, purpose, and meaning in life. On several occasions, religious leaders in particular came to Jesus and asked him a question like this, "Jesus, the God really want from? Of the 613 commandments the Jewish law, what is the most important?" The first one, every Jew would agree upon because it is found in the Shema Israel in Deuteronomy 6. This is the basic creed of Judaism, and it was the focus of one of our Vacation Bible Schools several years ago. I love the song that went with it and the sound of our kids singing the song.

BIBLE

⁴ "Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵ And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

Jesus says this is the most important commandment because it starts with our relationship with God, giving us the strength to do what we often can't do on our own. Knowing and receiving God's love, and reciprocating that love is key to anything worthwhile. This is not about a warm, fuzzy feeling, but her recognition that God is committed to us and because of that we commit ourselves back to God. We belong to God because we were made by God to be loved by God, our only response is to return that love. We don't, there is a hole inside of us. It is a God shaped hole that only our God can fill.

So, the first step is to offer ourselves in our lives to God. But Jesus is the second is just as important as the first. Please say it with me.

BIBLE Love your neighbor as you love yourself.

This is the mission of those of us who follow Jesus. We love God with

our whole heart and love our neighbor. Often people ask me how they can know God's will. People often pray really hard, "I am just trying to figure out God's will for my life." I remind them that is very simple. We get up in the morning and start by simply saying, "God, I love you with my heart, soul, mind, and strength. Help me to do that today. In God, it's going well right now but pretty soon I will leave my room and see my family. Help me to love them well, even though I might see them all day because of this pandemic! And, when I leave the house, help me to love my neighbor, even the crazy ones driving on Florida Road and passing me on the double yellow!"

We then pay attention to who God puts in front of us that might need the love God is placed in our hearts. We can't give what we don't have, so we allow God to fill us first, then we offer that great love to others. If you want to know the strategy for changing the world and being the presence of Jesus Christ in the world, it's not that difficult. We love our neighbor as we love ourselves and we lead the way in doing that. Once again, that is difficult and challenging, especially given the way Jesus clarifies that in his mission on this earth in Luke 19:10, when he has dinner with a notorious sinner and hated tax collector Zacchaeus.

BIBLE

¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost."

Jesus came for people like Zacchaeus, to help them fill the good news of the great love he came to offer for everyone, even those we might deem as unlovable because of our own human condition. Jesus made it crystal clear only gospel of John with these words. It is why much of the world doesn't see Jesus anymore, because many who are followers of Jesus don't really take these words seriously if we are honest. We read this in John 13.

BIBLE

³⁴ So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

We attempt to get this right here at Summit Church, but there are a thousand different ways we get it wrong because we are not perfect. This is true of every church, and because we are larger church in this community, maybe we get it wrong more often. I think way most people get upset with Christians in the world today is because we don't even realize or think that we get it wrong. We are looked at loving, and when we are the opposite of that, people say they are not interested. Even though we fail many times, our driving passion is to get it right and be able to demonstrate God's love in our daily individual lives as followers of Jesus, and as a church. It is not a warm, fuzzy feeling, but a determined choice to bless others, to show kindness, and respond with compassion by listening and caring.

This is not complicated but it is the strategy for helping people come to know Jesus. The strategy for growing a church. If the strategy for transforming the community. It's the strategy for being a Christian. And it's the strategy for changing the world and the kingdom of God. It is good news of great love which changes everything.

The one thing I am most proud of as your pastor is how amazing you are at serving others. Many have come to our church for the first time because they have seen your love in action or been a recipient of that love and it is changed their hearts. I ran into two people just this past week who have had that experience and call this their church home because of it. This church is been in this community for more than 130 years and in many ways it's just getting started because it's not just about the past, but about who God is calling us into the future.

I did some rough math this week and found that more than 100,000 people have called this church their home over the past 132 years, since its founding on February 23, 1889. That's almost double the size of our county and I imagine we will have an even greater impact in our next 132 years if we will take seriously this good news of great love. This is meant to be our evangelism strategy, not going door-to-door handing out Bibles or asking, "Are you saved?" Our strategy happens with every single person we meet and seeking to show them the love of Christ. Jesus put this way in Matthew 5.

BIBLE

¹⁴ "You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

The apostle Paul put it this way in his second letter to the people of Corinth, chapter 5.

BIBLE

⁵ You see, we don't go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

⁷ We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

Our great power is from God, not ourselves, and we exhibited and live

that great love every day because of what God is done in our hearts. We meet someone and we share that love in tangible way and one day maybe there is a conversation about why you do what you do and an opening happens for an invitation to hang out at your house and do church online, or, the building, or offer a Stephen Minister is a possibility for someone going through a hard time, or connect in the church so we can help pay their rent or provide childcare in our Early Learning Center. Maybe, it's just a meal and a listening ear that leads to deeper conversation. Because that person sees love in their neighbor, they wonder if we Christians aren't that bad and maybe they're willing to give us a shot.

This is Valentine's weekend, so I thought it appropriate to finish with the story of St. Valentine. The history of Valentine's Day—and the story of its patron saint—is shrouded in mystery. There were several different saints in the early church named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred. One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine's actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons, where they were often beaten and tortured. According to one legend, an imprisoned Valentine actually sent the first "valentine" greeting himself after he fell in love with a young girl—possibly his jailor's daughter—who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter signed **"From your Valentine,"** an expression that is still in use today. Although the truth behind the Valentine legends is murky, the stories all emphasize his

appeal as a sympathetic, heroic figure who had a determined, sacrificial love.

Whether we are a follower of Jesus or not, I think most of us know inside of what the world needs now is love, great love. This is the good news, and we are called to love God and love our neighbor as we love ourselves, and that we be the presence of Jesus Christ the world. You can't buy anything online that will bring you as much joy and purpose as loving God and loving your neighbor. The world needs great love and we are called to share. Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

Gracious God, we pray that you would help us. You know that we struggle with loving our neighbor and there are moments where we find ourselves in conflict. We find it so hard to say a kind thing in response to something that was hurtful that was said to us. There are moments oh Lord, where we don't like the people around us, and yet you call us to love them whether we like them or not. God, we are tempted to post that thing quickly on Facebook or Instagram or Snapchat which makes fun of that person that we don't like but seems distant because we only read about them. Help us to remember that even those posts reverberate throughout the world when people know we are a follower of Jesus.

Forgive us and help us to choose to do the loving thing, even when it's hard. Help us to be a church for the next 132 years which seeks to be the presence of Jesus in the world. May people find good news of great love in this community of faith because of mercy and grace and compassion and kindness that we live out daily. May that not just be what people feel when they walk in our buildings, but may we take it out in the world so we might demonstrate your great love to all that we meet. Holy Spirit fill us with your life and love as we seek to be the presence of Jesus Christ in the world by loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. In Jesus' name. Amen.