

IF I HAD BUT ONE SERMON TO PREACH

The elders invited me to preach this morning because the minister is on vacation. I wanted to mention this for the sake of the visitors because we don't want the visitors to think this old, decrepit man is the preacher of the church. So I told them that I would be glad to do my best. Immediately after hanging up from that phone call that morning, I naturally started thinking of what to preach. I thought about it a lot and continued to think about it right up until this moment. I know that there are many important subjects that need to be preached from the pulpit on this Lord's Day.

For example, gambling has just about taken over this area of Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma and Arkansas. It is a shocking thing, and this is an evil that needs to be denounced severely.

Also, drunkenness has become the curse of our society. This is another sin that we need to preach against very hard.

Dope addiction is ruining many of our best young people - another sin that needs to be denounced. Lying, cheating, jealousy, and thievery are commonplace. Oh how we need to preach against these evils.

And no longer can we trust our financial advisors. The whole world was shocked this past week when we learned that the FBI has arrested over 400 bankers, financial advisors, and other important people in our society whom we had trusted with our money. This evil certainly needs to be preached about.

Disobedience to parents is another horrible sin that pervades our present society. We would certainly need to denounce this sin.

As I thought about all of these sins that I could preach about this morning, I began to zero in on this thought: What is the most important thing that Jesus would want to be preached on this Lord's Day morning? And try as I could, I could not get away from Matthew, Chapter 22, verse 35: An expert of the law asked Jesus this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment; and the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself."

And so, I decided to preach on what Jesus says is the most important thing of all. In another passage, Jesus put it like this: (John 13:35) "By this shall all men know that you are all my disciples IF you have love one for

another."

Jesus did not say, "By the name that you wear, everybody will know that you are my disciples." Please do not misunderstand what I am saying. I believe that the name "Christian" is the name to wear. I believe that it is very, very important that we wear the name "Christian," because it is the ONLY name under heaven whereby men can be saved, but Jesus did not say that was the most important thing. He said that it was by love that people would know that we were His disciples.

He did not say that it was by the way that we observed the Lord's Supper that people would know. Now again, I would say, please do not misunderstand me. I believe that the Lord's Supper is tremendously important. I believe that we need to participate in the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day. But Jesus did not say that by the Lord's Supper people will know. He said it was by love that people would know that we were His disciples.

And he did not say that it was by baptism that people would know. Again, I would say please do not misunderstand what I am saying. I believe in Christian Baptism. I do not believe it is possible to go to heaven without being baptized in Christ. It is a divine commandment of Jesus - tremendously important. But He did not say that was the way people would know that we are His disciples. He said it was by the way that we loved one another that people would know that we are disciples of Christ.

Romans 12:10, states: "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another;"

In 1st Peter 3 "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another. Love as brethren:"

My friends, love is the missing link in the world of today. Love is the cure-all medicine for this sin-sick world. Love for our country is the foundation of this nation. And that is why we have had this patriotic service preceding the celebration of the 4th of July. Any nation minus the love of her citizens is headed for self-destruction. Love for each member of the family is the basis of a happy home. Any home minus the love of the family members equals hopelessness. Love is the very test of salvation.

First John 3:14 states: "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren."

I have called to your attention these many scriptures from the Bible not just for the purpose of reading scripture, but so that I might say that brotherly

love needs to be expressed. Faith in Jesus Christ and love for the brethren go together.

Ephesians 1:15-16 states: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;". How did the Apostle Paul compliment the Church at Ephesus? By calling attention to their Christian love for one another, which was well-known throughout the world. If the Apostle Paul were to write to the Villa Heights Christian Church today, What would he say ?

A Very Funny Story

I'm afraid that often times, many of us see the church like a certain deacon that I heard about. This deacon was cross and cranky; he was divisive. He criticized the preacher; he criticized the elders; he criticized the other deacons; he criticized his Sunday School class; he criticized his Sunday School Teacher. He didn't have a good word to say about anybody. The elders of the church and the preacher planned a revival meeting. When the evangelist arrived, the elders said to the preacher and the evangelist, we think that you ought to go call on Deacon so and so, because he seems to be unhappy. Try to get him revived. If we could just get this one deacon happy again and serving the Lord, it would be worth the whole revival.

So the preacher and the evangelist went out to call on the deacon. He was out in the field plowing and he didn't like it that he was stopped from his work. He was cross and cranky with the preacher and the evangelist. He didn't have anything good to say about anybody in the church. After the preacher and the evangelist had been there a half an hour trying to help him, they gave up, and they felt that their visit was a failure. Shortly after they left, the Lord turned it into success. This deacon had been so busy talking with the preacher and the evangelist and criticizing everybody that he had forgotten about his big, ferocious bull. And just then he realized that the bull was bearing down upon him savagely. The deacon started running for the fence as fast as he could, praying at the same time, "Lord, help me to get to the fence before the bull gets to me." Then he became desperate, saying, "Lord, if you will help me to beat that bull to the fence, I promise to rededicate my life to Christ." The Lord helped him, and unlike most people who make a promise under adverse circumstances, he kept his promise.

He went to the revival that night. He walked in smiling at everybody. The whole church was shocked because usually he walked in with a frown, griping and criticizing everything. He went around shaking hands and hugging people. My, the people didn't know what had happened! When the evangelist finished his sermon, the deacon was the first one to go forward, and said, "Preacher, I want to talk to the church." Preacher said,

"Go ahead," and so he broke down and wept, saying, "All of you know how terrible I've acted. You know how I've walked around griping, criticizing, and causing trouble in this church. I am so sorry, and I want to tell you what happened." So he told about his experience out in the pasture with the bull, and then he announced that he was rededicating his life to Jesus and that from now on he would be a tither and a soul winner. One of the "pillars of the church" stood up, a dear lady 90 years of age. She shouted enthusiastically, "Preacher I make a motion that we purchase that bull for further work in our congregation!"

I am sure that some of us would 2nd the lady's motion. We think it would ge good to have a ferocious bull attack all the church members that are causing all the trouble." But listen, my friends, there is a better way. There is a better way. And that's the way Jesus taught us. He said it is better that we love one another.

A Personal Illustration

I have a daughter, Teresa, whom most of you do not know. She is a graduate of _Ozark Bible College and in years gone by she has been here at Villa Heights on several occasions and has worshipped with us and has met some of you but you may have forgotten. Teresa married a preacher and they have five children. She and her husband, Bud, and their children are missionaries in South Africa. When Teresa was a tiny little girl, three years of age, Pinocchio was coming to town. So I promised our children that I would take them to see Pinocchio. Well, when the time came, Teresa was sick. She had a terrible temperature and so like a good Daddy, I said, "Teresa, you can't go to the movies and see Pinocchio because you're sick. Well, you know how little girls can be. She whimpered and she begged, "Please, Daddy; please let me go see Pinocchio." But like a good Daddy I held firm and said, "No, you have a fever and you cannot go to see Pinocchio." After a while Teresa stopped begging and I was trying to read the paper and I didn't notice what was going on. She got up on my lap, and you know little girls have a way with their Daddies. She didn't say a word, but suddenly I was aware that an arm had slipped around my neck. Then the other arm, and in a little bit I was being squeezed to death; smothered with kisses, and suddenly Teresa made the triumphant announcement, "My sweet Daddy is going to see to it that I go to see Pinocchio." Oh my goodness, it is amazing what love can accomplish! Love can warm the coldest heart.

We are all members of one family

All Christians are members of the same fraternity. We should love one another. All Christians are united with Christ - the head of the Church - therefore we should love one another. All Christians are related in the same interests- the Kingdom of God - therefore we should love one

another. All Christians have communion together every Lord's Day - so we should love one another. All Christians are going to the same home - heaven - and we're going to live together eternally - therefore we should love one another with a very special affection.

I have three points that I hope to make in this message, and here is the first point.

I Please take a good look at our affectionate Savior. Look at Jesus and see the way he loved everybody.

In John 13:23: "One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to Him."

In John 21:20: "Peter turned and saw that disciple whom Jesus loved following them." This is the one that leaned back against Jesus at the supper. The point is Jesus loved His disciples and the disciples loved Jesus and John expressed his love by leaning his head on the bosom of Jesus.

Another example: Jesus was greatly grieved when the Pharisee did not kiss Him and wash His feet. We read about it in Luke 7:44-46. Then He turned toward the woman and said to Simon: "Do you see this woman? I came to your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman from the time I entered has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet; therefore I tell you her many sins have been forgiven for she has loved much. The harlot woman from the street kneeled to kiss Jesus' feet, and to put ointment on His feet and to wipe His feet with her hair.

In John 11:5, there is a description of the visit that Jesus made in the home of friends. The Bible said that Jesus loved Martha and her sister, Mary, and Lazarus.

When Judas would betray Jesus, so loving was our Savior that Judas betrayed Him with a kiss. How affectionate was our Lord Jesus Christ who is our supreme example that we are to follow.

II The second point that I want to make this morning - I want you to take a look at the affectionate Apostle Paul.

Oh how Paul loved everybody! He wrote to Timothy, to Tychicus, to Nymphas, to Luke, to Aphia, to the Christians at Rome, to the Christians

at Corinth, to the Christians at Phillipi, and he said, "Dearly beloved."
When Paul left the disciples at Ephesus, he embraced them! (Acts Chapter 20, Verse 1). "And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia."

When Eutychus fell from the third story because of Paul's lengthy sermon, [Acts 20:10] the Bible says Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, "Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him."

When the Apostle Paul met the elders of Ephesus at Melita, the Bible says, "They all wept." (That is the elders of the church). They all wept and embraced him and kissed him. Elders of the church, when our minister comes home from vacation, what would he think if we all met him weeping, and embraced him, - kissed him! That is how the elders of the church greeted their preacher, according to the Bible!

Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2nd Corinthians 13:12; 1st Thessalonians 5:26; and 1st Peter 5:14 - all say: "Greet one another with an holy kiss." Now in view of all these many scriptures that I have called your attention to, I want us now to apply this sermon -

III. This is the third point of my message - the application -

I want each one of us now personally to ask ourselves this question: How have I been acting in the church toward my brothers and sisters in Christ?

Be honest. Have I been acting with suspicion? Have I been acting with hesitation? Have I been acting by refusing to speak to the ones I don't particularly like? Have I been acting by holding a grudge? Have I been giving some a cold shoulder? If that's the way I've been acting, then I'm wrong! I have sinned. My soul is in jeopardy. But some of you - I can hear you right now, saying, but Reggie, my brother or sister has done me a wrong. I have been mistreated. My brother or sister has sinned against me. I don't approve of what my brother or sister has done. My friends the Bible still says: Love them anyway. Jesus said: "By this all men shall know that you are my disciples - if ye have love one for another." Our salvation depends upon it! If we don't stop acting like we have been acting we're not going to go to heaven. That's the bottom line.

I have a closing parable that I want to give you - a modern day parable.

A certain lady in the church came to the preacher. She said, "Preacher, my husband and I are going to get divorced." The preacher said, "Oh no, don't talk that way." But she said, "No, preacher, don't try to talk me out of it - I hate him; he's been using me. I can't stand him and I want to hurt him! The preacher said, "Well, why did you come to me?" and she said, "I want your advice." "What can I do to my husband to really hurt him badly?" And the

preacher said, "You really want my honest advice?" And she said, "Yes."

He said, "OK, here it is: You go home and cook your husband's favorite meals." "What?!" she said. "Now wait, listen to me," he said. He said, "Go home and fix his favorite meal. When he comes home from work today, you be all dressed up, have on a pretty dress, have your hair combed, and you greet him warmly with a big hug and kiss." "Oh, no!" she said. "Yes," he said. "Do you want to hurt him?" "Yes," she said. "Listen to me, then.

Fix his favorite meal, give him a warm greeting with a hug and a kiss, serve him his favorite meal, then have him come in and sit down in his easy chair and give him his newspaper, put his feet up on the footstool, take his shoes off, rub his feet."

She said, "Preacher, I hate him; I want to hurt him." He said, "Hear me out." She said, "OK." He said, "You do that today, tomorrow, the next day and next week, the week after that - you do that for 2 months without fail, and then after 2 months you come back to my office and I will go with you to the lawyer and help you get the divorce." OK. So she left. Two months went by. She came back to his office and he was busy studying, not expecting anybody. She walked in; he looked up and said, "Oh, I guess you've come to get the divorce." "What! What are you talking about - divorce? I'm married to the most wonderful man in the world. Why I dearly love my husband; how could you mention the word 'divorce?'

Now, I want to apply that modern-day parable to the church. The bride of Christ. The church that Jesus loved SO much that He gave His life upon the cross for the church. Think about how you look at the church. What your thoughts are about the church? How many times have you been angry with the preacher? How many times have you been mad at the elders - that bunch of elders, I wish they'd go jump in the river? How many times have you been angry with the deacons - they're worthless; they don't do any work around the church. How many times have you been angry with the Sunday School Teacher, or members of the Sunday School class?

Now here is my challenge: Start loving these people. Tell the preacher how much you appreciate his sermon. Compliment your Sunday School Teacher. Go around to every member that you can possibly reach and give them a hug, a smile, a handshake, and tell them how much you love them.

Do that for 2 months and then quit the church. Well, I predict that you won't quit. Because the fact is you will love the church that Jesus loved SO much that the word "quit" will not be in your vocabulary. Love the brethren is the command in the Bible. Jesus said "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples - if you have love one for another."

We've come to the moment for invitation. I want to remind you that Jesus, first of all, loved you. And you and I were not very lovable. Think of all the

sins that we are guilty of - but Jesus loved us anyway - and he died for us. He shed his blood for us. And now we invite you, if you've never accepted Him as your Savior, you come to Him, confess your sins, obey Him in baptism, and He will wash away all your sins with His blood and give you life everlasting. That is real love. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

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