



# **POWER IN WEAKNESS!**

**The Epistle of 2 Corinthians**

## **Loving the Unloving!**

**2 Corinthians 12:11-21**

**Message #16 of 17 – S893**

**Sermon given on April 26, 2020**

**remotely from Lancaster home**



**Sunday Morning Service**

**Pastor Rick Lancaster**

# Loving the Unloving!

## **2 Corinthians 12:11-21**

### Opening Comments

- Hey this is Rick Lancaster – coming to you remotely from my home office – thank you for tuning in
  - Turn to **2 Corinthians 12**
  - Today we continue our journey through **2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness!**
  - The Bible teaches that the very nature of God is love **1 John 4:16**  
**And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.**
  - And because we were created in the image of God, love is bound up in our nature as well
  - The greatest human need is to love and be loved
  - We were created to be loved by God and to love Him back and to love the others He loves **Matthew 22:36-40**
- Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “ ‘*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*’ This is *the* first and great commandment. And *the* second *is* like it: ‘*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”
- The whole Bible is summarized by those two things – love God and others
  - The problem is that sin gets in the way – we don’t love God or others the way we should
  - And we usually love ourselves too much or the wrong way
  - If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then your desire ought to be to love God and others with your whole being
  - There is probably nothing better in life than loving someone with your whole being and having that love returned to you
  - On the other hand, there may be nothing harder in life than truly loving someone, and to not be loved in return
  - Except maybe to have our love responded to in very unloving ways
  - The Apostle Paul is not unfamiliar with that feeling **2 Corinthians 12:15b**

**...the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved.**

- Paul loved the people of the church in Corinth, and they were behaving in a very unloving way toward him
- How Paul responds to the unloving Corinthians in this letter is a good lesson for all of us
- Sadly, all of us will love someone who won't love us back, or worse, will be unloving toward us
- Paul is going to model the right response and, at the same time, reveal to us the heart of a true pastor – the kind of pastor I want to be
- Let's pray and then get into our text
- **Pray**

### Teaching

- **Loving the Unloving!**
- In 2 Corinthians 12 Paul is continuing his defense of his ministry and his role as an apostle of Christ
- Paul finished last time by relating to them about an experience where he saw heaven – followed immediately with a description of his thorn in the flesh
- It was given to him to keep him from being prideful about all that God had done through and revealed to him
- It was some sort of miserable physical disability that he asked Jesus three times to take away from him
- Jesus told Paul no!
- **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**
- Paul says rather than boasting in the things that make me look great, I will boast in the things that reveal God's greatness and power
- Let's pick up where we left off last week
- Paul begins this section by telling them he is disappointed with how they have acted toward him
- **2 Corinthians 12:11**
- Paul was repulsed by the idea of boasting and he did everything he could to point his boasting to the work of Christ in him
- He says, you made me do this – forced me to act like a fool
- Every person in the church in Corinth had eternal life because of the ministry of Paul

- When the detractors showed up and started questioning Paul's credentials, they should have defended him themselves
- 'in nothing...' - in one breath Paul is saying his ministry is as important as any other apostle's ministry (assigned to by Christ). And in the next breath says that he is not worthy of notice. This is true Christian humility in service.
- Paul had proven his calling as an apostle in radical ways
- **2 Corinthians 12:12**
- Signs, wonders, and mighty deeds – miraculous things were happening in Corinth through Paul and probably through guys like Titus – proved he was an apostle
- Miracles are cool, but they don't create faith, they can provide an opportunity to experience truth leading to faith but doesn't create it
- In John 6 Jesus feeds 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two small fish
- That is a miracle – reveals the awesome creative power of God
- The next day the people come back – not to seek Jesus, their Messiah or God **John 6:26**

**Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled."**

- They wanted more to eat
- There is something I want you to notice in the middle of verse 12
- It is the phrase 'with perseverance' – or patiently
- This is the first of several traits Paul says are required to love the unloving – **Patience**
- Paul's detractors may have been doing some signs, wonders, and mighty deeds – and they made sure everyone noticed
- Paul did them patiently, like a father with a small child
- Last Thursday, my granddaughter Aurora turned five
- Kelly invited her to help her bake her birthday cake
- At five, Aurora knows everything needed to bake a cake, even though she never has baked one
- She doesn't need help, at least that what she thinks
- Kelly's goal was to bake a cake with Aurora that would look nice and taste good
- Kelly was amazingly patient with Aurora

- Loving the unloving will sometimes mean doing things and putting up with things that you shouldn't have to **Colossians 3:12-14**

Therefore, as *the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*

- Paul came to Corinth with the eternity-changing gospel of Jesus Christ
- They didn't need any more than that
- Paul shifts into some irony next
- **2 Corinthians 12:13-14**
- Paul's detractors were saying that Paul's message couldn't be worth that much because he was giving it away for free
- They measured themselves by how much they could charge to speak
- Paul sensed something in the Corinthians that caused him to decide not to receive support from them, though he did take support from other churches
- Instead Paul worked as a tentmaker to provide for himself and his companions
- The second trait necessary to love the unloving – **Selflessness**
- Paul didn't go to Corinth for what he could get from them
- Paul went to Corinth, possibly exposing himself to more suffering because they needed to hear the gospel of Christ
- Every time Paul went to a new city, there was a chance he would be beaten, scourged, even stoned
- Truly loving someone means making yourself vulnerable to them
- When we really love someone, we open ourselves to being hurt by that person – we hope that they will love us back rather than hurt us
- When we seek to love the unloving, we are exposing ourselves to a higher risk of hurt, pain, rejection, or betrayal
- If God is calling us to love someone, we need to remember that He understands the risk we are taking
- Selflessness is not about you not being important or not mattering, it is about the other person being more important and mattering more than you – not to God, but to you

- That's what Jesus was telling us **Matthew 16:24-25**  
Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."
  - In the same way we put ourselves aside to love our children, Paul says he has loved the Corinthians
  - Not for his gain, but for theirs
  - Paul continues with that thought
  - **2 Corinthians 12:15**
  - The word 'spent' = **give oneself completely, to be completely expended, be exhausted**
  - Loving someone who is loving you back is exhilarating, life-giving
  - Loving the unloving is draining, exhausting
  - I have ministered to people who have told me they have nothing left to give
  - If you feel that way – take a deep breath – reach down and feel for a pulse
  - As long as there is breath in your lungs and your heart is beating, you have a little more to give
  - If you don't know how you are going to do it – you feel too weak to go on, go back to last week's message
  - Especially **2 Corinthians 12:9-10**
  - God's power can rest upon your weakness
  - God can do what you can't – not in the other person – but in you!
  - God can change your heart so that you can love that unloving person
  - God can provide everything you need so that you can do what He is calling you to do **2 Peter 1:2-4**
- Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that *pertain* to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption *that is* in the world through lust.**
- Let the power of Christ rest on your weakness and you will more than just endure – you will love that unloving person
  - And that love will reveal Christ to them in a way that just might change their heart and cause them to love you back

- **2 Corinthians 12:16**
- Paul is being sarcastic – I tricked you by patiently, selflessly loving you
- Then calls upon the witness of his companion's behavior
- **2 Corinthians 12:17-19**
- Paul's companions followed his example and loved like Paul did
- Paul makes a powerful declaration 'We speak before God in Christ.'
- Every Christian is 'in Christ' – when we speak/communicate we are doing it in the presence of God – being recorded – will give an account someday
- Paul – what we do, we do for you edification – to build you up
- The third trait needed for loving the unloving is **Compassion**
- Paul wasn't in Corinth for what he could get from them
- He was there to give them what they needed
- That unloving person God has called you to love needs what your love gives them
- Paul said he was doing what he was doing because it helped them to grow in their faith
- To do that he had to care about them – in fact, he loved the people of the church in Corinth
- Even though, the more he loved them, the less they seemed to love him
- They needed his love and because he had compassion upon them, he patiently, selflessly loved them – expecting nothing in return
- If God has called you to love that unloving person, He is also calling you to have compassion upon them
- Right now, they may not even be capable of loving you back
- They need you to give them what God has given you for them – patiently, selflessly, compassionately until God tells you to stop or until something happens in their heart
- The reason Paul is writing this letter is because he is getting ready to come and visit them again
- He wants them to be prepared for his visit
- **2 Corinthians 12:20-21**

- Paul has heard that there are some who are doing things they shouldn't
  - As an apostle of Christ, he has the authority to call them to holiness – to repent of their sins and return to Christ
  - One aspect of loving the unloving is remembering that happiness is not God's ultimate goal in our relationship with them – holiness is
  - I believe happiness is a byproduct of holiness
  - The fourth trait of someone to develop who is trying to love the unloving is **Holiness**
  - Holiness is the goal of all believers, just as all these traits ought to be **1 Peter 1:15-16**
- ... but as He who called you *is* holy, you also be holy in all *your* conduct, because it is written, "*Be holy, for I am holy.*"
- Being holy is not about being perfect, though holiness does lead toward perfection
  - Being holy is about setting parts of your life aside for service unto God
  - The more of your life God has, the holier you are
  - It is a process we call sanctification
  - It is about becoming more like Jesus day-by-day
  - God loved the unloving by sending Jesus **Romans 5:8**
- But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**
- He calls us to love the unloving
  - You can't do it in your own strength – accept your weakness as a the place where the power of God lives and let the Holy Spirit help you to develop these four traits – **Patience – Selflessness – Compassion – Holiness**
  - And day-by-day the Holy Spirit will help you to love the unloving
  - And because all things are possible with God, cling to the hope that their heart can change, and they can love you back the way God is calling them to
  - What a glorious day that will be!
  - **Pray!**