

God's Love in Action

1. Intro & Context

- How would you respond if you heard these words:
 - "My wife has just moved out"
 - "Yesterday I was made redundant"
 - "The scans confirmed my mum has cancer"
 - "I feel so betrayed"
 - "I'm really overwhelmed"

- How would you respond when
 - A friend confides they are wrestling with an addiction
 - You know someone from your group is feeling left out
 - Someone close to you is struggling with depression or anxiety

- What would you do?
- What would you say?
- Would you say anything at all?

- These are scenarios that are all too common and how we respond to them can have a massive impact on the wellbeing of that person
 - If we respond badly, thoughtlessly or insensitively ... it can be hugely detrimental, harmful and isolating
 - If we respond well ... with compassion, empathy and wisdom ... it can be wonderfully encouraging, comforting and reassuring

- The series we are about to embark on over the next 8 weeks is called God's Love in Action
- In other words, it's a series aimed at equipping us to be people who are able to love one another in all the ups & downs, and ins & outs of life

- Now whether you're Christian or not ... this is relevant for all of us
- Unless your Anthony Hopkins in Silence of the Lambs ... everyone wants to
 - **be** loved and
 - be a person who is **able** to love
- The challenge is ...
 - Loving others well AND
 - Loving them when we don't feel like it!
- Loving others even when we're ...
 - Resentful

- Tired
- Time poor
- Want to relax
- Loving others when, the other person is
 - Annoying
 - Difficult
 - Awkward
 - Unappreciative

- If Jesus says that people will know you are my disciples if you love one another, and
- If at Church@thepeak we're is committed to ***living to be and make disciples of Jesus*** ... then
 - we need to be a church ...
 - we need to be disciples who
 - know how to and practice loving one another
- How will the community around us know Church@thepeak is fair dinkum in living to be and make disciples of Jesus
 - When they see and experience God's love in and through this church

- The Bible has lots to say about how we ought to love one another
- But before we get into the details of what it means for us to love one another ... first
 - we need a foundation
 - we need a platform to base it all on
 - we need a starting point to understand what love is ... and how we might be equipped to love others

- To help us with that, I want us to look at 1 John 4 this morning under three headings
 - The command to love
 - The barriers to love
 - The power to love

PRAY

2. Command to love

- The letter of 1 John is a very pastoral and comforting letter
- And if we were to read through all of the letter we would see that one of the big themes of the letter is love
 - Here in Ch 4 John repeats the word 'love' 21 times in just 12 verses!

- As we read Ch 4, you would have noticed the recurring idea in these verses is the command to 'love **one another**'
- We see that in
 - v7 - Dear friends, let us love one another
 - v11 - we also ought to love one another
 - v12 - if we love one another
 - v21 - Whoever loves God must also love his brother
- John's point is that ... an essential part of being a follower of Jesus is that you love one another

- In fact, he goes on to say it's more than that
 - He says your love for others is a sign or a mark that you're a Christian
- Check out v7-8
 - *Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God*
 - *Whoever does not love does not know God*
- Also ...
 - v12 - *if we love one another, God lives in us*
 - v16 - *Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him*

- John is urging his readers to live a life that's consistent with their faith in a God **who is love**
- He's saying ...
 - "If you're a Christian, if you believe in Jesus, if you worship the God who is love ... then live that out by loving one another"

- So the Christian ... and therefore the church community ... ought to be characterised by this reality whereby they love one another

- **Illustration – Current Affairs / Today Tonight**
- You know those current affairs programmes on just after the news
- Always a story or some exclusive investigation they're doing into some dodgy builder, politician or businessman who's ripping people off
- The programme will have its secret cameras set up filming them
 - Counting large wads of cash
 - Laughing with their mates over all their antics
 - Nervously looking over their shoulder when get out of their car
- And the camera footage would be used to expose them and show them for who they truly are

- What John's saying is ... if you're a Christian ... and a secret camera was set up on your life or my life
- The footage would show time and time again, over and over, acts of love towards others
- It wouldn't be as scandalous a Current Affair or Today Tonight ... but it would show real acts of love for others that would be a reflection and confirmation of your faith in Christ

- **Application**
- Let's explore what it might look like to love one another
- **Youth / Growth Groups**
- One of the ways will be to love one another at youth group or in our growth groups
- How?
 - Send them a message if they haven't been around for a couple of weeks
 - Pray for one another and the things going on in their life
 - Ask them about and encourage them in their Christian walk - living for Jesus at school, in their marriage, parenting, their witness to friends, Bible reading

- **Family**
- How can we love each other in our family
- So often it's in the little things isn't it?
 - Way you speak to your parents, spouse or kids > tone, words you use
 - How you prioritise time with your family
 - How you seek to encourage one another your walk with Jesus
 - How you disciple your kids
 - How you respect your parents
 - How you help out and do your part in the home

- **Church**
- What about at church?
- How you ...
 - Prioritise church and growth group each week
 - Come to church with mindset to serve and encourage others
 - Include the shy person or outsider
 - Open your home and do hospitality together
 - You welcome the person who is new to church

- **Forgiveness**

- You know where loving one another will make the biggest difference in our lives ... it's in our willingness to repent and forgive one another
- When you and I take what John is saying seriously ... we will be people who are willing to repent and forgive
 - If you and I are loving one another ... we're
 - willing to hear to the person we have hurt
 - willing to admit our wrongs
 - willing to move towards the person who has upset, offended or hurt us in a willingness to forgive and be reconciled
- You can't say you're taking this command seriously if
 - you're unwilling to forgive
 - you're unwilling to reconcile
 - you're unwilling to listen to and understand how and why you have caused pain and hurt to someone
 - you're unwilling to say 'sorry'
 - you insist on holding onto a grudge
- Love finds its ultimate expression in repentance and forgiveness
 - We're going to spend more time thinking about this later in the series when look at God's Love in Conflict and Resolution

3. Barriers to love

- Now for most people, this is obvious
- Understanding what John is saying is easy – love one another!
 - We get that
 - It's not hard to understand is it?
- But it's not the **understanding** that is hard ... it's **doing** what John is saying is actually the hard bit, right?
- Our modern culture is obsessed with self
 - Self fulfilment
 - Self gratification
 - Self promotion
- See this in advertising
 - L'Oreal – because you're worth it
 - Vodafone – Power to you
- Much of social media ... is about self promotion
- Promoting
 - what I'm achieving

- what I'm working on
- the swanky places I'm holidaying or eating out at
- Of course our culture is like this ... because WE are like this
 - Our human nature is to look after and promote ourselves
- Of course this is a generalisation and there are times when you and I will show love to others
 - But the thing is ... we don't show love to others all the time or as much as we would like to
 - We want to ... but we so often fail
 - And there are times when we don't **want** to love others and we deliberately harden our hearts and **choose** not to love one another
- And that's because our human nature ... the inclination of our hearts is to love ourselves
- **Illustration - Survivor**
- We like watching the TV show Survivor > new Australian series just started
- Don't know Survivor > 20 people get thrown together on an island
 - Have to make do with basic provisions
 - Have regular challenges ...and team who loses challenge has to vote off a member of their tribe ...
 - Until get down to the final three survivors when the jury votes for the winner
- Survivor gives a real insight into our selfish human nature
 - Because what it shows is that people are by nature selfish
 - They all want to win!
 - Their motivation is either
 - Greed > I want to win \$500,000
 - Reputation > I want to be known as the sole survivor
- And while there are often brilliant moves that contestants pull to further themselves in the game ...
 - Often they resort to lying, deceiving and blindsiding each other as they look to further their own interests and chase the money or the title
- I know it's a game, but it really does show how we tend to operate in our broken human nature
- Like the contestants in Survivor **we** do things to serve our own purposes, interests, goals and desires

- As a consequence ... we fail to love one another because we are unwilling allow our love for others to trump our desires to do or get what we want
- And so
 - we'll **not do** the thing we promised because it takes effort
 - we'll **not help** the person in need because that will mean getting involved
 - we **won't say sorry**, because that would be an admission of guilt and damage our reputation
 - we **won't do that job** to help out at home because that would take time away from me doing the thing I want to do
 - we'll **retaliate** with harsh words in order to get back at the person who has unintentionally hurt us
 - we'll **do what we want** and ignore the impact it has others around us
- That's our human selfishness rising to the fore every time
- Because our sinful human nature is to satisfy our own desires and interests rather than to love one another around us
 - It's a heart issue
- I'm not saying we're incapable of acts of love
 - I'm talking about what stops us from loving one another more than we should
- So we know we ought to love one another
 - That's the easy bit ... knowing what we ought to do
 - The hard bit is actually doing it ... actually loving others like we should
 - Because we have this underlying issue of the **heart** that wants to satisfy **me** ... rather than serve and love other people

4. Power to love

- How can we move forward on this?
- How can we overcome and put aside the selfish desires of the heart and love one another the ways we want to and know we ought to?
- What's going to transform our hearts so that we might be more willing to love one another in ways we know we should
- Well it starts with God ... and this is what John has been at pains to point out in these verses here in 1 John 4

- v7 - *Dear friends, let us love one another ... why? ... for love comes from God*
- Love originates with God
- Matthew Henry > "He is the fountain, author, parent and commander of love"
- The **power to love** starts with Him
- Like the electricity running through electrical wires, love comes from God to us, then flows through us to others

- As John goes on to say in v8 - because **God is love**
 - That is ... the very essence of his being is love
 - He's not a temperamental god looking to smite all who dare to defy him
 - He's a God of love

- How do we know this? Verse 9-10
 - ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*
- God demonstrated his love for us in giving up his son on the cross

- You see God doesn't offer up the same selfish excuses we do ... not to love us
- He doesn't say ...
 - "I've got have some 'me time' today"
- He doesn't say ...
 - "You rejected me, thumbed your nose at me and insulted me ... so that's it! I never want to have anything to do with you again"
- No! even though we deserve to be rejected for doing all that ... he showed his amazing love for us by sending his *Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*.

- Why?
 - So that we might **live** through him
 - That is ... so that we might have eternal life
 - So that our sin could be atoned for and we could find forgiveness with him
- This is the essence of love!
 - Sacrificial, self-less, other person centred – love

- And so John goes on to say in v11
 - **Since** God so loved **us** ... we also ought to love one another
 - Since God laid down his life for you
 - Since God was so willing to serve you
 - Since God was so willing to love you ...
 - The only right response is to love one another

- Notice John doesn't say
 - Love one another ... and if you do ... God will love you
 - Love one another ... because if you don't God's going to get you
- No!
 - He says God loved you first!
 - He showed you what love looks like
 - And not just what love looks like ... but that he directed his love towards you!
 - And you get to experience his love
 - And you get to benefit from his love

- Therefore, God's love is demonstrated to us and experienced by us ...
 - And that enables and empowers us to love one another
- We don't love others
 - out of fear of losing God's love
 - nor because of the threat of God's wrath ...
 - but as a result of God's generous love to us

Application

- If this is what God's love to us is like ... then what does that teach us?

Love is costly

- It teaches us love is costly
- If you're going to love others ... it will cost you
- When Jesus was on the cross, he called out to God the Father and said
 - *"My God My God why have you forsaken me?"*
 - And in that moment ... for the Father to hear Jesus, the Son crying out in agony and anguish would have been heart-breaking!!
 - That **must** have been excruciating to hear the cry of his son ... and leave him
- It cost God unbelievably to love like that

- And so, we shouldn't be surprised if we're going to love one another, there will be a cost

- There's bound to be some costs
- There's going to be some sacrifices
- If you're going to welcome and love people at church ... it will cost you
 - Giving up sitting in your usual seat and to sit with a newcomer
 - Giving up chatting with your friends after church, to welcome the visitor
 - Giving up some 'me time' on Sunday to welcome ppl over for lunch
 - Giving up time to go and visit and sit with and pray with that person who is going through hard times
- But then what did Jesus do?
 - He was willing to give up his place in heaven and come to you
 - He was willing to give himself up on the cross in order to welcome you into eternity
- If you're going to forgive one another ... that will cost you
 - You're going to have to make the move towards the person who hurt you even when there is a barrier between you
 - You're going to have to absorb some of the hurt and pain the other person's inflicted on you in order to forgive
- But then what did Jesus do?
 - He moved towards you to even though there was a barrier of sin between us
 - On the cross he absorbed wrath of God against you, in order that you and I could be forgiven
 - He didn't stand at a distance and wait for you and I to admit our failures ... he came to us > died for us > forgave us and loved us
- And so friends, when you love one another it will cost you
- But then again ... the cross reminds us that God's love for us cost him so much more ... for it cost him his son
- **Love is risky**
- Not only is loving one another costly, but it's also risky
- There is always the risk
 - that you will love others and they won't love you back
 - that others will exploit your love and generosity
- But that's not a reason to not to love one another
- Because Jesus took a bigger risk ... he emptied himself on a cross to love the world ... knowing that many in the world would not love him back
- And so friends, we love ... not because we're going to be loved back
 - We love one another because ... we're **already** loved

- His love is all you need
- You don't need the love of others to fuel you and keep you going
- The love of other people > even those closest to you > will only let you down
- But God's love is more than sufficient
 - God's love is greater than the love any other person can give you
 - And his love will never let you down
- So yes ... it's risky to love
 - But God risked much more to love you
 - And if others let you down, you know you have one who loves you completely, whole-heartedly, now and for eternity

5. Conclusion

- Friends, if you're here this morning and you'd say you're not yet a Christian ... let me ask you ...
 - Where do you get power to love when it is hard?
 - Where do you get the strength to love others when you don't want to?
 - How do you love your work colleague, friend or spouse when your will is fighting with you to retaliate and lash out?
- But when you acknowledge Jesus ... God lives in you
- And if God lives in you ... he gives you the power to love in ways you otherwise couldn't do
- How?
 - Because you understand how radically loved you are by God
 - You know what it cost God to love you
 - You get how undeserving you are to experience that love
- And to the extent that the love of God to you in Christ grips your heart
 - It will empower you, and motivate you and it give you the resources to love one another ... just as you have been loved by God
- You can have that power to love others in Christ
 - Come to him, turn to him ... acknowledge him as Lord and Saviour
 - And as you acknowledge him for all that he's done for you on the cross
 - That will equip and empower you to love others in the ways you want to
- And brothers and sisters ... if you find you're struggling to love one another
- Let me ask ...
 - Have you lost touch with God's love for you?
 - Have you failed to grasp it?

- Have you forgotten it / become immune to it / become blasé about God's love to you?
- If that's you ... then let me urge you to go back to the cross
- Because the good news of God's great love for you ... will help you and I
 - to overcome that barrier of selfishness
 - empower and equip us to love one another as we know we should

PRAY