

Dustin Blumer

Sermon 515 - 1 John 4:9-19, Philippians 4

Power of Love

What an incredible day! We get to celebrate the wedding of Dan and Laura. We get to be together, it is good to see you, and welcome if it's your first time here. And to top it off we get to hear from God and be wowed by his goodness. We're in a series talking about Anxiety, and raise your hands if you've ever been anxious. You are not alone.

And to get things going here is something I believe is true. *Anxiety comes when we care too much about what people think of us.* Is this true in your life? You ever been anxious about a new haircut. And you were confident about the gameplan going in, you came in with your cellphone, I want it like this. Give the orders. But now getting out of there, you're not sure you want to be seen in public - what will they say? It's the child or young adult new to school or to a class. Ever have a child not want to get out of the car? What if they all hate me or make fun of me? It's the presentation with peers. I just came back from a pastor's conference, and I observed a young pastor give his first paper. And he did great job. But talking with him after I could sense the pent up anxiety. He told me how hard it was after it fielding questions and responding to reactions. And I remember 10 years before the feelings I had before my own first conference paper. I thought I should resign. I can't do this. They're going to label me a heretic. Call me unfit for ministry - tar and feather me. The mind thinks of crazy things. In fact what we do is we may stew in our own negative thoughts about ourselves, waiting for someone to confirm them. So when someone comes up to us to say, "Your hair looks...." We say, "I know awful right. Like I got in a battle with the lawnmower and lost, yep. Good thing hair grows fast." I was going to say great and ask where you went? We wait for others to confirm negative self talk.

Which is why when we do get good feedback and positive comments it can feel great. Like who doesn't love Facebook on your birthday? Everyday should feel like Facebook does on your birthday. You see all the loved ones and acquaintances confirming their care for you. Sending clipart balloons and cake. That's a good day. Or who doesn't like to hear an attaboy at work or school or you knocked it out of the park, here's an A++. And these experiences are so exhilarating that perhaps we dream of a world where everyone loves us, and we only hear positive feedback, and we learn to love ourselves and stop the negative self talk. But is that world possible? A world where everyone loves us, approves of us, has our back through thick and thin? No. So if you're looking for peace based on what others think of you, it will only drive your insecurities. People's feelings about us change as quickly as the tide of the ocean. We all know what it is to read the negative comments about us on social media, to have been ridiculed, or put down. We all know sometimes haters are just going to hate. And if we care too much we will be racked with anxiety.

So can we get God's perspective? That's why we are here, and by the way welcome if you are not a Jesus follower or don't consider yourself a Christian. So glad to have you. But I've learned of a different way to live because of a follow of Jesus named Paul. Paul said, "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I

were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.” (Gal 1:10) Did you see the dichotomy he sets up. It’s like I can either try to please people, and sway with the tide - rising and falling on their approval or disappointment. Or I can serve and follow Christ. Or I can live for an audience of one. I can make it my mission to be driven by what he has said. And Paul knew what he was going to do. Paul would live for an audience of one. That God’s voice would overcome the crowd, and even his own negative self talk.

And that’s our opportunity as well. To do as Paul did, to separate yourself in these moments from whatever anyone else has said about you - on social media or through any other avenue - and simply hear what God has to say. And this is what I think you’ll find. *Peace comes when care more about what God thinks of you in Jesus Christ.* So let’s dive into God’s Word. The word recorded and written one of Jesus most beloved. John who was a disciple and a witness of all what Jesus said and did out of love for us. He calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved. And in honor of the Word I’m going to invite you to please stand. There it is could you turned to the person next to you and say. God loves you more than you know right now.

There are certain things in life that as hard as I try I will never be able to do. You as well? I recently heard of someone who did something I will never do. Zach Bitter who ran 100 miles and kept a pace of 6:47 per mile. Can you imagine that? If you’ve ever run a marathon that is almost 4 consecutive marathons. And I know I will never do that because the other day at the gym when I got done with my 3.5 miles at a pace much slower, I was resting on the gym floor, a very kind man comes over and asks if I was ok or if I needed help. Could you run the 100 miles at that pace? Some of you run the stairs in Palos, or we have a member who completed an Ironman (I couldn’t do that), but this seems too much.

I bring this up because today we are taking a look at love. And one thing I recognize is our inability to give to God or to each other a perfect love. It’s more impossible than an Ironman or 100 mile run. Look at what Scripture says, the wisest who ever lived Solomon recorded, “Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?” (Prov. 20:6) Answer none. And when is the last time you’ve recognized this? We see it all the time don’t we. In people on the news who have displayed a failing love. In things we promise to do for others, but don’t. In things the things we tell God. God I would never do that, and then we do.

Which is why I love the words from our lesson. Look at v.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.” And what we learn is this. *Peace is found in God’s perfect love for us, not in our love for him.* I mean this is Jesus Christ. The one who does the impossible. Not an Ironman or running 100 miles. But living on earth and never failing in love. In every season, at all times, to all around him and to his father - he never failed. This is the same God who is with us today and has unfailing love for us!

And think of how that changes anxiety. You know a wedding day could be a day of anxiety. Does anyone remember their wedding day? Was anyone nervous? Don’t tell your spouse. But here is why I rejoice so much over this marriage of Dan and Laura. You already have the perfect love you need, even before this day came. And what I praise in each of you is how much you prioritize the love of God in your life. How many times I’ve witnessed you drown out every other voice to listen and to follow his voice. The voice that reminds you - you are my child, you are loved, you are worthy all through Jesus Christ. And though I love you both

and are incredibly honored to see you witness to the faith. Here's what I know Dan, Laura's amazing - such a bright light - but it's impossible for Laura to love you perfectly. Laura, Dan is fun and one of my favorite people, but it's impossible for Dan to love you perfectly. But that is all ok. Because you both already have the perfect love you need. And you can have peace. For you prioritize what it is to hear this perfect love and your marriage built upon it will be blessed. As you seek Him, nothing can separate you from his love.

But yes our love is imperfect. And sometimes we might get anxiety over all the times and ways we failed. And because we failed at times we fear punishment. I remember when we were hiding as kids in fear of mom and dad's punishment. Here's the scenario Dad was letting my drive the car out of the garage to get experience. But as he did he got a little to close, and as he was backing out the front panel of the car scratched against the garage track leaving a huge indentation. Immediately, when it happened I remember my brother rushing into the house to go to his room. I remember fear in his eyes, and thinking this is Defcon 1 what is Dad going to do? You ever been there? As a kid you were told, "When Mom or Dad come home." And so you hid in your room until then. Maybe for you it was flashing lights in the rearview mirror. And you wanted to hide. We live in anxiety over the fear of punishment. I consider Jeffery Epstein - who took his life in prison because he couldn't stand the idea of what might happen to him for what he did.

So in the face of God we might fear punishment knowing we have not been perfect, and our failings deserve punishment. The wages of sin and lovelessness is death. But God our Father I believe is calling us today. You can come out of hiding. You couldn't hide anyway. And why? v.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." See God knows our worst and responded with his best. And Jesus was not only perfect love in our place, but he released us from all punishment. Jesus would pick up a cross where he would die, so you and I would know punishment from all sin and failure is paid once for all. Our sins have been hurled into the depths of sea, they have been removed as far as the east is from the west. And so God says to you today. Come out of the bedroom you've been hiding in. Dad is here, and he is filled with mercy. Come and live in the light of his love. *Peace replaces anxiety because we live without fear of punishment.* Perhaps this is the first time you've heard this message. You maybe were convinced it was your love for God that made you worthy. Maybe you were just waiting for his hammer judgment to drop. But let me say it again it is his love alone that makes us worthy. Your punishment has been paid once for all.

And here's what you need to know about God. It isn't just that he does love. It's that he is love. Reminds me of the game if look up strong in the dictionary you find a picture of the Rock, look up the word beautiful find yours, look up the word hairy there I am. So you look up the word love you find God. The essence of the most incredible form of love called agape. Agape which is unfailing, undeserved, unconditional love. It's a love that when we were sinners he chose to die for us. This is the God you need to know. And he is the love that changes everything.

And what would it look like. How would the world change. *How would you be different if you saw yourself loved, approved of and accepted, and worthy today?*

You know sometimes you just have to admire little children for their fearlessness. And one of the things that some kids are not afraid to do is dance. Would you permit an example of this. Here is young William at age 2. There he is - showing us the Elvis is not just a generational phenom, but he has crossed generations. But could the love of God, could it get you to a place of freedom? Knowing you were loved, approved and accepted. Would it change your gait and your walk? Think of young William, he doesn't care if he gets it wrong. No one even knows the dance he is doing. He has the freedom of making it up as he goes along because he knows he is loved. He has the applause and acceptance of the crowd.

We have the applause of heaven in Jesus Christ. The saints and angels are cheering us on. *Knowing we are loved we can live without fear of past or future failure.* So many of us are crippled by our failures in the past. We hide. Some crippled by the anxiety that we may fail, so we never really try. We never really put ourselves out there. We never really live in freedom. Because of the unfailing love and forgiveness of Jesus we are free to fail. Now here I am not saying we are free to sin and disobey. But I'm saying if you've lived in the bedroom of guilt and shame - and the accuser has locked that door shut. God has opened the door, and he's calling you out into the dance floor. To live in the peace and security of his love, and hear the applause of heaven. To try again, even though there's been some missteps. To try for the first time to live loved and live for God, with the knowledge that if you do mess up, you're not a fake, you're not beyond hope. You're normal and still in need of God's perfect love and forgiveness. Friends, look at what v.18 says, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." If we fail the punishment's been paid. And we can wake up with mercies new every morning - and get after it again. There are second chances in the kingdom of God, and 3rd, and 4th, and... forever.

And if you and I learn to live this way. In peace and freedom. Don't you think we'd want to bring others out on the dance floor? Don't you think you'd want the same for others? And that's exactly what God has said to do. Over and over in this lesson telling us that if he loved us so we ought to love one another. And when we do look at what it says, "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." (12)

That is what someone did for me this past week. I was at a pastor's conference and another pastor was calling others into the dance floor because of the love of God saying, "That pastor over there? He's not guilty." And I can see why you chose him to serve you." And you know what that pastor did by sharing the love of God - he pulled me onto the dance floor where I was free to serve and free to live for Christ even though I know all my imperfections and failings.

And Dan and Laura you know why I'm so excited for you? Because marriage provides a beautiful opportunity - an opportunity to pull each other onto the dance floor. To experience the life that is truly life. In marriage you'll have an opportunity to share with each other the Gospel of Jesus that frees you from past or future failures. You'll have opportunity to share that with Ryan as well. To remind each other to come out of the darkness and into the light, to live each day with the peace of forgiveness, and the knowledge of unfailing love. And God says as you do that, and as you love - his love is made complete. And God himself lives with us. I have a

feeling God is going to live strongly in your household and that you will do well completing his love.

But it's not just Dan and Laura that should experience this freedom. It's not just me at a pastor's conference. We are to share this love with everyone. We are to tell others they don't have to live fear and anxiety. *Share the peace of God with others as you share God's love.* Because it is a game changer. There's a strength found there that when all the other voices are against you, write you off, or fade away - his will still be there saying to you to me because of Christ. You are my beloved, you my child, the apple of my eye, and my precious bride. Amen.