

Irresistible: A Better Question

October 13, 2019

Scripture: John 21:15-17 *“After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”*

“Yes, Lord,” Peter replied, “you know I love you.” “Then feed my lambs,” Jesus told him.

Jesus repeated the question: “Simon son of John, do you love me?” “Yes, Lord,” Peter said, “you know I love you.” “Then take care of my sheep,” Jesus said.

A third time he asked him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, “Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Then feed my sheep.

We’ve been working through this series for a few weeks and I think that we have all been challenged with each message to re-think how we think about our faith, and this week isn’t going to be any different. Today we’re going to look at a question that we all ask that we shouldn’t really be asking. We don’t ask the wrong question on purpose, we don’t even realize it’s the wrong question, but it is! The question that we shouldn’t be asking is “What does the Bible say about _____”?

Now, listen, I am not saying that the Bible doesn’t have really good things to say. It is full of beautiful stories, poetry, allegories, history, commands, wisdom and principles that are important for all of us to understand and apply to our lives. The problem is, and please hear me out on this – it doesn’t address everything. We like to say that we can go to the Bible for answers to anything that we come up against in life. While that’s nice to say and hear, it’s not true if by saying it we mean that we can find a direct answer to every possible issue that we come up against. When we are asked “What should I do about _____?” there isn’t always an option to say “Well, the Bible says _____.”

Maybe the most common way that this comes up in our lives is in what we consider to be a sin. It is in our nature to snuggle right up close to the “sin” line and often our justification is “The Bible doesn’t say that _____ is a sin.” The reality is that it probably doesn’t. There are lots of things that the Bible doesn’t address at all, either as good or bad, they just aren’t topics that we can read about in the scriptures.

How to we remedy that? We have to ask a better question. We can ask the question that the early church had to ask when they were trying to discern what they should and shouldn’t do in their lives. Remember, they didn’t have a Bible to reference like we do, they had

to reference the example that Jesus gave to them. Jesus gave a new command, a new covenant, and that means that we can ask a new covenant question that fills in the gaps and closes all of the loopholes that we stumble into when we ask a question that cannot be answered. See, we can't always answer what the Bible says about something, but we can always answer this question: What does love require of me?

Asking what love requires fills in the gaps and closes the loopholes.

It can be easy to get defensive of the Bible here and try to say that it is more than it really is and that we should never say there are gaps or loopholes. Well, there are...we all know it even if we don't like it or really want to say it. It was never meant to be a step-by-step guide to every specific issue, but the overall principles can be the guide for our lives and the issues that come up. Like we have said, the early church had no Bible. What we have didn't exist for them – they had principles, a principle of love that was shown to them through Jesus' life. They based their lives on Jesus' life and example. The thing about the principles that the early church lived by that we need to live by is that they always asked the question about what love required of them.

Let's take an example that we can all understand – lying. We all know that we aren't supposed to lie – we teach our kids not to lie as soon as they learn how to talk. We know that Christians aren't supposed to lie, but why do we know that? The Bible doesn't really say not to lie. The early church knew not to lie and they didn't have a Bible to reference anyway. So how did they know we shouldn't lie? They knew that love required them to be people of truth. Jesus is the truth and Jesus talked about truth; He also talked about treating people like you want to be treated and loving them. We can't really love somebody if we are lying to them; we don't not lie because the Bible says not to, or God says not to, but we don't lie because loving people requires that we not lie to them.

There's something else that we understand here, and I want us to really think about this: asking the question about what love requires isn't about what God gets from it, it's not about what you get from it, but it is about what others get from it. Not lying isn't about you and it isn't even about God, it is about loving the other person. You tell the truth to somebody because you love and respect them enough not to lie. It's for the benefit of the other that we ask the question of what love requires of us in how we treat them.

It is not for God's benefit, or for your benefit, but for the benefit of the one-another's.

We've talked in this series about the Old Testament covenant and the New Testament covenant, and those same ideas apply here. In the Old Testament the covenant between God and man was different than the one we live under today; Jesus changed everything. He made the old covenant obsolete and made a new, world-changing, life-giving covenant with us. Understanding the difference in those two covenants helps us to understand better the faith and helps us to ask the right question.

The Old Testament covenant was designed to be transactional – we do something for God and in return He does something for us. We make our animal sacrifice, and He forgives us of our sins. We follow His specific rules and He protects us; we don't follow them and He removes his protections from us. We can see this all throughout the Old Testament – it is how

God worked with His people in that place and time. People obeyed God because of what they would get from their obedience.

We don't obey in order to obtain something from God, we obey in light of what we've already been given.

The New Testament covenant, the one that we live under as followers of Jesus, isn't transactional at all – the transaction, in fact, was made without us. God sent Jesus to take our place and take our sins on Himself and that is what saves us – what restores our place with God. We didn't ask for the transaction, we didn't see the transaction and we didn't deserve the transaction – but it was made none the less; we have nothing to do with it; it's over. That's why the new covenant has nothing to do with what we get from it and has everything to do with what others get from it through us.

The Old Testament covenant was about obeying God so that we would gain something from it. The New Testament covenant is obeying God because of what He has already done for us. See the difference there? We don't have to do something, or make a transaction, any longer to be restored to God – He already made that transaction for us, with Jesus, and we follow Him because of it. He doesn't need anything from us. They pleased God so they wouldn't get in trouble, we please God because He has already rescued us from the trouble that we were in and we want to help other people get rescued too.

Let's take a look at our scripture from today and see how Jesus tried to make this point to Peter. Jesus is asking Peter several times if he really loves Him and when Peter says yes Jesus tells him what to do about that – feed my sheep. Jesus was talking in metaphor here, of course, and is telling Peter that if he really love Him he would take care of people, he would love people. That is really at the core of everything that Jesus did in the Gospels, He loved people and took care of them – physically, emotionally and spiritually. This is what He calls us to do, this is what He was telling Peter that He needed to do – love people – take care of His sheep.

Later in scripture Jesus sums all of this up in a phrase that we all know well. When He is asked what this all means, to boil His whole message down into a sound bite, He says it this way: Love God, Love People. That's it! That's our new command and our new covenant. That strips down His conversation with Peter into a take home phrase that we can all remember and apply to our lives. Do you love Me? Then Love people. If you really love Me, then you'll really love people. That's what this all comes down to. That's the new set of rules, the new agreement between us and God. If we say that we love Jesus then we need to love people.

So, what does that really look like? How did the early church do that? How were they able to love people and become irresistible to the world? They did crazy, loving things that nobody else would have even dreamt of doing.

There was a practice in Rome at the time of both Jesus and the early church that wasn't spoken about in the scriptures or by Jesus. This was the practice of infanticide, they actually

called it “exposure” and it is what it sounds like – they’d take their unwanted babies outside of the city and leave them in the woods “exposed” to the elements and to animals. This was not only legal and was an accepted and in some cases required part of society and culture. These children were left to be eaten by animals, to freeze to death, burn up to death or starve to death. They were out of sight and out of mind. The people didn’t think of this as murder because the babies weren’t hurt or touched. They would say that it was “up to the gods” or “up to God” if they lived or died.

People did this for a whole variety of reason – economics was at the top of the list, they just couldn’t afford to care for the baby. Near the top of the list was also gender – we have writings from soldiers at war back to their wives during the time that tell them when they have the baby if it is a boy to try hard to care for it, but if it is a girl to “expose” it. Birth defects was also a major reason for this practice as was “exposing” babies that were conceived outside of marriage. It was a common and accepted practice that nobody really spoke out against; the religious people or the non-religious people.

That all changed though with this new group of people who were living under a new command and a new covenant. They were guided by love and the example that they saw in Jesus. Love required them to do something for these babies and they took a drastic step that the people thought was crazy: they started their own foster program. The early church began posting themselves outside of the cities in the places where babies were “exposed”. When the parent left the child and walked away, they walked in! They took the babies to the church and a family took them in and raised them from that day forward, on their own dime, like they had given birth to them. There was no difference between their biological kids and the kids they rescued from “exposure”. They saw these babies being left to die, and without any scripture to tell them what to do, they knew the example Jesus gave them of asking what love required of them made it clear what they had to do, and so they did it.

Most of us aren’t facing babies being left to fend for themselves on the outskirts of town, but we are faced with decisions every single day. My challenge for all of us today is to ask ourselves, in every situation, what love requires of us. We can stop asking if something is and isn’t a sin and then get all twisted up in a theological pretzel trying to make a scripture fit that really doesn’t fit. Andy Stanley gives a really good word in the book about this, about what we should do if we’re not sure which decision God wants us to take, and it is this:

God will always nudge us in the direction of goodness, faithfulness and gentleness; when in doubt, max those out.

I want to end this morning by looking at what God is nudging us, as Cross Point Church, in order to love those around us. We have been talking for a few weeks about making some changes to our Sunday mornings in order to reach the growing number of families in this community with the life-saving and life-giving Gospel of Jesus. We know that we are put in this place and those families were put in this place and that love requires us to meet them where

they are and show them Jesus. Pastor Dave has a series of listening sessions lined up to talk with all of us about this change, in fact they start today between services. We have families that need Jesus right here in our backyard and love requires us to reach them; since we love Jesus we must feed His sheep.

In order to get to that place we need to prepare ourselves to be ready. We believe that if we do what God is calling us to do, if we go all in “for them”, that He is going to do amazing things in this community. Broken people will be out back together again. Hurt people will be healed. Families will grow stronger. God has a great thing for us to do here and we have to get on board and ask what love requires us, as individual, to do.

The good news is that you don’t have to wait until changes are made and new people come to be a part of this. We must prepare ourselves to be ready for what God is going to do and that means that we need to be ready for more kids. That is where you come in. We cannot be ready for more kids when we can’t even take care of the ones that we have here now on Sunday mornings. There are kids here every week that need you. They need somebody to remember their name and ask how their baseball game was. They need people to tie their shoes and help them color and glue. They need people to care about them. There isn’t anybody in this room that can’t do that. Ask yourself what love requires of you. If we’re going to do this, if we’re going to become irresistible and make Jesus irresistible then it is going to take all of us.

Listen, I know Sunday mornings can be hard. It is hard to get out of bed and get in here for a service, let alone get in here and wrangle kids for an hour. The good news is that nobody ever promised any of this would be easy, so it shouldn’t come as a shock. I am standing here today because somebody, lots of somebodies, got out of bed on Sunday mornings and came to my home church and put up with my goofiness and loved me. I will venture to say that is the case for almost everybody here this morning.

Love requires us to care for people. Jesus told Peter, and He tells us, that if we really love Him we will show it by taking care of people. The whole Gospel message boils down to this: Love God, Love People and if we’re going to do that than we might as well start with the smallest people amongst us. Everybody can give an hour on Sunday mornings, everybody. We have three services, we will have two services, so the good news is that you can serve during one service and worship during the other; I’ve said it before and I’ll keep saying – Christianity isn’t a spectator sport. We’re all in this together – love requires us to be in this together.

I’m going to end with a story that I was told by a friend from another church. In her church there are a lot of broken families. They are in a lower-income area and there is a lot of hurt in the kids who they care for in Sunday mornings. Some of them are rambunctious, some of them are bad, all of them are just looking for some love. Mrs. Cindy, we will call her, was in her mid-50’s and her children were all out of the house. She helped with the 3rd grade class at the church every Sunday, dragging herself out of bed each week even when she didn’t want to. Michael was an 8-year old who was dealing with the recent divorce of his parents and he didn’t

really like the way his moms new boyfriend treated him. He came every Sunday and he was kind of a pain in the butt; he did, however, love Mrs. Cindy and she loved him. He still drove her nuts, but she loved him anyway.

One Tuesday evening Mrs. Cindy got a call from the pastor. He told her that Michael had a breakdown at school and was in the principals office that day. He wasn't bad, he didn't throw a desk or anything, he was sad and crying and had written in his journal for English class that he wanted to kill himself. At 8-years old he had a plan to take a whole bottle of Tylenol and "just go to sleep forever." When the school counselor asked him what kept him from doing that, he answered "Mrs. Cindy would probably miss me and cry on Sunday morning, so I didn't do it".

You have no idea what impact you can make my loving somebody else's kid for an hour on Sunday mornings. You may help save a life. You will make a difference, I can promise you that you will make a difference. Love God, Love People – that is what your faith requires of you.