

Daniel S. Teefey  
Riverside Covenant Church  
December 20, 2009  
**Matthew 5:1-12 – Advent Conspiracy – Love All**

**Today we are going to finish our Advent Conspiracy series and as I mentioned earlier, the topic is “Love All.”**

**I hope you have followed the progression we have tried to make here.** Our theme has been an attempt to return Christmas to its rightful place as a remembrance and celebration of Jesus' birth. We began by saying that no matter what our culture has turned Christmas into, for us to take it back we must begin with worship. Every movement of our being must be oriented towards the worship of Jesus. And when it is, and we faithfully assess our culture, we find some alarming things.

**In the Advent Conspiracy we discover that Americans spend billions and billions of dollars more on stuff during Christmas than would be needed to provide clean drinking water for the world.** And these stats could go on and on. So we discussed the importance of spending less and spending wisely. That our culture has robbed us and tricked us into believing that we would find joy in consumption.

**Once we spend less, we are urged to give more.** The Creator of the World, God, is a giver. He gave us Himself. And we are told repeatedly throughout the Bible that we are to be people of deep generosity too.

**This morning, we end with discussing that our faith must also push us to love all.** It sounds nice. But to love like Jesus is not just nice . . . it is radically different and uncomfortable . . .

**Read Matthew 5:1-12.**

**Now this should seem like an odd text to base a sermon on when the topic is love.** Usually the texts I choose at least contain the sermon topic in them. Not once in this passage do we find the word “love.”

**But I love this passage.** In fact, when I was growing up and attending Catholic school we had to memorize it. That might be one of the reasons I love it. And I really believe it points strongly at biblical love and God's call for us to be people of love.

**Let me begin by painting a small picture of what is happening in this passage.** This passage is known as the Beatitudes from the Latin for “blessed” or “happy.” The scene is the beginning of Jesus' teaching ministry. In Matthew, Jesus has just called his first disciples and begun healing. And he goes up onto a mountain side, sits down and begins with these verses.

**As we picture this in our minds we imagine this gentle, nice guy walking slowly up and sitting down.** And then we like how he says these nice things about people that are in tough situations. But I don't think this is how he would have been understood at the time and I don't think we should pretend that the things he says here are not radical.

**The world that Jesus entered was Jewish and it was ruled by the Pharisees and Sadducees as the members of the Sanhedrin.** They interpreted the Jewish Law or our Old Testament and the proscribed what everyone was to do with regard to the bounds of regulations regarding how they were to maintain purity and holiness. Every area of life was subject to various separations between who was pure and holy and who was not and everyone in society knew where he or she stood.

**The high priest was at the top of the societal structure . . .** and at the bottom were the common people, the uneducated, the day-laborers and those that had generally very limited influence.

**The Jewish leaders generally understood that this same level of separation between the have's and have nots would be carried into heaven.** The educated religious leaders . . . those that followed every legalistic religious law to the letter . . . would be next to God while the common man, the poor, the sick . . . presuming they got into heaven by the skin of their teeth would be in some less significant place in heaven.

**The Jews of the day believed that the first in the Kingdom of God would be the educated, the priests and teachers of the law (all males and middle to upper-class).** The last in the Kingdom would then of course be the poor and often oppressed “people of the land,” along with women and gentiles.

**This is the context to which Jesus walks up onto the mountainside, sits down, and begins to speak. His words change the world. His presence changes the way that we perceive reality.**

**Sometimes we forget this.** Jesus becomes ordinary to us. He becomes the pat answer to all the religious questions people ask us. But he is not that safe.

Jesus begins, **“blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”**

From the very first line of Jesus' teaching ministry in Matthew we get a picture of His heart. Of his love. And **the object of that love is not those that were loved by the powerful in his culture.**

**Who do we love? Who do we really love?** I imagine if we went around we would all generally say that we love our families and our friends at least. And many of us would go on to say how much we love everyone. That ultimately we don't really hate anyone. **But if someone were to watch our lives for a month.** Every second of our days . . . who would they say that we loved? Think about that for a second . . . if someone were study our life and observe us and then we were to ask them objectively who they thought we showed the most love for . . . **what might they say?**

The Colts? Shopping? Video games? Work? News? People that we like?

**Jesus' understanding of the world calls for a radical reassessment of what it means to love for us.** It calls for a radical reassessment of who we are called to love.

**Jesus brings into the world a new emphasis on love which he demonstrates in the way that he lives his life. For Jesus love depends on the nature of the lover rather than that of the beloved. Jesus loved because he was a loving person, not because he found attractive qualities in those he loved. His followers are to be loving people, not simply to be drawn to attractive people.**

**This is an extremely important point. To love as Jesus does is to love universally. To love all.** Jesus even loves those opposed to him and his demands. God for all his ability to punish and for all his own spotless purity does not regard sinners with aversion, but with love, with the costly love that we see in the cross where Jesus died to save them.

**In Jesus' day the Jews understood 613 commandments in the Law**, and there were vigorous discussions about the relative importance of some of these. Jesus swept aside all such deliberations with his revolutionary insistence on the centrality of love.

**When the Bible is examined it is clear that the point of Jesus' insistence on love is not who or what to love.** There is no singular object for our love. **We are to be people that have love . . . that are filled with it, and are guided by it in all our actions.** The point is not that we must show love to such and such a person, but that we are to be loving people regardless of the object of that love.

In our passage in Matthew 5, the Beatitude, Jesus is proclaiming the revolutionary nature of this understanding, which turns human standards upside down.

In the text we get a series of people that Jesus calls blessed. His understanding of them pours from his character. Again, Jesus begins **“blessed are the poor in spirit.”** **The poor in spirit are those that are both financially poor and without material resources and those that have been robbed of their dignity.** We may imagine a collection of poor people, eyes dull with lack of emotion. Poor and without spirit, they are the tired victims of a cruel society. These people, the poor of spirit, are the ones to whom Jesus promises the kingdom of the Father.

Jesus goes on. **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”** **We can't overspiritualize these statements and pretend that they just refer to spiritual things.** These are people that are crying over death and calamity in their lives. People in Jesus' day did not live very long. Disease was rampant. And death wasn't something that people were protected from by hospitals and funeral homes. Death was right in front of people. It was in their houses. Jesus says that God is with them in this despair and hopelessness.

Verse 5 is one of the most radical of the Beatitudes. **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”** We generally understand this term to mean gentle or humble and this definitely applies, but the word goes even deeper, in a sense presuming that they are pushed into such a position through oppression. That they are “run over” and trampled upon. It is these people that will “inherit the earth.”

**You can see the stark contrast that Jesus is painting even compared to our world today.** It is the rich in our world today that have wills and estates and things and land to pass on to their relatives to inherit. Jesus says that it will be those who are poor, that have lives of mourning, and are trampled upon that will inherit from Him.

Verse 6, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”** Those that are provided no food and drink in this world are cared for, loved and provided for abundantly by God.

**These verses are referring to the same grouping of people.** People that are poor, who mourn, who are meek, and who hunger and thirst. And Jesus calls them “blessed.”

**Now I know some of you are saying, but hold on a minute . . . what about their faith, what about their church attendance . . .** and that is what Jesus Jewish audience would have been saying too . . . what about their sacrifices, what about their giving record, what about their adherence to the law . . .

**But Jesus does not call them blessed because of what they do, but because of who they are as God’s creation and who He is as someone who purely loves.** To love as God loves is not to make that love dependent upon how worthy of love the other is, or whether they meet some arbitrary standard we have established . . . to love as God loves is to be a loving person . . . that loves by default.

Jesus switches gears in verses 7-9. **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”**

**These verses are not addressed to the poor and oppressed, but to the ruling class, the rich and the oppressors of Jesus’ day.** Jesus says to them it is not your power and prestige that is the basis of God’s love for you. What makes a person blessed is their mercy, the purity of their heart, and their willingness to be a peacemaker.

Verse 10 then speaks to both groups. **“Blessed are those that are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** The ending comes full circle matching the ending at the beginning in verse 3. Verses 11-12 continue this same theme. **“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute**

**you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”**

One scholar wrote of this passage, **“Jesus makes clear the full freedom of God to act in ways that are objectively opposed to the ways accepted as normal by the kingdoms of this world. The God of Jesus does not accept the logic and sacrosanct conventions of these kingdoms, nor does he submit to hierarchies built on a foundation of wealth and oppression . . . Instead, God is a love to be communicated, a life to be shared, a freedom and joy that are meant to inspire freedom and joy in human beings.”**

**Jesus lived this out and we find it throughout the Gospels.** He chooses a child to be the model disciple, he dines with prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners, and tells parables with such characters as the repentant tax collector and the self righteous Pharisee.

**Jesus’ love is not some special affection, it is not some fuzzy feeling, but a willingness to place the well being of others before himself.**

It is that love which is to characterize who we are as followers of Christ. The church is to be refuge of this love. And to love for Jesus is to serve. **To love is to humble oneself before others.**

**Anyone can memorize God’s command to love others, but to actually do as Jesus did is much more profound and difficult.**

**Anybody that is in any kind of committed relationship with someone else knows this.** If love were just a feeling we would constantly be in and out of love . . . some days we would love, some days we wouldn’t. Love takes commitment . . . it is an identity that must be formed . . . take my relationship with Dana . . . I know I love her not because I wake up with some giddy feeling every morning . . . actually some mornings we wake up quite annoyed with one another . . . I know I love Dana because I am fully committed to her even when I don’t feel like it. I love her because I am willing to sacrifice for her. **I love her because I am willing to serve her.** And how do I know this is love, because that is what God shows us love is.

**Love is indeed a fascinating thing.** It is seemingly unexplainable. Often it is just a 10 cent word that we toss around freely. I love my dog. I love Coldstone Creamery. I love Purdue. I love free meals. If you listened to the way we talked you would think love is pretty easy. Love is just *really* liking something. But love is a lot more. The Bible says, **“God is love.”** This means much more than “God really likes everything.” God cares so deeply about us that God is willing to put himself on the line for our benefit. Love is action.

**So if love is not a feeling, but an action, you might want to ask what actions constitute love?** The Bible is full of various commandments and so are our churches. If we just do those things, do we love? If I get coffee for my friends, do I really love them? If I give money to the poor, do I love them? If I advocate for justice, do I love the oppressed? If I go on mission trips, do I love the native people? Maybe . . . but maybe not. That is just the thing about love, there is no prescription for it. We can go through the supposed motions of love, but deep down we know it is not the real thing. It is not authentic. **Our attempts at love are often about us and not about God.** There is no specific set of things you can do that make your actions love. You can’t exactly teach someone to love.

**Ultimately, we love not by ourselves, but by funneling God’s love for us, to others.** We love by experiencing God’s love for us and then modeling that love to others. We become a window through which others see a glimpse of God. We can love others because Christ first loved us. We, as God’s church, are God’s instruments of love to each other.

**Most of us are extremely privileged people.** We live in an environment where we have access to virtually unlimited educational opportunities. We have cars and houses. We have thoroughly researched financial plans. We have computers and televisions. We have a toolbox full of practical tools and experiences. **And all of this is great . . . but all of our tools and all of our gifts are entirely worthless without love.** Love must be the foundation of all that we do. Love must be the cornerstone upon which we build our lives. We must be willing to serve others. We must be willing to sacrifice of ourselves for each other. We must be willing to give without any expectation of receiving anything in return. **We must desire above all us to be known for love.**

**Love doesn’t come wrapped in a package. It can’t be bought.** In the drama we saw this. We all know love when we see it and experience it and it is priceless. This Christmas let’s give that love not just to

people we like . . . but let's try to especially give it to those people we don't. Those people we struggle with. Those people that we never notice.

**And I hope that this rethinking of Christmas does not just rest in your memory as a sermon series one time, but a new way of thinking about how you spend your resources.** I hope that you see how the decisions you make impact your family, your community and ultimately the world. Jesus is still changing the world. Be a part of that change. **Worship Fully. Spend Less. Give More. Love All.**

**Read 1 Corinthians 13: 1-8 (Attached)**

References consulted:

Domeris, W.R. "Exegesis and Proclamation." Journal of Theology for South Africa 73, (1990): 67-76.

McKnight, Scot, et al. Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.