

Well can you believe that Christmas is only a week away? Wow, how time flies!  
I would like to invite you all to our Christmas Eve service at 7pm. We have a good skit lined up and refreshments to follow. Hope to see you all there!  
Have a super Christmas and great new year! God bless you!  
Pastor Don

"Love Is Serving" Romans 1:1-7 Dec. 15, 2013

The judge asked the defendant what he was being charged with. The defendant replied I was just doing a little early Christmas shopping for my children your honor. Shopping early is not a crime the judge said; how early were you shopping. That is when the defendant replied "before the store opened."

20 year old Emily stood patiently in line to see Santa Clause. Finally it was her turn and she sat down on Santa's lap. Now he usually doesn't take requests from adults, but she smiled very nicely at him, so he asked her, 'What do you want for Christmas?' 'Something for my mother, please,' replied Emily sweetly. 'Something for your mother? Well, that's very loving and thoughtful of you,' smiled Santa. 'What would you like me to bring her?'

Without turning a hair Emily answered quickly, 'A son-in-law.'

A man went to the cosmetics counter at the local department store. I'm interested in getting my wife some perfume for Christmas, he told the sales clerk, what do you recommend. She showed him a bottle that cost \$150. Oh my, that is way too expensive he replied so she showed him a smaller bottle and said this one is only \$50. No that is still too much. Then she showed him a tiny bottle that was only \$10. He said no, I want to see something that is really cheap. So she held up a mirror so he could see his reflecton.

As the barber was cutting his hair, a little boy was admiring the barbers Christmas tree. He was fascinated by the lights and decorations. He said daddy, can we get a Christmas tree for our house. The father replied I'm sorry son; by Jewish houses don't have Christmas trees. To which the little boy replied, aw daddy, why did you have to buy a Jewish house?

Any construction company can build a house. But only love can make it a home. Any realtor can sell you a house, but only love will make it a home. Home is where the heart is. Home is where the love is. Home is where Jesus is; does Jesus dwell in our hearts?

All love comes from God for God is love. Christmas is all about love. Love came down at Christmas and hopefully it spreads all around. Does it flow through us as it makes its way around the world?

Christmas is more than lights, decorations, shopping, wrapping, baking and caroling. It is love. Love is the real meaning of Christmas. God loved us so much; He gave us His only begotten Son. As Christ's ambassador, Christ's reflection, His hands and His feet in this world, we are to share His love any and every way we can any and every chance we get. Do we do that? Is our Christmas season filled with love? Is love what motivates us?

True love for God is serving.

Would you pray with me as we begin this morning's message? {Pray}

Paul calls himself a bondservant of Jesus Christ. A bondservant is a slave. The people of Paul's day were very familiar with slavery. Rome was infamous for making its captives slaves. But here, Paul is not talking about forced slavery, but chosen slavery. You see, Paul chose to be a slave to Christ. He voluntarily became Christ's slave because he loved Jesus with all his heart. Do we love Jesus with all our heart? Are we slaves for Christ?

Paul was not only a Jew, he was a Roman citizen. Why would a free Roman citizen choose to become someone's slave? Because of their love for them. Paul is using the Hebrew definition of bondservant; a servant who willingly commits themselves to serving the master that they love. Exodus 21:5-6 describes this for us; *"But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,'<sup>6</sup> then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever*

Paul choose to become completely dependant and totally submissive to Christ. Choosing to be someone's bondservant sounds a lot like becoming an indentured slave doesn't it? But it is a lot different. An indentured slave is only a slave temporarily, for a set period of time; then they are released from their bondage. Being a bondservant to Christ is a life long commitment. Are we willing to be totally submissive and dependant upon Christ? Do we love Him enough to go wherever he sends us; say what ever he tells us to speak, do whatever he commands us to do? To be totally submissive to Christ we must denounce all other masters. Who is our master? Do we serve Christ or ourselves?

When we love someone, we want to obey their will. Christians are to be Christ's servants, slaves if you will, because they love Him. We aren't slaves exactly because a true slave has no rights and no freedom of choice; they are forced to do their masters will. Jesus never forces Himself on anyone; we are free to choose to obey or disobey. Paul uses this term to show how much he loves Christ. How much do we love Jesus? Do we choose to be His bondservant? Is our love for Him shown by our service for Him?

If we truly love Jesus, if we are truly His friend, we want His will to be done in our life. Jesus called us His friends; do we call Him our friend? Jesus said in John 15:14-15 *"You are my friends if you do what ever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends for all things that I heard from*

*my father I have made known unto you.*” We serve our friends don’t we? We try to please them don’t we? So are we trying to please and serve Jesus?

The word Apostle means one who is sent. Paul was obviously called by Jesus to be an ambassador for him. Not everyone has a dramatic conversion like Paul, but all Christians are called to be ambassadors for Christ. We each have our own ministry; we are all equipped with our own skills, and are sent into the mission field. Love for Christ makes us obey our calling, follow His leading, and preach His word. Are we exercising our love?

Christmas is all about love. Jesus said in John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* Love is why Jesus came into the world. God is love. 1John 4:8-10 *“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”* Jesus came into the world for one reason and one reason only, to die for our sins.

John 3:17-18 *“For God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”* God sent Jesus to earth with a mission; to die for our sins. Jesus completed this mission of love. Jesus is the son of God, the Messiah; predicted by the Prophets. He was the promised seed of David; both Mary & Joseph can trace their roots back to King David. He was conceived by the Virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit.

Thus He was born of a woman, making Him fully human while at the same time, fully God. He was God in the flesh, Immanuel, God with us. We don’t have to understand that, we just have to believe it. Jesus grew up a sinless man, God in the flesh, and died on the cross as propitiation, payment, for our sins. All sacrifices for sin had to be perfect, no blemishes of any kind. Sin is a blemish. In order to be accepted as the Lamb of God, Jesus had to be sinless. Normal humans aren’t sinless are we? Romans 3:23 says *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* That is why God had to send His son to die in our place. There simply was no other way for man to be reconciled with God. Heaven cannot be earned or bought. It can only be received through the grace of God by faith in Jesus. Ephesians 2:8-9 *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any one should boast.”* Jesus is the only way for anyone to get to heaven. He said in John 14:6 *“I am the way, the truth and the life; nobody comes to the Father but by me.”* Do we believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life? Eternal life only comes through Jesus. Those who believe are not condemned; those who refuse to believe are condemned already. Only those who chose Jesus can have everlasting life. Do we love Jesus enough to choose and to share Him?

Jesus was resurrected by the power of God to prove that God accepted His death as atonement for our sins. Christians have the privilege and responsibility of telling this good news to the world. Are we carrying the message of Jesus to the lost?

Can God love us any more than that? What more can He do for us than to sacrifice His only begotten Son? Jesus himself said in John 15:13 "*Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.*" Jesus died for us, are we willing to die for him? Or harder yet, to live for Him/ to show his love to the world/ to stand & be identified with him? Paul was; he lived for his Lord; he wrote nearly 1/2 of the New Testament. Paul eventually died for his faith. Are we willing to live and/or die for Jesus?

Jesus Himself demonstrated true love by obeying the Father's will. Jesus was willing to leave his comfortable home in heaven, come to earth in human form and face all the hardships of humanity; heat, cold, hunger, thirst, fatigue, work, other peoples attitudes, suffering, illness, pain and death. Oh the pain Jesus endured for you and me. Why would the creator of the world do that? Because he loved his father and obeyed his will. Why would God ask Him do to that? Because he loves us. While we were yet sinners, God loved us. Romans 5:8 "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" Jesus did all that for us, yet we have trouble leaving our comfort zones to serve him don't we. Actions speak louder than words.

Do our actions show our love for the world to see? Just how much do we love Christ? What are we willing to do for Him? Maybe a better question is what won't we do for Him? What is he calling us to do today? Do we love him enough to do it? Helen Steiner Rice wrote a poem that Grandpa Jones & a few others turned into a song. You may have heard it before. It goes like this:

It happened one day near December's end, two neighbors called on an old-time friend

And they found his shop so meager and mean, Made gay with a thousand boughs of green, And Conrad was sitting with face a-shine When he suddenly stopped as he stitched a twine And he said, "Old friends, at dawn today, When the cock was crowing the night away, The Lord appeared in a dream to me And said, 'I am coming your guest to be'. So I've been busy with feet astir, Strewing my shop with branches of fir, The table is spread and the kettle is shined And over the rafters the holly is twined, And now I will wait for my Lord to appear And listen closely so I will hear His step as He nears my humble place, And I open the door and look on His face. .  
."

So his friends went home and left Conrad alone, for this was the happiest day he had known, for, long since, his family had passed away And Conrad had spent many a sad Christmas Day. But he knew with the Lord as his Christmas guest This Christmas would be the dearest and best, so he listened with only joy in his heart. And with every sound he would rise with a start and look for the Lord to be at his door like the vision he had a few hours before. So he ran to the window after hearing a sound,

But all that he could see on the snow-covered ground was a shabby beggar whose shoes were torn and all of his clothes were ragged and worn. But Conrad was touched and went to the door and he said, "Your feet must be frozen and sore, I have some shoes in my shop for you and a coat that will keep you warmer, too."

So with grateful heart the man went away, But Conrad noticed the time of day. He wondered what made the Lord so late and how much longer he'd have to wait,

When he heard a knock and ran to the door, but it was only a stranger once more.

A bent, old lady with a shawl of black, with a bundle of kindling piled on her back.

She asked for only a place to rest, but that was reserved for Conrad's Great Guest. But her voice seemed to plead, "Don't send me away Let me rest for awhile on Christmas day." So Conrad brewed her a steaming cup And told her to sit at the table and sup.

But after she left he was filled with dismay for he saw that the hours were slipping away And the Lord had not come as He said He would, And Conrad felt sure he had misunderstood. When out of the stillness he heard a cry, "Please help me and tell me where am I." So again he opened his friendly door and stood disappointed as twice before, it was only a child who had wandered away and was lost from her family on Christmas Day. Again Conrad's heart was heavy and sad, but he knew he should make the little girl glad, so he called her in and wiped her tears and quieted all her childish fears. Then he led her back to her home once more but as he entered his own darkened door, He knew that the Lord was not coming today for the hours of Christmas had passed away. So he went to his room and knelt down to pray And he said, "Dear Lord, why did you delay, what kept you from coming to call on me, for I wanted so much your face to see. . ." When soft in the silence a voice he heard, "Lift up your head for I kept my word-- Three times my shadow crossed your floor-- Three times I came to your lowly door-- For I was the beggar with bruised, cold feet, I was the woman you gave something to eat, and I was the child on the homeless street. Three times I knocked and three times I came in, and each time I found the warmth of a friend. Of all the gifts, love is the best; I was honored to be your Christmas guest." As ye have done it unto others ye have done it unto me. Does the love of God flow through us to others? Is our love for God made evident through our service for Him? Love is serving! Hallelujah & Amen! (Pray)