

The Revolutionary Love of Jesus

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I think we can all agree that the past year and a half has probably been the one of the more unpredictable and overwhelming periods of our lives. Not only has there been a lot of public health concerns and political discourse, I'm sure all of us could name a million things that have happened to us personally, myself included. Now, out of all of the things I expected to change, the one thing I didn't expect to change was my faith. When I was in confirmation, we all had to take a spiritual gift test, and I remember getting my results back and my main gift was faith. At first I was like "what kind of spiritual gift is faith?! I wanna see the future or speak some gibberish", and God said "Sara, you're a Lutheran, not a Pentecostal, don't get ahead of yourself." Obviously over time I've come to know the significance of that gift.

But my faith started shifting into something deeper around November of last year as I started getting more exposed to the people that challenge Christianity. I've engaged with a lot of people not only in personal conversations but through social media, and it really opened my eyes to a different perspective on non belief. Now, I could stand up here for hours giving every example of a bad church experience or a doubt about God, but what I realized is one thing that it can really boil down to for people is feeling a lack of love from the very place that is supposed to be the beacon of love. In realizing that, it was heartbreaking and discouraging, but it was also very convicting. The whole reason I can even give this message is not because I've always gotten it right, in fact it's the exact opposite. There have been numerous times that I did the exact opposite of what Je-

Jesus would've done, and I know it's hurt people in the process. So, with this new perspective, I simply asked God, "What do I do?" Through the mission trip, discussion with other believers, and constant prayer, the answer became abundantly clear: love your neighbor. What does that mean? How do we do that?

Loving your neighbor doesn't only apply to the people you like. I think Matthew 5 gives us a lot of clarity on who we're supposed to love. Jesus in this passage is continuing His sermon on the mount, and he says "You have heard the law that says 'love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!" We see Jesus putting this into action while he's being crucified. All the way up until the end, Jesus never retaliates against the people that are beating Him to death. Even as He's hanging on the cross He says "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing" (Luke 23:34). If Jesus can love the same people that nailed Him to a cross, I think we are more than equipped to love the people around us. So the next question is: How do we love our neighbor?

Start by sharing the Gospel with them! I think sometimes as Christians we can forget the power of the Gospel because we hear it all the time. I know that I'm extremely guilty of that. But the truth is that the Gospel continues to be the most groundbreaking thing that has ever happened in all of history, because the very same God that controls the entire universe desires a relationship with us. It is the assurance that no matter what you've done or who you are, your salvation is secured through your faith in Jesus. I think when people hear that - that they are loved unconditionally and there is a bigger hope and purpose - it changes them, as it has changed all of us. I believe that sharing the Gospel with people is the most loving thing we can do as Christians, because in Je-

Jesus is where we find our hope, our rescue, and our desire to love, to show grace, and to be forgiving.

I used to think that if I wasn't going up to people and trying to convert them right away, I was doing it wrong. I've quickly realized that most of the time, we share the Gospel with people without even really realizing it. I wanna be clear, it's important to actually *tell* people about Jesus, but *acting* like Jesus can have just as big of an impact.

One of the books that helps me examine if I possess Christlike characteristics is Galatians. In Galatians 5 Paul lays out the **fruit of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)**. There are 9 fruit, those being love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. Examining each of these fruit on its own are sermons within themselves. As Christians, we have the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit. When we accept Jesus into our lives, God puts His spirit in us to reveal God to us and His desires. As a result of having the Holy Spirit, we become more Christlike, therefore producing the fruit of the spirit, and we look less like the world. Trust me when I say that people notice the difference, and people will start asking questions.

Build relationships with people and meet them where they are. One of the best ways to show somebody that you care about them is to show up for them, to be present in their lives, to rejoice with them in their best moments, and weep with them in their worst. Get to know people and what they're struggling with in their lives. When someone is struggling, show compassion and empathy towards them. Be patient and slow to judgement.

One of the best examples of this is in the parable that Jesus tells us in Luke 10. One important thing to note about the Good Samaritan story is that at this time the Jews

and Samaritans did *NOT* like each other. The last thing that a Samaritan would've done was help out a Jew. If anything, the Priest and the Levite that passed right by should've been the people helping him. That's not the point that Jesus is trying to make. There will be many opportunities for us to love our neighbor, just as the Samaritan loved the Jew. My question to you is, are you gonna be the Priest and Levite, or are you going to be the Samaritan?

One of the best things about being a Christian is we don't have to wander around wondering how we are supposed to love people. We know to love people the way that Christ loves us, because Christ *is* love. He is the ultimate example *of* love. Loving people is one of the most difficult things to do, because it's easy to deem certain people as unlovable. It's hard for us to love on our own will, but because we have faith in Jesus, we are able to see people how Christ sees them.

I'll leave you with this: If there's one thing I've learned, it's that Jesus loves broken people. I think one of the biggest misconceptions about Christianity is that you have to fix yourself before you can have a relationship with God. That is so far from the truth! I have witnessed people that have given up everything they were and dedicated their life to God, and watching those people's lives be completely changed has been one of the biggest motivators for my faith, because those people are living proof that God is still working. It's proof that no matter if you are dealing with addictions, depression, divorce, grief, etc. God is still with you, He is still fighting for you, and He still loves you. That is the revolutionary love that Jesus gives to the world. Amen.