

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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Stunning Love

PART

3

TITLE

Love Is Kind

SCRIPTURE

1 Corinthians 13:4; 1 John 3:16-18



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Well, good morning Providence. It is a privilege to be with you this morning and to be up here and to open the word together. I want you to know that well first of all, my name's Daniel Savage and I'm the pastor of discipleship. If you and I have not met yet, then I look forward to meeting you soon. And I've been here since December, so relatively new and people are still getting to know me and I'm getting to know them. But I want you to know first that I consider this a real privilege to be up here and to open the word together and to sit under it, I consider this one of the most important times of the week for us as a church family. And so with that in mind, let's pray and ask the Lord for his help one more time.

Heavenly father, I ask that you would be with us now and that you would do what you promised to do, which is to work through your word, it is truth and it sanctifies us. And so God, I pray that you would work and move through it, that Jesus would be lifted high and that we would be drawn to him. God, I pray that you would do a work among us. I feel my own weakness in this moment as I think about what is supposed to happen during this time and I am aware that I cannot do it without your help. And so God help us. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We've been the last two weeks looking at first Corinthians chapter 13 and thinking about love and every instruction in a letter like this arises out of some need for instruction. So Paul who wrote first Corinthians is writing to the church in Corinth. He's writing them to instruct them. He was there, he was a part of starting this church and preaching the Gospel there and then moved on to do ministry somewhere else. And as he's traveling, he's getting word back about the Corinthians and hearing about what's happening there and what he hears are troubling things to him. And so he writes back to them these instructions and corrections. If you read through the letter, you read one thing after another that the church was doing wrong. Mistakes that they are making, deformities that he is hearing about in them and one of those deformities is that they are not a loving church.

In fact, if we read this instruction and think about how it comes out of what he has heard about the church then we can assume that this church is impatient and harsh, envious and inconsiderate. They have these incredible gifts, and if you read chapter 12 and chapter 14 even the early on in the book, he's thankful to God for these gifts that they've been given. They have these incredible gifts that they are exercising. He says they don't like any gift. They've been gifted in every way as a church body, but he says that when they are discharging these gifts without love, they're being rendered worthless. We've experienced that all of us have in some way where someone does something for us or helps us in some way and the experience is ruined by the way that they do it.

Just a few weeks ago, I went across the street to Walmart and my strategy, so you know when I go to Walmart is to try to find the general area that I believe the item I'm looking for to be, and then find someone with a blue vest and say, "Can you tell me where this item is?" I just consider it near impossible to find anything in that huge store.

And so I just go in, try to get to the general vicinity and ask someone for help. Well, this is always an adventure asking someone for help. And so this just a few weeks ago I went over, I was looking for one thing in all of Walmart. And so I went to the general area, I thought it was, I found someone asked them for help and to say that they were less than enthusiastic would be an understatement. I thought this person either hates their job or hates me. And so they took me to where the item was and I walked away and instead of feeling helped and thankful for the experience, I walked away thinking this person could use some additional training.

The experience was ruined by the way that they interacted with me and the way that they made me feel like I was an inconvenience. This is what Paul is saying about the church in Corinth. They have these incredible gifts. They're speaking in the tongues of men and angels, they're prophesying, they're preaching the Gospel, they're doing all these things and exercising this great faith. And he says, "It's all being rendered worthless because of the way you're doing it." And he says at the end of chapter 12, "Let me show you a more excellent way." And he launches into this instruction about love in chapter 13. If you don't have a Bible this morning, we're going to read first Corinthians chapter 13 there's some bibles in the chairs in front of you and it's on page 959. Page 959, first Corinthians chapter 13 starting in verse one, this is Paul's instruction about love.

He says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol. And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast, it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Last week Brian focused on the attribute of love. This idea that love is patient, in this week we will think about how love is kind. And so in order to understand what kindness is, we have to think about it for a second. And he puts these two things together, patients and kindness, he pairs them together.

Patience is about how we respond. It is more passive, but kindness is active. It's about what we do and this usage that he has here in first Corinthians 13 when he says, "Love is kind," he's actually using the word kind as a verb. This is the only time in the new testament that the word is used this way. And so really what he's saying is love does kindness, or love kinds if we want to make up a word. And so if patience, as we learned last week is having a long fuse or suffering long with someone then kindness is being quick or predisposed to do good. It's an act of seeking. It's a heart bent towards doing good to and for others. Like anything else, if we want to understand any of these parts of love then we should think first about God. First John tells us that God is love. God is the perfect manifestation of love, the perfect manifestation of kindness. And if we want to see what God is like, we're told in Hebrews that we can look to Jesus.

Hebrews chapter 1:3 says that, “He is the radiance of his glory and the exact representation of his nature.” So if we want to know what God is like, if we want to see God, then we look to Jesus. And Jesus shows this kind of kindness all throughout his life. Kindness, this active seeking to do someone else good. One great example is in a familiar story about Jesus and Zacchaeus. Famous story, there’s a children’s song about it, and as I read this, you’re going to have trouble not singing the song in your head. Luke chapter 19:1, it talks about Jesus and his encounter with Zacchaeus, it says, “He, Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich and he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. He was a wee little man and a wee little man was he.

And so he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see what he could see, for he was about to pass that way and when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and he said to Zacchaeus, “Zacchaeus hurry and come down for I must stay at your house today.” If you don’t know the song, you should have someone sing it to you after the service. Verses 6, “So he hurried and he came down and he received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner,” and Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I restore it fourfold.” And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house,” since he also is a son of Abraham, for the son of man came to seek and to save the lost.” This is kindness.

Jesus is passing by and he looks up into a tree and what he sees when he looks up into this tree is a broken man who is lost and needs to be found. He isn’t discouraged by the criticism that he is going to receive, he isn’t deterred by the inconvenience. He isn’t repulsed by Zacchaeus, his background or his sin. He’s not blinded by the fact that this was a man who turned on his own people. He sees Zacchaeus and he is inclined to do him good. This is what it means to do kindness. Jesus sees past the obstacles, he sees Zacchaeus and he wants to do him good. This is kindness. Are you seeking to do good to others with a gentle heart? Are you seeing the people around you? Are you seeing their needs and looking for opportunities to do them good? It’s an active seeking that we’re supposed to do.

One of the jobs that I had outside of ministry was, I was an inside sales representative for a software company. And if you know anything about inside sales, especially entry level inside sales, it’s a lot of outbound calling, trying to look for people who might possibly need what it is that you’re selling. And so I was cold calling businesses all day long every day, I would come into work and I was supposed to make 70 phone calls a day. I was calling one business after another hoping to find someone that needed what I was selling. And so I would come to work every day and I was think of it like a hunt. I was going out, I was looking for that one person that this software would actually add something to their business. It would make it more efficient, it would save them money, it would help their bottom line. And so I was looking and I would come in and I would look under every rock and in every crevice looking for that one person who needed what I was selling.

Kindness is supposed to be this way for us. That we would go out with this sort of active seeking, looking in every crevice under every rock for someone who needs the kindness of God. We should go out every day seeking someone in the world who needs kindness. Are you actively looking for opportunities to be kind and gentle or maybe a more difficult question for us to consider, are you being kind to the people who you're around every day? You're family, coworkers, classmates, neighbors, regardless of how they treat you, are you kind to them the way that God has been kind to you? As I was thinking about this all week and thinking about kindness and the experience of people in the world, I was struck by this idea that people around us are surrounded by cold, hard people, in cold hard realities. And one of the ways that we spread the Kingdom of God in the world is through expressions of kindness. What we're called to spread the reign and rule of God wherever we go.

That's what Jesus was talking about when he said, "We're the salt of the earth or we are light in the darkness." And we take the reign and rule of God that has captured our hearts and we spread it wherever we go. And so we go with this light in us and we go into dark places and that place becomes light. In the same way, we go into these cold hard places and we make them warm and gentle. We go into these cruel cold places and we bring kindness. We spread warmth and gentleness to cashiers that are trapped in darkness and have interacted with cold hard people all day. We spread warmth to children in foster care and repairmen that come to our houses and neighbors who are struggling at work and family members who are battling depression. We bring warm gentleness, kindness into their world. We spread light where there was only darkness, but we have to be strategic.

We have to be active, we have to go looking like we would look for our next sale, looking under every rock and every crevice, seeing every face that we pass looking for that person that needs kindness. We are required to show kindness. It's a command of us. We're commanded to love our neighbors. If we're following Jesus, this isn't extra credit, this is something that we are commanded to do. Think about what Jesus taught in Matthew 25 in verse 34 it says, "Then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me. I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me, and then the righteous will answer in saying, "Lord, when? When did we see you hungry and feed you or thirsty and give you a drink?

When did we see you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you." And the king will answer them, "Truly I say to you as you did to the one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me." He will go on to say to those who didn't feed and clothe those who were the least of these that they didn't feed and clothe him and he will tell them to depart.

It's a passage about judgments. Jesus takes our kindness so seriously, that he says that he receives it as if we are being kind to him directly. So when you travel to another country to install a clean water filter, Jesus receives it as if you've traveled all that way so that he could have clean water. And when you smile and offer a kind word to that person who looks so dark and lonely, Jesus says he receives as if you went out of your way to smile and offer a kind word to him. So who do you know that needs a cup of cold water?

Who do you know that needs your help and how is God calling you to be his agent of kindness in the world? This isn't easy, kindness costs us something. It costs time or effort or energy or inconvenience. It costs our pride or our money. It is seeking to do someone good even when it costs us something. So we have to ask, are we willing to bear the cost of kindness. If we're honest sometimes we are, but sometimes we aren't. In fact, maybe oftentimes we aren't. Brian has been reminding us over the last few weeks that these things don't come naturally to us. The answer isn't to try to force ourselves to be kind or to walk out of here and try to white knuckle kindness. We have to pursue kindness. Like I said, it's not an option, it's not extra. If we're following Jesus, we have to do it, but the problem is we just can't do it on our own. We need a new nature. We need to be changed and renewed and I want to consider this morning how the Gospel gives us everything that we need to pursue and attain kindness.

It gives us everything that we need in four ways, probably more than four, but four that I thought of. First, the Gospel is the greatest display of kindness. Think about Titus 3:4 and 5, it says, "When the kindness of God, our savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us. Not on the basis of deeds which we had done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." The Gospel, the word Gospel simply means good news. The Gospel is the good news that God saw us in our helpless state. He saw that we were enslaved to sin and we were dead in our trespasses and he sent a savior to give us life. Jesus came and walked among us and lived a perfect life, the life that we could not live. And then he died in our place and bore our sin and shame, and then he was raised from the dead on the third day. This is the good news, the Gospel, and it's about the kindness of God and how it appeared, he was actively seeking to do as good.

He saw us in our broken state that we were without hope, that we could not rescue ourselves and he at great cost sent his son to die for us. An active seeking to do us good regardless of what it would cost him. The Gospel gives us the greatest picture of kindness. And second, the Gospel motivates us to pursue kindness even when the world is cold and dark. In one of the reasons that kindness is so difficult is that kindness is not what we experienced from the people around us all the time. If everyone else in the world was kind, kindness would be a lot easier and we would still find a way to mess it up, but it would be easier. Our kindness isn't a response to the actions of others. And think about what Jesus said in Luke 6:27-29 he says, "But I say to you who hear love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. Whoever hits you on the cheek, offer him the other also and whoever takes away your coat, do not withhold your shirt from him either."

Now, how are we supposed to find the motivation to do that? How are you supposed to respond in kindness to someone who is mistreating you? How do you offer the other cheek to someone who just struck you? Where do you find the motivation to live the way that Jesus is calling us to live? Well, kindness in response to mistreatment only comes as a response to what Jesus has done for us. The way that we treat others and seek to do them good can't be a reflection of the way that we are treated, but instead is a reflection of the way that God has treated us. The Gospel gives us everything that we need to operate with continual kindness in the world, even when the world is cruel and cold and even when it isn't natural to us. And so we will leave here, some of us highly motivated to be kind. All of us, most of us I should say, would probably agree that kindness is a good thing. It's something that we want to do.

We want to be known as a kind person. And so you're being reminded of it now and you're going to be all fired up and you're going to leave here and you're going to try to go do kindness. You're going to think my kids aren't going to recognize me anymore. I'm going to kill my neighbor with kindness, I don't care what he does to my lawn. I'm going to go out here and I'm going to be kind and you're going to try really hard, and the problem is your motivation is going to run out. You will forget this great sermon that I've just preached and people will mistreat you and you will reenter the cold hard realities of the world and your motivation for kindness is going to dry up. It might take a day, it might take a week, it might take an hour. So where do we find the continuing motivation to love and to show kindness when it's not what we are receiving from the people around us?

There's only one place that we can go and it is the Gospel. If we look to the world for motivation to be kind, we won't find it. If we look deep within our own hearts to try to find motivation to be kind, we won't find it there either. There's only one place that we can go that is a bottomless well of resource for motivating us to continue in kindness no matter what we experience in the world, and it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the kindness of God expressed to us and that he saw our great need and in response to that need, he took on whatever it would cost him to come and save us. This is a kindness like none we have ever seen or known anywhere else, and it is a spring of motivation that will motivate you to be kind no matter how you are treated. It will motivate us and enable us to do what Jesus has called us to do, to do good to those who hate you. It's a well that never runs dry.

Third, the Gospel brings forgiveness when we fail to show kindness. Because regardless of how motivated we might get and regardless of how often we may run to the well of the Gospel to find motivation, we will fail at this. We have failed. The reality of it is that none of us have done this perfectly, we have all failed, Christians in the room have failed. As followers of Jesus we know we're supposed to be kind and yet we fail to do it. If you're not a Christian in the room, you have failed to be kind. We aren't kind, we aren't gentle, we think about ourselves first and we step on other people if we need to, to get ahead. We tell half truths to make ourselves look better even at someone else's expense. We pass by people in need because we're busy, we have other things to do. We aren't Christians because we're always perfectly kind, we are Christians because we have collectively confessed that we fail to be kind when we know we should.

We have collectively confessed that we need a savior, we've failed to do what we were commanded to do, and so we've cast ourselves on the mercy of God and the hope of Jesus Christ and his forgiveness. God's kindness in the gospel sets us free of past failures and frees us to pursue kindness in the future because we are forgiven. That's only half of the good news. The other part of the good news is the fourth thing that the Gospel does when it clothes us into perfect kindness of Jesus. So we are people who know we need a savior? We know we need to be forgiven of not being kind, but we also need kindness. If we're going to stand before God as righteous, we have to be people who have exercised perfect kindness in the world and we have failed, but Jesus never failed. Jesus never failed to express kindness when kindness was needed. He never turned away from doing good because it would cost him too much. He never failed to actively seek to do others good no matter what the cost was to him.

In the Gospel not only are our failures to be kind taken away and placed on him, but his perfect record of kindness is placed on us. In Christ we have all we need. With our failures removed and his perfect record applied we are set to go from here and pursue radical kindness. When I think about radical kindness, I think about Larry and Jean Elliott. Larry and Jean Elliot were career missionaries in Honduras and I met Larry and Jean when I was a sophomore in high school. I was on my first international mission trip and had gone to Honduras with my youth group to work with Larry and Jean. They had been there for 20 some years at this point and I was just starting to think about ministry, just starting to think about what that might look like in my own life. And so I got to go on this trip and work with Larry and Jean and they were terrific people. They had a contagious kindness about them and it was an incredible experience being there and being surrounded by the fruit of their decades long ministry in Honduras.

They had planted churches and those churches had planted churches and they were extended to some 80 mission points that they were reaching by the time I got there. And what Larry would do, Larry Elliott was, he would drill water wells. They would go out to surrounding villages and areas around the capital city there and they would drill a water well and use that as an opportunity to share the Gospel. And so they had done that for the last 20 some years and had been preaching the Gospel and the fruit of their ministry was everywhere and it was incredible. It was so encouraging. I ended up going back a few more times. The last time I went, I was a sophomore in college, maybe I was a junior, that's not very relevant. But I went to Honduras, we were there on a mission trip and we were working on, with some of the churches that they had planted, but Larry and Jean were gone. They had been reassigned by the international mission board and had accepted a new call to go to Baghdad, Iraq.

The country of Iraq was open to missionaries in a way that it hadn't been in a long time and they needed the Gospel there, and what they also needed was clean drinking water. And so they called Larry and said, "Would you consider moving your operation to Baghdad and training people on the ground there so they can do what you've been doing in Honduras for so long." And they agreed to go. And while we were there in Honduras, we got word that Larry and Jean Elliot had been killed in Baghdad.

They were driving through the city and their car was surrounded by gunmen and they were shot in the streets of Baghdad. And I remember hearing that and trying to process it as a college student in Honduras. And my first thought was, this isn't fair. Larry and Jean Elliot had already given enough. They had spent 26 years in Honduras away from their family, away from the comforts of their home. They had poured themselves out among the people of Honduras and I was surrounded by all the fruit of their ministry and I was thinking they had done enough.

And then we went to this memorial service that they had while we were there in Honduras and I started listening to the testimonies of the people who had been impacted by them. One after another, after another. It dawned on me that, that's not how Larry and Jean Elliot thought at all. They weren't keeping some tally about how much they had given and came to the point where they thought, "You know what? We've given enough, let's go back home and enjoy our grandkids." They were people who were predisposed to doing good. They were people who were quick to respond and actively looking for ways to do good to others. They heard that there were people in Iraq who needed the Gospel and who needed clean water and they said, "We are ready to go." They were predisposed to doing good. And where do you find motivation after giving up your life for 26 years to serve other people? Where do you find the motivation to go to a dangerous place and start all over?

You find it in the kindness of God. Larry and Jean Elliott knew that the kindness of God, their savior had appeared in his love for mankind. And because of that he had saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to his mercy. And in that they found a limitless resource for actively seeking to do good to others no matter what it would cost them. If you are a Christian here this morning, I hope you will remember the kindness of God. I hope you will meditate on it and think deeply about it and let it drive and propel you to show kindness to the people around you, even when they are not kind to you. And if you're not a Christian here this morning, the Bible tells us that it's the kindness of God that leads us to turn to him. That he came when you were his enemy and embraced great cost so that you could be saved from your sins. I want you to think about is kindness as well. And turn to Jesus Christ and find forgiveness and eternal life.

Let's pray. Heavenly father, thank you for your kindness that is expressed to us in the gospel. The good news that you saw us in our helpless state and you actively sought to do us good, even at great cost. God, I pray that you would capture our hearts with these truths, that they would be so real and so overwhelming to us that they would be a limitless supply of motivation to go and to be kind the way that you've called us to. God, I pray that our love for you would increase as we think about your kindness, and I pray that our ability to show love to our neighbors would increase as we think about this kindness that you have shown us. I thank you for all that you've done, for your kindness, your goodness that never ends, never runs out. I pray these things in the name of Jesus, amen.



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