

## What If Our Hearts Were Right?

A sermon based on 1 John 3:18-24

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I'm slightly embarrassed to be admitting this to you this morning, but I enjoy romantic comedies. It's not that I really love them, but as I've told my wife, I'm certainly not opposed to watching them. I guess you could call me a sap.

Well, there's one in particular that our sermon text for this morning makes me think of. It's the movie *Enchanted*. Have you seen it? Now, I'm not going to spoil it for those of you who haven't, but there's a really catchy song they sing called "That's How You Know." It's a song about letting someone know you love them by the small things you do for him/her, like leaving little notes letting her know you're thinking of her, sending flowers when she's having a bad day, dancing because you know she'll enjoy it, singing her a song, and the song goes on.

The point is that words aren't enough to convey love; actions show true love. That's how you know what's in here (your heart)...through what comes out here.

How does God know that you love him? We might say we love him, but often times, what comes out of here (the heart) doesn't show love for God. It does show just how not right our hearts are. And if our hearts, or our consciences, were right, based on what comes out of our hearts, we shouldn't be going up there, but down there, to hell. Is that right?

Now, how do you know if that person's right for you? There are a lot of music artists who think they know. Barry Manilow, with his sultry voice sings, "Always follow your heart." The Swedish pop rock duo Roxette serenades, "Listen to your heart." And then there's Stevie Wonder – a timeless wonder – singing, "Baby, I knew at once you were meant for me...be true to your heart."

Now, not to get all nostalgic or cheesy and emotional here, but you see the common link, don't you? According to those songs, to find your true love, this here (your heart) tells you where it is. This right here tells you if what you're feeling, this love, if it's right or not.

Well, this morning, the words for our sermon come from 1 John, which just happens to be known as the letter of love. Don't worry, it's not full of cheesy, lovey, romantic lyrics. No, it talks about a fuller, richer, deeper love...a "right" love...the perfect love. 1 John beautifully expresses the love God has for us.

It's a great follow-up to John's most famous passage - "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" – with gems like... "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God." "God is love." "This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

Right there, with even just those few verses, we see what true love is. Contrary to popular thought today, love is more than just an emotion. Love is more than something you can fall in or out of at a

moment's notice. Love is more even than just lip service, just saying the words. Love is action. Love is what God has lavished on us. Love is God sending Jesus to be our sacrifice. Love is God.

And love is our response. "Dear children," John writes, "let us not love with words or tongue (again, with lip service only) but with actions and in truth." You want to know what's really going on in here (in our hearts)? You want to know if there's true love, and especially true love for God, in here? Do you want to know if our hearts are right? Then don't look for the proof in words. The proof is in what you see. The proof is in the actions.

Do you understand why? As an author once wrote, "Lips and tongues lie. But actions never do. No matter what words are spoken, actions betray the truth of everyone's heart." Isn't that true? It's easy to say one thing, the right thing, and then to completely discount and discredit your words by doing the wrong thing.

But that's just the problem. Our actions don't lie. They give direct insight into what's really going on in our hearts.

Well, what if our hearts were right? That's kind of a misnomer. Yeah, our hearts are right; they tell the truth. But often times, what people see from you and me out here speaks the truth of what's in here...the truth that our hearts are not right.

The book of Ephesians talks about this sad reality, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of the world...All of us lived among [these spiritual enemies] at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature (or our sinful hearts) and following its desires and thoughts."

You want proof that your heart isn't right? Listen to what Jesus says, "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.' "

You want proof that your heart isn't right? Like the songs go, just listen to your heart for a moment...to your sinful heart. What does it love? Well, I love not getting into trouble when I've done something wrong, like when I broke that heirloom my spouse treasures, so hiding it or lying about it seems like the only solution. I love the sweet satisfaction I feel whenever I unleash my anger, yelling at my kids, cursing at my co-workers, venting about someone else behind their back.

I could be a good Samaritan and help my neighbor who's just recently had hip surgery and has been having a tough time keeping his driveway plowed or his lawn mown, but he's been kind of a jerk to me, and I love seeing him get what's coming to him.

I love myself and making sure that my needs and my wants supersede anyone else's, which means if I have the choice between helping out at church on a Saturday afternoon versus having some me time so I can work on my own projects, I choose me.. In fact, more times than not, if I listen to my heart, I find that I love myself more than God, which I show by doing what I want (sinning) more often than doing what God wants (obeying).

It's sad when that's the proof our hearts provide. But what's even sadder is we start to believe that we're in the right. You see, God has blessed every one of us with a conscience, you know, that thing

inside you that's supposed to prick you and guilt you when you've done something wrong, when you've sinned.

Well, here's what Steve Jobs had to say about your conscience, "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma - which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of other's opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary." Or, even more simply, as Jiminy Cricket chirped, "Let your conscience be your guide."

Friends, that's the kind of thinking that prevails in our world today. That's the mindset we are struggling with, even within ourselves. The thought that what we decide is right...it's right. Who cares about God's Word...God's law? I won't be restricted by God's rules. Doesn't that save your conscience? It feels right to me, so it must be right.

But you know what else our consciences do? Well, when you were younger and you hit your brother or sister, what would you do? You would run and hide because you knew Mom or Dad would eventually come and a spanking or some other form of punishment would quickly follow. That was your conscience at work. It doesn't just pull at us when we do something wrong, but it also makes us aware that we deserve punishment. And for sin, the punishment is death.

We can't run and hide. Our consciences rat us out to God. Our hearts condemn us every day. The child of God – you...me – know he has failed many times to love as God desires him to love. That's quite the burden, and we know it.

What if our hearts, if our consciences were right? Jiminy Cricket, if our conscience was our guide, you know where it would lead? Straight to an eternity in hell.

You know, the devil would love nothing more than that. He would love for our sinful hearts to condemn us. He would love for us to fall into the trap of believing our sinful hearts so that we would belong to him. And yet, friends, we won't fall for his lies. You know why? Look at what John writes, "This is how we know that we belong to the truth...if (or better yet, when) our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts."

We don't belong to Satan. We belong to the truth, or rather, the Truth (capital T), Jesus, the Way, the Truth, the Life.

Now, that doesn't sound right, logical. It shouldn't add up. We shouldn't belong to the truth. We shouldn't be right with God because he says the right way is the perfect way, and that's not us. But that is the way of true love. And as John wrote just before our verses this morning, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."

Talk about hearts being right. That was Jesus, a man after God's own heart, and he showed it. Everything that Jesus said, everything that Jesus was proof of his sinlessness. He was perfect. His heart was right. But Jesus wasn't just concerned about his perfect heart. He wanted your heart as well. And so, in love, Christ laid his life down for you. Jesus offered himself up on the cross as a sacrifice for you. Jesus died to pay for you and your sins. His blood wiped every sin away and wiped your heart clean. His blood paid the price to buy you back from Satan. His resurrection proved it.

Now you and I belong to the Truth. How can we be sure? God, who is greater than our hearts, tells us we belong to him. And God, who is greater than our hearts, has done what it takes to make our hearts right.

Everything that comes out of a sinful, dirty heart, God washed it away through the waters of baptism. You are clean. You are at peace with God. God through your baptism assures you of that whenever your heart or your conscience tries to condemn you. Because of your baptism, you belong to God. You are his dear child, and that means your heart is right.

And because our hearts are right with God, now what comes out of them are words and actions that are right-eous and God-pleasing.

Now, don't be misled by the second half of our text, where John says, "If our hearts do not condemn us (which they don't), we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him."

God doesn't listen to us and give his blessings to us as a result of our obedience. The truth is, our obedience is a result of God's love, that he loves us enough to send Jesus to die for us, he loves us enough to live in us, and he loves us enough to give us his Holy Spirit, who works faithful obedience through us, who works through us to love others with words and tongue and with our actions.

Now, those who deny the truth must try to still their guilty consciences with some kind of work-righteousness. But not us. Our hearts look to the spiritual rest God has brought us in love through Christ. And now we act in love because in Jesus, our hearts are right.

How does God know that we love him? There's nothing we have to do. He already knows we love him. He already knows we belong to him. He already knows our hearts are right.

But we'll still show him we love him. You can do that even in the littlest things, like your offerings, opening your Bible on a day other than Sunday, washing the dishes without stumbling, being courteous and helpful to your co-workers, spending quality time with your spouse or your children. And the list goes on.

Thank God that through Jesus, through the waters of baptism, what's in here is right. Set your heart at rest in that truth. And know that because of the Truth, Jesus, your heart can no longer condemn you. But it will remain in Jesus' love throughout this life and forever in heaven. That's the truth. Amen.