

Re-Discover! We Love “Because” Jesus Is at Work FOR Us!

A sermon based on 1 John 4:19

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! Amen.

It must have been a perplexing, maybe even borderline uncomfortable conversation to be having. “But this man is my enemy,” the man pleaded. “You know his line of work, how vehemently and openly he’s come after me, after all of us, and now, you want me to go to him and you want me to help him, even heal him? Why would I do that?”

And God’s answer? In that conversation between Ananias and God we saw in our first lesson from Acts, God could have just left his answer at a firm “because...because I said so,” and that would have been good enough.

“Because I said so.” As kids grow and begin to discover the world around them, with their developing thirst for knowledge and answers comes the question, “Why?” You probably know that well! Sometimes, kids’ usage of that question gets to the annoying stage where parents, exhausted, finally just say, “because I said so,” or “it’s that way because that’s just the way that it is.” Sound familiar?

Thankfully, that answer hasn’t always been good enough for everyone. Some of our greatest technological, scientific, medical advances and discoveries have come because men and women asked the question “why” and were content with the answer “just because.”

Well, over this past week at Camp Discovery, we asked the question “why?” and discovered some amazing answers in our take-home points. Campers, would you be willing to help me review our take-home points?

1. Like, for our first day, why was David so bold in fighting against the giant Goliath? It’s because *Discover! Jesus gives me courage!* Just like he did for David.
2. Or, for the judge Deborah, why was she able to encourage Barak and save her people from their enemies? It’s because *Discover! Jesus gives me wisdom!*
3. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three men thrown into the fire...literally, and yet they didn’t die. Why? It’s because *Discover! Jesus saves me!*
4. Or why did blind Bartimaeus trust that Jesus could restore his sight? It’s because *Discover! Jesus gives me faith!*
5. And then why did Ananias help Saul get his sight back? It’s because *Discover! Jesus gives me his love to share!*

Friends, the learning isn’t done. Camp Discovery, sadly, is over, but here, today, we’re at Camp Re-Discovery, and today, we’re going to explore the question “why?” Why do we love? *Re-Discover! We love BECAUSE Jesus is at work for us!*

We love. That’s it. That’s what we as believers do. That’s what all of God’s commands in the Bible center around. Jesus summarized, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Or, even simpler, “love.” That’s it. So Pastor, what’s there for us to re-discover? We love – it’s that simple.

Is it really, though? A simple enough concept, yes! But to actually love...to share with others through my words and my actions the love Jesus gives me, it's anything but simple. How about for you? Are you having a hard time there seeing my point? Well, that's why we're here at Camp Re-Discovery this morning. Let's take re-look into your heart.

You'll see...that our actions aren't always loving, our motives behind our actions aren't always loving, even what we sometimes view as showing love is not always loving. Kids, in just this past week, I saw tears because someone took my seat, or someone pushed me off my stump, or someone was making fun of me. And I'm sure that's just a small sample of what goes on sometimes at home or at school or when hanging out with friends.

And adults, I know I can't say every word to come out of my mouth, whether it was a lie, a curse word, a bit of gossip, whatever, that it's been loving. And I'm sure you're in the same boat. And throw in some of the actions we do...it's pretty easy to see we aren't always loving.

Or, how about the motives behind our actions. "Yeah, I'm kind and courteous to my co-workers, but it's just so that when it comes time for me applying for that promotion, they'll all support me." Or, "I'll clean up my room and take out the trash not because Mom or Dad asked me to, but because Mom or Dad promised a treat or that brand new toy I've been wanting if I do it." Are those loving motives?

And finally, sometimes even sometime what we view as showing love is not love at all. "Yeah, I wave at my neighbor and chat all nice with him when we pass each other on the sidewalk and even make the token offer to help at his upcoming garage sale, but I can't tell you how hard it is to keep the smile on my face without gritting my teeth as I do so. I loathe him." Or, "my friend is struggling with this particular sin, or she's living life the way she wants to (with some ungodly choices), but I really care about her and love her, and I treasure our friendship so much, so I don't talk to her about it and about the dangers of it." That's not loving.

We lie. We hit. We gossip. We hate. We sin. But so many times, what we don't do is love.

And when we re-look at our hearts, the reason is easy to see. Just listen to what the Apostle Paul writes in the book of Romans, "What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...It is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." The truth is what we have in our hearts is a sinful nature who opposes God, who hates God, who does not show love as God commands us to do, who has us headed towards eternal death.

o Now, for those of you who love to save "stuff" – Christmas decorations, antiques, trinkets from your childhood, whatever you find interesting – what's it like to come upon them after a time, to re-discover them, when you're digging through storage for something else? It's great to take some time and reminisce and relive some of the memories you've had with them or to imagine the story behind the piece, isn't it?

Thankfully, for us (all of us) who have the problem of not always loving, who have the problem of sin, you've come to Camp Re-Discovery, where we get to re-view our greatest treasure, the Bible, re-

discover its amazing message, and re-live Jesus' loving sacrifice! You see, all of God's commands center on God telling us to love others. All of God's Word focuses on God loving us.

Maybe you remember some of these... "Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends." "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." And, of course, today, "We love BECAUSE he first loved us," or, as I would like to put it, "We love BECAUSE Jesus is at work FOR us."

You see, over this past week, we talked about how Jesus is at work in us and how Jesus is working through us. But we can't even begin to have that conversation without talking about the work Jesus has done for us...the work of love.

I could imagine the conversation going like this: Jesus, why did you do all this? Because I love you. Why did you come down from your throne in heaven to become a lowly human? Because I love you. Why did you suffer so much (being beaten, spit on, mocked, falsely accused and convicted) and then die on the cross when you're God and you could have stopped it all? Because I love you.

For every question, it would be the same answer...because I love you. And add to that the perfect life he lived, where he showed love to everyone, where every motive of his heart was love, and his resurrection, that he loved us enough to give us the assurance that his work of saving us from our sins was complete and that eternal life in heaven is ours...it's all because he loves us.

Maybe you've heard this saying before, "You can't give what you don't have." On our own, we can't give love to God. We can't show true love to others because we have hostile hearts, sinful natures who hate God."

But we have a God who loves us regardless, who loves us unconditionally. And best of all, we have a Savior, Jesus, who worked his love for us, and who now works in us and through us to share that same love with others as we serve and help them in their need, especially their greatest need of knowing about their Savior.

Friends, it's been said that "love is a two-way street." NO, IT'S NOT! At least, not when it comes to us and God. That's not a bad thing, though. Thankfully, it's God's love first, and now we get to respond to his love by loving others...truly loving others.

What a relief it is to know that we don't have to save ourselves, regenerate our own dead hearts, transform our own hostile minds, climb up to God or earn his approval. God has made all the first moves!

What a relief it is to know that when God commands us to love other (sinful, undeserving) people, we don't have to come up with that love completely on our own. We merely have to pick up, use, and develop what's already there. God isn't saying, "Come on – get love!" He is simply expecting us to use what we have. The Holy Spirit who gave us a heart of faith has left a deposit of his love in our hearts, and the more we give it away, the more we receive anew from the Spirit.

Re-Discover! Jesus is at work FOR you! That means we can re-look at our sinful past and rejoice in the victory Jesus won for us on the cross.

Re-Discover! Jesus is at work IN you! That means we re-pent of all our failures to love God and love others and trust in his complete forgiveness for all of our sins...free of charge!

Re-Discover! Jesus is at work THROUGH you! That means because God first loved us (and what an amazing love that is!) we want to, we can, we will re-commit ourselves to love every day, in everything we think, everything we say, everything we do.