**Matthew 22:34-40**

Introduction

I. We live in a culture that has stripped love of its true meaning

A. Love is a feeling

“I love that thing or person” = that thing or person makes me feel good. Gets me

B. Love is tolerance

“To love me is to accept and celebrate every choice I make and every feeling that pops up in my heart.”

II. Jesus’ view of love is much different and far more robust

The Passage

I. “Love” your neighbor as yourself

A. Jesus uses “agape”

1. Eros: erotic, romantic, passionate love

2. Philia: friendship love, affection comes from having shared interests, passions

3. Agape: the highest form of love, God’s love for us

B. Definition of agape

=An unconditional and sacrificial commitment to another person’s good

As you consider each of those words, notice how different that is from the culture’s view of love

II. Love your neighbor “as yourself”

A. What does he mean by loving yourself

1. Some suggest this is an indirect command to love ourselves (meaning having a strong self-esteem/self image)

2. But most likely Jesus is not commanding us to love ourselves, he’s assuming we already love ourselves, in the sense that we are all concerned with self-interest. We instinctively and naturally look out for ourselves and our own safety, happiness, comfort and fulfilment. Jesus is inviting us to take this very natural self love and do something radical: extend it to our neighbor.

B. The radical nature of this command

1. John Piper: “This command seems to demand that I tear the skin off my body and wrap it around another person so that I feel that I am that other person; and all the longings that I have for my own safety and health and success and happiness I now feel for that other person as though he/she were me. It means: Wanting to feed the hungry as much as you want to feed yourself when you get hungry. It means: Wanting to find your neighbor a job as much as you are glad you have a job. Wanting to help your fellow student get A's as much as you want to get A's. Wanting to help the person stalled on the freeway as much as you are glad you are not stalled on the freeway. Wanting to give the poor softball player a chance to play as much as you want to play the whole game. Wanting to share Christ with your neighbor as much as you are glad you know Christ yourself.

It means using all the creativity and energy and perseverance to do good things for others that you use in doing good things for yourself. Caring about what happens to others as much as you care about what happens to yourself. Can you imagine what the church would be like if we were all like that: looking at the person to the right and to the left and feeling the same longing for their happiness that we feel for our own.

2. This is such a radical perspective

a. I’m called out of my self-centered view of the universe

b. I’m invited to step out of my perspective and get a third party perspective on the situations in life so that my interests are no more and no less important than anyone else’s interests

3. This requires a radical sacrifice

Oftentimes two people’s interests are mutually exclusive, so I have to abandon my interests in order to pursue someone else’s

C. Two times when we do this well

1. Parenting: parents of young children often forsake their own interests (need for food, sleep, comfort, etc.) in the interests of their children. Jesus is inviting us to have that posture towards everyone.

2. Birthdays: everyone knows that the birthday person’s interest are the most important that day, and they live accordingly. Jesus is inviting us to treat people as though it were their birthday everyday.

III. Jesus lives this view of love

A. Philippians 2:1-8

1. Jesus renounces his own interests and privileges (of being God in heaven) and serves for our interests and privileges (in becoming man and then dying on a cross) (see v. 5-8)

2. We are invited into that same life of letting go of our own status, privileges, comforts in order to serve for the good of others (see v. 3-4)

3. There are small opportunities everyday to let go or our interests in order to pursue the interest of others. Consider these examples: each one involves a letting go in order to pursue the good of another:

-listening, praying for someone, apologizing, forgiving, giving of

4. Love doesn’t keep track of the sacrifice; it simply focuses on the good of the other

B. Thought experiment: In each situation you encounter this week, ask the simple question: What is it that would be good for this person right now?

**Discussion Questions**

1. Sunday’s message began with a few comments about our culture’s understanding of what love is. Do you agree with those comments? Where do you find yourself or your friends buying into the view of love offered by the culture?

2. Consider the definition of agape love offered on Sunday. How did that definition strike you? Is there anything you would change or add to that definition?

3. Consider John Piper’s comments about what Jesus means when he calls us to love your neighbor “as yourself.” How do those comments strike you and what does that stir in you?

4. Interact with the statement that was made on Sunday: “Jesus is inviting us to treat people as though it were their birthday everyday.” How do you respond to that?