

WHAT IS LOVE?

by Ernest O'Neill

Video Clip transcript extracted from the talk LOVE IS HONEST by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

The three wise men who gave gifts to Jesus are known as the Magi, and one of the most famous short stories in the world is one written by O'Henry, an American shortstory writer, called "The Gift of The Magi." It is a story about a young couple who loved each other more every year they were married, and yet they had very little money. So when Christmas came along they had no money at all for buying presents. In fact, they had only two things in their possession that were of any value or that they were proud of at all. One was the young woman's blonde hair which came right down to her waist, and the other was a gold watch that the husband had that had been given to him by his father.

The week before Christmas they went around the stores shopping like everybody else except that they had no money to buy anything. They would keep going to two stores especially. One had a pair of golden combs that both knew would look just beautiful in the wife's hair, and the other store had a beautiful gold chain that would look magnificent on the husband's watch. They wandered around those stores repeatedly, even though they felt they had no chance of ever buying those things.

So Christmas morning arrived and they came down to the living room where they usually exchanged presents. The husband could see a light of excitement in his wife's eyes and she could see the same in his eyes, except his changed to horror when he saw that she had cut off all her hair. Dejectedly he brought out the present he had bought for her. You can guess. The golden combs! Except that now she had no hair to put them in, so it was useless.

However, she picked herself up and continued to be excited and she brought out her present for him, which was the gold chain for his watch. He smiled and said, "You obviously sold your hair to buy the chain for my watch, but I don't have a watch. I pawned my watch to buy the combs for your hair." O'Henry says these two foolish people stumbled on the central factor in giving gifts -- that of love. If there isn't love behind giving a gift it is of no value, and if there is love it doesn't much matter if the gift works out right or not; it is the love that counts.

Over the next weeks we are going to spend a lot of time trying to find out what real love is and contrasting it with all the wrong ideas that we in our twentieth century have of love. So we are going to spend some time on this verse, but loved ones, could we just settle the fact this morning that God says to us, "Now I'm assuming from all the signs that you people have around you that you know that you exist only because Somebody else loves you. I am assuming that you yourselves see that your lives will only work if they are run through and flooded and surrounded by your love. Now I'm saying to you 'Let your love be real. Let it be real and true and genuine, not something that you put on.'"

The basis of all that is in I John 4:7: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

What is love unfeigned and love undissembled? It is Jesus hanging, bleeding on the cross and saying to you, "I want to assure you that all the evil that you have in your heart that has to be destroyed, I have taken into my own heart and I am bearing it through hell's fire so that it will be destroyed forever and so that you will be able to go into my Father's presence without fear of extermination." That is love unfeigned. No bluff. The man is dying. He is dying and he is telling you that He is taking the worst that you have produced in your heart into His own heart freely because He loves you. That is love. It gives completely and without reservation, gives itself for the highest purpose known to man. That is what real love unfeigned and undissembled is.

Loved ones, I would just ask you and myself, "Is love the basic attitude in our lives? Is love the basic attitude that we have to the people that we work with? Do we love our colleagues at work? Do we love the fellow students we have in our classes at school? Is love the governing attitude in our relationship to them or is it competition, rivalry and trying to keep one-up? Is our basic attitude to the people that we live with, either our family or relatives or roommates, the basic attitude of love? Is our life girded around about with love?"

It is horrifying, isn't it, how we can so often find that our life is governed by paranoia or competitiveness or insecurity or struggling to keep our heads above water, but not governed by love. Yet, God is saying to us, "Look, that is the only thing that makes life work." Could it not be that that is why you and I have so much trouble with things in life? Could it be that what your marriage needs is a bit more love? It is very interesting these days that we talk so much about communication and think that communication will solve everything in marriage. Well, communication helps, but what marriage most needs is love. It is the same in our labor relationships in our businesses. What they most need is love. Actually if you and I were talking together alone without all these other people around, you know that you would say, "Yes, love has some kind of softening effect on me. When I see somebody really loves me, I would do anything for them. It makes everything worthwhile; it makes everything possible if a person loves me."

Loved ones, that is why I say to all of you this morning that God is saying to us, "Let love, which is the only cement that will hold all of us together, be real and undissembled, without dissimulation; let it be genuine." Let it not be something that you assume in order to impress somebody. Because the truth is, even if love sells its hair to buy a chain for your watch and you sell your watch to buy combs for love's hair, somehow the Christmas is the greatest success because love was there. It is the same with our lives. Love makes everything work. So let us accept what God says, that love is to be the basic attitude of each of us in our whole lives towards everyone we meet -- the drivers on the road, the people in the stores. Pray that God will make clear to us what love is. I would encourage you to look at different parts of your lives and see if there is any love in them. Is there any love in my relationship to my wife? Is there any love in my relationship to my friends at work? It might surprise us how cold things have been allowed to get for us.

Full sermon: LOVE IS HONEST by Rev. Ernest O'Neill