The Qualities of True Love, Part 1
1 Corinthians 13:4a-c
1864

Take your Bible and look at the 13th chapter of 1Corinthians. First Corinthians chapter 13. We are proceeding through the 13th chapter as we have been through the whole book of 1Corinthians, and we're going to be exposed to some very basic and very important areas of truth as we discuss the theme of love.

I don't think you'd get any argument on the fact that the greatest commodity in the world, the *summum bonum* of life, is love. In 13:13 it says: "The greatest of these is love." In 1Peter chapter 4 it says: "Above all things have love." And when it wants to– when the Bible wants to define God, when God wants to define Himself, He says about Himself: "God is"– what?– "love." Love is the clearest definition. Love is the personification of the character of God.

In Romans chapter 13, it says: "Love is the fulfilling of the whole law." Love is the high point of everything. Love is the number one ingredient in life in terms of attuning life to the character of God. And sad to say, love as urgent as it is, as important as it is, as divine as it is, is very frequently missing from God's own people, the church. And one great illustration of that is the church in the city of Corinth. A church in which existed all of the multiplicity of spiritual gifts, a wealth of human teachers ranging all the way from the apostle Paul to Apollos and many others, the finest of teaching, a great grasp on doctrine, a great facility for reaching the lost in a strategic city, with all that was going for the Corinthians, Paul adds them up to zero in chapter 13 because he says, "Love is missing." And anything minus love equals zero.

And so the apostle Paul points out to them here the absolute necessity and urgency of love, tragically absent in their community of believers. And you know, you'd have to think, too, that as important as it is, it's a very strange thing that it has been found so difficult for the church to truly experience love. Now, the word that is used throughout here for love is agape, and we assume that that is the strongest word, the most grandiose word, the loftiest word, the most fully defining word to speak of this particular thing, and so that's the word that's used here.

There have been many definitions of love. There have been many people who have written books about love. You can find books about love in every century. There are songs about love. There are poems about love. There are discussions about love. But when you've said it all and you've read it all and you've sung it all and you've heard it all, you haven't heard it until you've read 1Corinthians chapter 13 verses 4 to 7 because here is the most complete description of love ever penned. The reason I say that is because this is God's own personal definition of love. And more than a definition, it is a description.

In fact, if you want to be technical about it, the Bible never defines love. It never defines love. It never defines love in terms of abstracts, in terms of attitudes, in terms of feelings, in terms of ideology. It

never defines love, it only describes love– in action. Because love is not an abstract. Love is not a feeling. Love is not really an attitude. Love is a deed. Love is an activity. And to support that, I want to point out something to you that you wouldn't know unless you were aware of the Greek, but in verses 4 to 7, where you look at the normal scriptural rendering of this and it says: "Love is patient, love is kind," love is this, love is not that, love– and what you read in English are adjectives. But in the Greek, there are no adjectives here, these are all verbs. And verbs describe– what?– action.

Love is not something you describe with adjectives; love is something you describe with verbs because love is only described, it is not defined. Love is only love when it acts. And that's the way it's presented in the Word of God. So the Bible never defines love, it only describes it. And the description here is most beautiful. In every one of the 15 perfections of love in verses 4 to 7, there are 15 different perfections of love to fill out its description, but in every one of them, a verb is acting.

The Corinthians had missed the boat desperately because in all of the flurry of activity, there was no love there. So Paul stops to show them four things about love: the prominence of love– that's the first three verses, remember that?– the prominence of love; second, the perfections of love, or, if you will, the properties of love, and those are in verses 4 to 7; thirdly, the permanence of love, verses 8 to 12; and lastly, he sums it up with that great statement on the preeminence of love.

Now, Paul wants them to understand that love is a necessary reality. That love is something without which they are zero, tinkling bronze and a clanging cymbal, and they are nothing without it. And so having pointed up the prominence of love in verses 1 to 3 by saying: "It doesn't matter whether you can speak in tongues, even the tongues of angels, you're nothing but noise. It doesn't matter that you have the gift of prophecy or that you have all knowledge and all wisdom and all faith, and it doesn't matter that you give yourself as a martyr. It doesn't matter that you sell everything you have and give it to the poor. If you don't have love, you're nothing." Absolutely nothing. That's the prominence of love. It plays the prominent part in all Christian behavior, and where it is absent, the behavior ceases to be Christian.

Now, he moves then to describe love because they're saying, "Well, if love is so important, and we can't do anything without love and we can't minister any gifts without love, and we can only be noise without love and we can only be nothing without love, could you tell us what love is? If we've got to be it, then tell us how." And so he says, "Here is love."

Look with me at verse 4 and listen to his description. "Love is suffering long; love is acting kindly; love is not envying; love is not boasting; love is not feeling conceited; love is not behaving in an unbecoming way; love is not seeking its own things; love is not irritated; love is not thinking evil; love is not rejoicing in iniquity; love is rejoicing with the truth; love is enduring all things; love is believing all things; love is hoping all things; love is lasting unto all things."

Now, there is a description of love. You didn't see anything abstract. You didn't see anything, really, in terms of an ideology. You only saw things in terms of a behavior. What you have here is really– it's like love is a light, a beam of light, and the beam of light hits a prism, and the prism divides that single beam of light into all of its colors, and that's exactly what happens here. The apostle Paul takes the concept of love and shoots it into the prism and it splatters all over and you've got 15 different colors. And all 15 describe the perfections that make up the one reality of love. This is the spectrum of love. Love in action.

You'll see in these 15– and by the way, we're going to look at them over the next few weeks because it wouldn't be right to do– to just hurry by these things if this is the most important thing in all the world and this is the most essential thing in the church, then we ought to spend some time looking at the uniqueness of every one of them. And as we look at these in the next few weeks, you're going to see, I trust, what will become to you a very transforming truth. You're going to see a whole concept of life that is embodied in this idea of love that has to make you behave and make me behave differently than we do now. It's already had a profound effect on my life, just in this week. Hopefully, it'll have a greater one.

You know, what's incredible about this and what hit me– you know, I've been studying 1Corinthians now for a long time and teaching you for many, many, many months, and you know, up to this point, it's been kind of– it's kind of like a lot of dirt up to here, isn't it? I mean, you are messed up here and you're messed up here and here's another ugly situation and you're crummy over in this category and why don't you shape up and you know, you feel a little bit like you've been slopping around in the mud for about a year. And then I thought, as I reached this particular point, you know, it's like a flower, the 13th chapter is like a flower that pushes its beauty right up through the dirt. And all of a sudden, you hit 13 and something bloomed out of the dirt of the Corinthian situation. And as you look closely at it and you see its glories and its beauties and this particularly in verses 4 to 7, it just opens up a tremendous horizon.

Now, the things that you see there are not things you don't understand. They're only things you and I don't apply. And my approach is not simply to just tell you what it says– you can read it yourself, and there have been enough versions and comments on it– but to try to help you to see how to apply this thing. Now, we may not get to that today but we will, little by little, and to the point of conclusion of the 7th verse in next week or the week after, we'll pull it all together. So I want you to stay with it.

It isn't important that you evaluate this sermon. In fact, it's never important that you do that, frankly. But it's not important particularly now that you evaluate and say, "Well, his first subpoint, 1b, was not very strong and I missed point two and so forth, and he seemed to be a little disorganized and it wasn't a very good illustration, it didn't apply, and so"– it isn't important that you get analytical. It isn't important that you even say, "Boy, it was terrific– oh, was it terrific, just really liked that." That isn't important, either. What is important is that you put your life up against the characteristics of love and you match yourself, that's important. Nothing else is.

It isn't important whether you like this or didn't like it. It isn't important whether it was new information or old. It isn't important whether it was boring or whether it was exciting. It's only important that you have the integrity and the honesty to put your life up against these principles and say, "This is me" or "This is not me." That's only important. And that's the way I feel about it.

The apostle Paul lists the 15 perfections of love and not in any logical order but it's almost in the order of the contrast that he sees with the mess in the Corinthian church. He starts out, for example, by saying, "Love is very patient" or "Love is suffering long." And that's just like a slap in the face to the Corinthians who were totally impatient and intolerant. And then he says, "Love is acting kindly." And they were doing anything but that. And then he says, "Love is not envying," and they were jealous and envious– read the third chapter, the whole first part of the chapter defines their envy. You see, what it is is he is showing them openly and honestly, "Hey, here is love and here you are– check it out. And realize that the way it looks now, nothing you do matters because there isn't any

love there. And just so you'll know why there isn't any love, I'll define it and you check your life against it." And that's the only thing that matters as we study it.

By the way, I'd add this, that when Paul was painting this portrait of love, I believe Jesus was sitting for the portrait. This is Him. Every one of these principles, we could draw right back into the gospels, and you would see that they are true of Christ. Because this is how God defines love and God is love and Christ is God.

Let's look at the first one– and these aren't going to be anything very profound. I'm sure you're familiar with them, but look at them in a fresh light. "Love"– it begins in verse 4– "Love is suffering long." "Love is patient." That's that old Greek word *makrothumeō* or *makrothumia*. It's the word that's used again and again and again and again in the New Testament and it describes– listen– it describes patience with people. It isn't so much a word that concerns itself with circumstances or events; it concerns itself with people. It is the ability to be wronged and wronged again and wronged again and have the power to retaliate but never even think of it, that's what it is. Chrysostom, that early church father, said: "It is the word which is used of the man who is wronged and who has it easily in his power to avenge himself but will never do it." That's the word. It is the spirit which never retaliates. It describes the person who never ever gets angry.

You know, it's interesting to think about this, but this is a strictly Christian concept. You say, "What do you mean by that?" I mean that in the Greek world, at least in that area, this was never considered to be a virtue. This was considered to be a sign of weakness. In fact, Aristotle said that the great Greek virtue is the refusal to tolerate any insult or injury and a readiness to strike back at any hurt. See, that was a virtue. You were a big man if you really whacked away at your enemies. If you really retaliated, if you were full of vengeance, you were showing you were a strong man. "Listen, guy, you're not going to get away with that." You know, we identify with that. We make heroes out of people who strike back. We say, "Boy, there's a gutsy guy, he told that guy off. Boy, that guy needed it." You know, we think that's courageous. We think that's really a man who will walk up and say, "You"– and let him have it, you know, and then we tell our hero stories. "Boy, I remember when I met that guy, did I ever tell him a thing or two." That's heroism to us. To God, it's the very opposite of love. Love does not retaliate.

And that's something new to the Greeks. The Christian is one who loves. So the Christian is one who is hurt and insulted and injured and in a position to take revenge but he never does. He never does. The word literally means "long tempered." Long tempered, has a long fuse. You can study all throughout the New Testament and you'll study the word again and again because it appears so many times. Paul said it was characteristic of his own heart, 2Corinthians 6:6. He said it should be characteristic of every Christian, Ephesians 4:2, everyone ought to be characterized by meekness and lowliness and long suffering. Paul said it was one of the fruit of the Spirit, wasn't it?

Now, if you need a model to follow, it's not too hard to find some. God was long suffering. Romans chapter 2 verse 4 says that the person who rejects God's grace is really– and this is a simple way to put it– "despising the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long suffering." Somebody who constantly turns his back on God is despising God's patience, His long suffering. God is long suffering.

In 2 Peter chapter 3 it says that "God is long suffering, not willing"– what? – "that any should perish." So if you're looking for someone who's long suffering, it's God. You say, "Well, it's kind of hard to

model my life after God. He's too abstract." Okay, how about Christ? The Lord Jesus Christ, hanging on the cross after He had endured all that He had endured, had nothing more to say about His killers than this: "Father"– what? – "forgive them, for they don't know what they do." And then there is another model. You say: "Well, Jesus is hard for me to model after, too." Well, how would you like to try Stephen? He's a little more earthy. Seventh chapter of Acts, the 60th verse, he's under the crushing blows of the stones and he says: "God, lay not this sin to their charge." And he fell asleep. He was long tempered, no vengeance, no retaliation, no bitterness, no animosity, no fighting back.

Can you imagine what the church would be like if everybody was like that? Nobody ever sought revenge? Can you imagine what your home would be like? If you– you know, if in your home, your wife does something you don't like and you silently say, "I'll show her. See if she gets another word out of me. See if she gets that new dress. I'll come home late and the dinner will be cold– ha!" It's the spirit of retaliation. But that's not love, is it? Love can be wronged and wronged and wronged and never wants revenge. That's the way to define love.

Robert Ingersoll, the brilliant atheist– if any atheist could be classified as brilliant– lived in the last century, and he stopped, as he used to like to do, in the middle of one of his lectures against God, and he took out his watch and he held it up to his audience and he says: "I'll give God five minutes to strike me dead for the things I've said." That's the way he use to mock God. Well, he wasn't struck dead and somebody told this incident to the great Christian, Theodore Parker, and Parker smiled and said this: "And did the gentlemen think he could exhaust the patience of the eternal God in five minutes?"

God is patient, isn't He? Aren't you glad? If He wasn't, you'd have been wiped out long ago– so would I. People say, "Oh, but He's wronged me again and again." Yes, and God could say that, couldn't He? Think about Israel, the story of Israel, the record of a patient love on the part of God for a rebellious, disobedient, sinful, disloyal people. You say, "Yeah." Yeah, well, before you say that too loud, it sounds a lot like my biography, too. If God was impatient, we'd be long gone, but God is a suffering God. Powerful feature of love.

You know, when you deal with people with patience, it has a tremendous effect. When there's no retaliation. A great story of that concerns Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln made a lot of friends, made some enemies. One man who became a rather outspoken enemy was named Stanton. Some of you historians can remember him. Stanton just despised Lincoln. In fact, in print, he called him a low, cunning clown. And on one occasion he nicknamed him the original gorilla, and he said that it was ridiculous for people to go to Africa, wandering around trying to find a gorilla when they could find one easily in Springfield, Illinois. Very bitter toward Lincoln and Lincoln never ever replied to him. Never said a word to him. Came time to choose war minister for the United States government and Lincoln chose Stanton. Somebody said, "Why?" He said, "Because he's the best man."

The years wore on and the biographer said this: "The night when the assassin's bullet tore out Lincoln's life, in the little room to which the President's body was taken, there stood that same Stanton, looking down into the silent face of Lincoln in all its ruggedness, and speaking through his tears, these words: 'There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen.'" He never accepted Lincoln's politics, but he couldn't resist his patience. He couldn't resist the non-retaliating spirit of the man. The song says: "Killing her softly with kindness." Patience.

Love forgives "seventy times seven" when it's been wronged, and that leads us to the second

attribute: kindness. And this is the flipside. Listen to this now. Long suffering endures the injuries of others and kindness pays them back only with good deeds. Long suffering says, “I’ll take anything from my enemies.” Kindness says, “I’ll give anything”– what? – “to my enemies, to meet their need.” Now, that’s the essence of it. Kindness is just the other side. The root word in the Greek is “useful.” “I will do anything that will be of use to my enemy, that will be of use to another. I will live my life to benefit others.” That’s what he’s saying. Love is conscious of using itself on others. Love is useful to other people. It’s not an abstract. It’s not an adjective. It’s the deed of kindness. It’s the deed of generosity. It’s the act that you do for someone else that they need done.

When it says love is kind, it isn’t talking about a sweet attitude, it’s talking about a useful deed to someone else. Love gives itself away to help somebody, even an enemy. When Jesus said, “Love your enemies,” He didn’t say, “Feel good about them.” He was simply saying this: “Do good things for your enemies.” Lincoln understood the spirit of it, didn’t he?

Paul does not, incidentally, picture love here in ideal surroundings by any means. This is not a great group of people who have warm affection and wonderful friendship, these people are at each other’s throat, Corinthian church. And he says: “In the hard surroundings of a sinful, selfish church, in the hard environment of a bad world that brings negative influences to bear on love, that’s the atmosphere in which the true character of love will really shine.”

Now again, do we see any models of the kindness of love, of love that does good things for others? Well, certainly God, don’t we? Certainly God. Romans 2:4– I just read it to you, the goodness of God– the kindness of God toward us. God has done again and again things to benefit even His enemies, has He not? And, you know, in Titus, that verse that says in 3 of Titus, verse 4: “After the kindness and love of God.” God is kind. God does things of kindness.

In 1 Peter 2:3, “If so be that you have tasted that the Lord is gracious”– gracious, it’s the same word. God is just good, He just does good things. He does useful things. He does helpful things for people.

And then there’s the Lord Jesus. And I love what it said in Matthew 11:30. Jesus said: “Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me for My yoke is”– what? – “easy.” The word “easy” in the Greek is the same word translated “kindness” in 1Corinthians 13. Jesus is simply saying, “Join up with Me and I’ll express to you kindness.” It’s a tremendous thought. This is a grace that can heal the hurts of the world. This is a grace that can heal the hurts in your family.

Let me ask you, parents, are you kind to each other? I mean really kind? Is your first thought, “What can I do that would be useful? Helpful? Meaningful? To my partner just after they’ve irritated me?” “How can I repay their anger with kindness?” “How can I repay their hurt with something useful and good that they need to be done?”

Let me ask you this, parents: Are you kind to your children? Do your children sense a tenderness? Do you go out of your way to do kind things for them? I don’t mean buy them off because of your unkindness. I mean to do things that are kind to them. Do you go the second mile or can you not be bothered? Are you willing to make some sacrifices to be helpful to them? You know, that gets real practical in our house. “Will you or will you not, Father, help me with my homework?” That’s our little thing. “Dad,” my son says to me, “would you help me study for my test?” Well, it would be kind to do that, wouldn’t it? For his sake. That’s where the battle comes down to, you know, bottom line. Love is

kind, it heals wounds, it waits patiently, it endures anything, it never retaliates, it only returns kindness.

Two men on a trail, a precipice and a sheer rock on the right and the trail is a foot wide and they meet head on. How they going to get past each other? Conflict. They try it like this, it doesn't work. Scratch their heads. One doesn't say anything, he just lies down flat, and the other walks over him. And that's love because love doesn't mind getting walked on, if it's going to benefit somebody else. That's the spirit that Paul is after in the Corinthian church. He says: "If you would only minister in a non-retaliating, self-sacrificing manner, not avenging and only returning kindness, then your spiritual gifts would mean something."

Third in this beautiful passage in defining the characteristics of love, notice verse 4 again, "Love suffers long and is being kind. Love is not envying." Boy, envy is a bad thing. Another word for envy, it starts with "J"– what is it? Jealousy. Now, there are two kinds. I was thinking this through. There are basically two kinds. One is superficial and the other is deep down, bedrock, rotten, stinking, jealousy. In fact, Shakespeare called it the green sickness. That's where that came from. And Solomon called it rottenness of the bones. And there was an old Latin proverb that said it is the enemy of honor. And someone else chose to call it the sorrow of fools. Jealousy. But there's two kinds.

A superficial jealousy says, "I want what you have." "Oh, I wish I had that." "Why do I have to– why does– how come he gets a new car?" You know, over at– my neighbor. "What's the deal?" And I've got to drive a 1932 Cord. What's going on?" I mean why did I get the dirty end of the stick? How can he afford it? He doesn't make any more money than I do. People see me driving around the neighborhood, they don't think I'm successful. Then if I just get it fixed up and painted, they'll know I'm trying to appear successful. Right? Jealousy. "I want what he has." But that's not the deepest level. The deepest says, "I wish he didn't have it." Right? The first thing is you want it and the second is you resent that he has it. It was Barclay who said, in his mind, that is meanness of the soul. That's the deep jealousy where it's not just that you want it, it's that you don't want them to have it. That's easy to do.

You know, it's easy to be jealous. Oh, listen– somebody will give me– say, "Oh, John, I got this fantastic tape, you've got to hear this guy– fantastic." And I'll put it on there and I'll say, "Ah, he's not bad. I've heard better." Wow, you know, that's the old ego, see? And if he's really good, then it's hard to deal with, see? There's lots of people that are better preachers than I am, but I don't buy their tapes. Can't handle it. No, that's not totally true, I want you to know that.

But you understand this, you understand the thing I'm talking about. It's very difficult to rejoice over somebody who does exactly what you do better. You know, I remember as an athlete how hard it was to play second string to a guy you knew was better than you. You wanted him to break his leg or you– why did his father marry that mother and make that combination so he turned out so good, you know? Why couldn't he have had polio when he was a kid or something, you know? Really. Strange thoughts that you get. It's not something we don't understand when we talk about jealousy, we understand it.

The word literally in the Greek, originally its root word means "to boil," it's the inner boiling, seething, steaming over somebody else's success, somebody else's beauty. And this is precisely what the Corinthians were doing to a T. Look at chapter 12 verse 31– remember this verse? And it is in the

imperative in the English translation, they translate it as a command: “But covet earnestly the best gifts.” Remember I showed you that that could be the same as an indicative? And it would be better translated “but you are coveting the showy gifts”?

You want to hear something interesting in support of that view that I was giving you? The word for covet in verse 31 and the word for envy in verse 4 of 13 are the very same word. Very same word in the Greek. And that’s why I take a negative view of 31. He’s not saying “covet certain gifts,” he’s saying, “The problem with you is you’re envious of certain gifts.” It’s the same thought. They were envious. If you doubt that, you can look at the third chapter of 1Corinthians and the third verse and it says: “For you are carnal, for whereas there is among you envy.” You envy, that’s 1Corinthians 3:3. There is envy and strife. You are suffering from what Solomon calls, in Proverbs 14:30, “the rottenness of the bones.”

But love is not envying. When love sees somebody who’s prosperous, when love sees somebody who’s popular, when love sees somebody who’s powerful or rich or beautiful or gifted, love is glad for them and love rejoices. I always think of Philippians chapter 1, and my mind goes automatically to that passage because Paul there is in jail and he writes and he says: “Yes, I’m in jail.” And he says: “There are some new young preachers coming along, and the people are beginning to accept them, and some of those young preachers are saying, ‘The reason Paul’s in jail is because the whole process went by him, he’s old-fashioned, he blew his ministry, he’s not useful to the Lord so the Lord put him on a shelf.’” And he says: “Yes, some are preaching Christ contentiously, supposing to add affliction to my bonds.” In other words, it isn’t bad that I’m in chains, they want to add more injury.

And what’s my reaction to them? Am I jealous that they’re in the limelight? Am I jealous that they’re the new breed of preachers? Am I jealous that they are doing what I used to do only they’re getting all the flowers and all the hurrahs? No. He says: “What do I care? Christ is preached and in that I”– what?– “I rejoice.” You see, that’s the spirit that says, “I don’t envy anybody who does what I do, even if they do it better than I do, and even if they get more applause than I do.” Love just rejoices in their success, in their usefulness.

You see, the other side of love here, jealousy, is such a destructive thing, if you go back and start– I started a little Bible study on this this week and I quit after a few minutes because I realized I could be there for a month. But I was going to try to chart the sins that were connected to jealousy. So I started with the very first sin, and you know what? Jealousy. Satan says to Eve: “Wouldn’t you like to be like”– whom?– “God?” “Yeah, I sure would. Why should He be like Him and me down here left out? I want to be like God,” and jealousy spawned Eve’s sin and the race fell.

The next sin that you see in the Bible after that is a murder. And Cain kills Abel because he was what? Jealous. He was jealous of the acceptance of his sacrifice; that is, Abel’s over his own. And you don’t go very far until you run into some brothers, and they have a particular brother named Joseph, and they sold him into slavery because they were jealous. And I thought at that point, “This is going to get rather lengthy. I’m still in Genesis.” And then I thought about the New Testament and I thought of just one illustration, and I could give you dozens. The prodigal son comes home, father slays the fatted calf, puts the ring on his finger, gives him a robe, and has a party. And it says about the older brother, “He was angry and wouldn’t go.” Why? Jealous.

Proverbs 27:4 says: “Wrath is cruel and anger is outrageous, but who is able to stand before envy?” Envy is hatred without a cure. Envy destroys the insides of a man.

James had some words to say about jealousy and envy. Those are synonyms, incidentally, in my thinking. James 3:14. He says: “If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not.” If you’ve got bitterness and envy and strife in your heart, you haven’t got anything to be proud of. “Because,” he says, “this kind of stuff, this wisdom descends not from above but it’s earthly, it’s sensual, and it’s demoniacal”– demonic. And all it does where you have envy and strife– verse 16– where you have envy and strife, you have confusion and every evil work. And I thought to myself, “There it is, folks. Every evil work spawns itself out of envy and jealousy.”

It’s hard to conquer, isn’t it? When somebody in your job gets a promotion over you, when somebody right near you does what you do better than you do– oh, I tell you, I used to go through that in school, you know, you’d work real hard and everybody got better grades than you. And you begin to be jealous. It just– it works s way in every dimension of life. But the only thing that can conquer it is love.

I contrast it this way: There was a king, his name was Saul. He had a son, his name was Jonathan. Okay? Now, Saul was the king– big shot. Jonathan was next in line, perhaps, for the throne. Along comes a fair-haired, Hebrew singer by the name of David. Not only a singer but a lion tamer, a giant killer, handsome, articulate, poetic, supreme musician, all kinds of abilities. He could be a very unpopular fellow. Can’t stand so much talent, one person. And you know what? Saul hated him, didn’t he? He hated him. He hated him because of his abilities and he hated him because of the threat of the throne going to David. And so Saul, in a fit of fury, grabbed his spear and tried to run it through him, didn’t he?

But there was another member in the family, that was Jonathan. Jonathan stood in line for the throne. We don’t know anything particularly about Jonathan. We know he shot an arrow fairly well, but that’s about it. We don’t know anything about his musical ability or his articulation or anything else about him, but you know something? We find one thing in the Scripture and that is that Jonathan never ever ever had any jealousy over David. You say, “Well, he didn’t stand to lose so much as Saul.” Oh, yeah, he did. He was in line, too, remember. It could have been his throne perhaps. But you know what the Bible says about Jonathan? First Samuel 20 verse 17– listen to what it says. It says: “He loved David as he loved his own soul.”

Now what made the difference between Saul and Jonathan? Love did. You see, Saul was jealous and Jonathan was not. Because Jonathan loved. Love can’t be jealous. Jealousy is hatred without a cure.

And so the Bible tells us there’s no place in the life of a Christian for that– none at all. Boy, Satan’s going to work on us in jealousy. Oh, that’s a subtle thing. You don’t think it’s too bad to be jealous, but it’s rotten right to the core. Boy, I fight that. We all do. We look at the blatant, flagrant, outside sins but that sin of jealousy can gnaw and eat at a heart. You can be jealous of the way somebody dresses, somebody looks, somebody works, somebody sings– anything.

An illustration: Oscar Wilde once told a story. It wasn’t true, he just made it up, but it illustrates the point. He said the devil was crossing the Libyan desert and on his way across, he met a whole pile of his demons who were really working hard on an old hermit. Now, this hermit was a saint. He had been, you know, set aside by the church and he’d taken his vows and he was a very holy hermit. And so he’s out there in the middle of the Libyan desert, you know. He said no to everything in the world,

and he had taken his cross and he'd gone to the desert. And so these demons were out there really trying to get him to stumble, really trying to tempt this old hermit, and they were going at it full bore. And Satan came along, and Wilde says this: Steadfastly, the sainted man resisted their suggestions. They weren't successful; they couldn't get him to fall into sin. Finally, after watching their failure in disgust, the devil whispered to the demons, "What you're doing is too crude. Permit me one moment." And then the devil whispered to the holy man, 'Your brother has just been made the bishop of Alexandria.'" And Wilde says a scowl of malignant jealousy crossed his face. "That," said the devil, "is the sort of thing I recommend."

Get the point? They can't get us in some places, they'll get us someplace else, and jealousy is a good place. You know, there's no better way to test a man than this: Let someone beneath him or someone on his level begin to succeed beyond him. See how he handles it.

A story is told about two great symphony conductors, Toscanini and Mascagni, in Italy. Mascagni, if you read about him, was– everybody knew the guy was just a terrible character, just a proud, egotistical, unbelievable guy. I'll tell you next week about one thing he did, he dedicated one of the operas he wrote to himself. Just a really– you know, terrible. "With great esteem," he said. But anyway, Mascagni resented Toscanini because there wasn't anybody like Toscanini. I mean Toscanini was Toscanini, right? And there was a festival, a musical festival in Milan in Italy to honor the composer Verdi. And the committee putting on the festival had inquired as to whether Toscanini and Mascagni would lead the orchestration. Mascagni was so jealous of Toscanini and it was so evident, and so everyone so knew it that he didn't even try to hide it. So he said, "I will conduct on one condition: that I am paid more money than Toscanini." The management agreed. At the close of the festival, Mascagni received his fee: one lira. Toscanini conducted for nothing, and Mascagni came out a fool.

A loving person rejoices in the excellence of others, you see that? A loving person rejoices in the excellencies of others, in the beauty of others, in the winsomeness of others, in the success of others, in the gifts of others. Holds no jealousy.

I look at Jesus and I see it again. I see His kindness, don't you? Do you see His kindness as He picks up a fallen woman and loves her? Do you see His suffering as He says on the cross, "Forgive them"? Do you see His total lack of jealousy as He says, "I came not to seek My own glory but"– what?– "the glory of Him that sent Me." And as He said, "I'm content not to be ministered unto but to"– what?– "to minister and give my life, a ransom for many."

Love suffers long. Love does deeds of kindness. And love is never jealous. And that's only the start. Let's pray.

It's indeed refreshing, our Father, to put our lives up beside these great perfections of love and to see their beauty. And yet at the same time, it's somewhat discouraging to see how far we are away from these, how we fight to even see one single evidence of such in us. And yet, Lord, it's comforting again to know that You have given us Your love and Your Spirit so that we might have the capacity to fulfill these truths. That's our desire, that Christ might be glorified. Amen.

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