

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Our Bible reading for today comes from 1 Corinthians 13.

Dear Friends in Christ,

We have reason to celebrate! And you might think, why? What's different, what's changed? We can celebrate because we have defined the most important part of our Vision Meetings. We are beginning a whole new season in the life of Zion. If this doesn't excite you, you might need to check your pulse, or drink some coffee, or have some caffeine, because we're all starting to wake up!

What we talked about at the Vision Meetings, when we talk about the Core of Zion, who we are, what we're about, what we do, this is what we said. We are centered in Christ Jesus, therefore we **Love, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat!** Now I want you to repeat this after me, Centered in Christ Jesus, we Love, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat! Let's say it again! Centered in Christ Jesus, we Love, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat! One more time! Centered in Christ Jesus, we Love, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat! And again, just because we're so excited about this! Centered in Christ Jesus, we Love, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat! Now say it like you mean it! This is who we are Zion! We are Centered in Christ Jesus, we Love, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat! Praise the Lord! That's exactly what we are all about.

Centered in Christ Jesus, we are all about Love, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat!

We're going to spend today talking about Love, and the next three Sundays talking about the other four core values, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat!

These core values, this is speaking to the core of who we are at Zion. We are Centered in Christ Jesus, therefore we Love, Teach, Serve, Reach, Repeat! When people come to Zion, whether you've been an active member of Zion all of your life, or you have been on the fringes of Zion or people that come to Zion for the first time in their life, this is what we want them to experience and remember from any worship service, any activity or engagement that we have. At Zion, we are centered in Christ Jesus, and we love, teach, serve, reach, repeat!

So let's look at Love, and see what we mean, when we say, Centered in Christ Jesus, love is our core value. For that we turn to 1 Corinthians 13.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ²And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

These first three verses are quite eye opening, because they are talking about doing some incredible things. If you are able to fluently speak several languages, even all 6,500 languages that exist today. Or if you are able to prophesy like Elijah in the Old Testament, or have the wisdom of Solomon, if you have faith like David, but if you don't have love, you and I are nothing. You and I could give up everything, give away every last penny to our name, even be martyred, burned at the stake for our faith, but if we don't have love, we gain nothing.

Paul is setting up, we could have and do some really impressive and awesome works in the eyes of the world, but if we don't have the Love of God in us and the Love of God working through us, we have nothing, we gain nothing, we are nothing.

So what is this love of God that Paul talks about? What does this love of God look like?

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends.

Notice what Godly love is all about. Why does God love you? Does God love you because you have surrendered your life to Him? No. Does God love you because you go to church and give money in the offering plate? No. Does God love you because you obey all of His commandments? Not only is that impossible for you to do, but God does not love you because sometimes you obey the 10 Commandments. Why does God love you? God loves you, because you are His creation. God loves you, because when He looks at you, He sees you the same way you see your own children. He sees you as His child. God loves you, and it is because of His love for you, that He sent His One and Only Son, Christ Jesus, to suffer and die on the cross, and to rise again for you. It is God's love for you, that Jesus paid your and my price and punishment of sin on the cross. Romans 5:8, **but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

When we look at God's love toward us, His love never ends. God's love for you is constant, and it is pure. God's love for you is patient and kind. God's love does not envy or boast. God doesn't love some people more than he loves others. He loves all people with a love beyond our understanding. God's love for you is not dependent on your love for Him or what you do for Him, again, His love never ends for you or anyone else. We see this very clearly in Christ Jesus' death and resurrection.

Notice how Paul continues, 1 Cor. 13:8-12. **As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes (the perfect is talking about the return of Christ Jesus, when Jesus comes again), the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.**

Paul compares our life of faith maturing, just like he did from childhood to adulthood. In our faith, we mature, instead of thinking like a child, thinking of ourselves first. When children get upset, they throw their temper tantrums, they pick up their toys and go home. And sometimes, as adults, we continue to act in childish ways. But maturing in our faith, we see life isn't about us, it's about Jesus and people. We serve God, by serving our neighbor. We show our love for God, by loving our neighbor. Love is patient, love is kind. Love bears all things.

Paul connects this maturing love and faith, to Jesus. There will be a day when we will stand face to face with Christ Jesus. There will be a day when we will fully know and see our God in all of His glory. Therefore, Paul says, ¹³ **So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.**

Being in Christ Jesus, that means the love that you have is a genuine love. Genuine love for God, because you see the genuine love God has for you. And because you have this genuine love for God, you know you are His child, you know you are going to see Jesus face to face and see Him in all of His glory. This gives you a genuine love for all that God loves and cares about, and it's people. Centered in Christ Jesus, we love God and we love people.

Imagine if we all lived and modeled, Godly love for each other, Godly love for the people we encounter. Not just having Godly love for people when we're at Zion, but imagine showing and living in the Godly love for people when you're at work, when you're at the store, when you're at home and with your neighbors. How does God's love in you change the way you see and treat people around you? How does God's love in you, change the words that you use and the actions you take with people? Paul says, we're not irritable, resentful, arrogant, or rude.

Just like Paul shares in 1 Corinthians 13, being centered in Christ Jesus, we are all about Love. It is God's love towards us, that we have, we apply, and live, abundantly, graciously, genuinely with people around us. God's love in us, that we care for others, placing their needs before our own. As people of God, we love God, and we love people.