

Beautiful, Eternal and Tasty

1 Peter 1:22-2:3

Introduction - Everlasting Gobstoppers

As I was preparing for this message I had the image of Willy Wonka from Roald Dahl's book, *Charlie And The Chocolate Factory*, in my head where he describes Everlasting Gobstoppers. After all, Willy Wonka's Everlasting Gobstoppers were beautiful to look at (or colourful at least), tasty and, as the name implies, were everlasting. This morning we're going to look at beautiful love, an eternal message and a satisfying taste but we'll also see how this stands opposite a bitter contrast.

Beautiful Love (v. 22)

Peter is continuing his theme of calling upon his readers to live a holy life, a life committed to God, but the focus moves to how this holy life impacts our relationships with other people. Peter states in verse 22, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart."

There are two things to note here. First, love is one of those words with which we're so saturated from the media, from personal experience, from popular culture, etc. that it's difficult at times to determine what love really means. Perhaps this definition of love may help us, "love is commitment to seek the best in and for another." I'll say it again, "love is commitment to seek the best in and for another." Clearly, this definition of love does not fully express romantic love but I don't think romantic love should stand in contrast to this view. I do indeed have an emotional (romantic) connection to Alison that I don't have with others but I still think that I am called to express my love for her by being committed to seeking the best in and for Alison.

The second thing to note is the order of how we come to love others. When Peter says, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth [...]," He is either looking back to the point of their conversion where they trusted in Christ, and thus

were obeying the truth, and this led to them being purified, or, Peter is thinking of how they have lived their lives in-line with God's truth since they put their trust in Christ and so they have become more holy, purified from the sinful world which surround them. While either answer is possible, with the immediate context being Jesus being the payment for us I'm inclined to see Peter's comment here as referring to his readers as being cleansed by trusting in the Gospel. With that in mind, see what Peter says is the result of this, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other [...]" It is because Peter's readers were already living in-line with the truth and were thus purified they they, and by extension all Christians, already had a sincere love for one another. Only after establishing the basis of his readers' love for one another does Peter actually command that this love be deepened, "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart."

It's important for a Christian to learn is not to try and well-up love from our own strength and internal fortitude. If we struggle with loving our fellow Christians, or other people more generally, we're not to try and simply create such feelings or commitment from ourselves, we need to go back and make sure that our lives are first our aligned with the gospel. It is as we grasp more and more fully what Christ has achieved for us at the cross and the depth of God's love for us that we are able, in turn, to love others.

This is why the love we are to show is beautiful. Christian love should always be beautiful because it does not arise out of own internal strength which would mean that it's limited by how much strength we have and neither is Christian love to be characterised by a desire to receive love in return. Christian love for others is beautiful because it grows out having received the most beautiful and inexhaustible love imaginable in the gospel.

Eternal Message (vv. 23-25)

Peter next re-states how our love comes from what God has done in us by emphasising the eternal nature of the change brought about in us.

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.”

And this is the word that was preached to you.

Peter appears to want his readers to recognise that the change they have experienced and thus the love they show is not to be some flash-in-the-pan emotional experience but is the mark of a permanent change because it is connected to an eternal message.

An often undervalued, but highly important, witness to the genuineness of the gospel is when the change created goes the distance. It's simply too easy for the media to point at public Christian figures and to show how often they fall and the myriad of ways in which that happens. One of the ways that we can combat that is by seeking, with all our strength, to remain close to Christ and to pray that God will hold us tight even when we're weak.

in going the distance we should recognise that this isn't simply in avoiding sin but in doing what Peter has just commanded, “love one another deeply, from the heart.” Do you ever pray that you don't turn into a grumpy old man or a tetchy old woman? Do you ever pray that you would use your retirement to love others from the heart or do you simply plan on using your retirement to work through your bucket list?

God's eternal word, the gospel, is what bring about change in our lives. Let's pray that we would walk with the Spirit and so demonstrate this eternal change by going the distance, loving others for the long haul.

A Bitter Contrast (v. 1)

At the start of chapter 2 Peter commands his readers to not do certain things, Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind.

In one sense this verse stands out as quite different to the positive verses before and after it but it's tied to Peter's command in verse 2, "love one another deeply, from the heart." I mentioned earlier a definition of love, "love is commitment to seek the best in and for another" and an extension of that is that love means that we are in good relationships with other people. Verse 1 of chapter 2 emphasises that Christians are to not do those activities which break down relationships with others. It would be hard to argue that by doing any of these things we would be seeking the best in and for another or that these activities promote good relationships.

Who of us, after being slandered or deceived has the same level of trust in another person? Who of us, when we see hypocrisy in another or we're on the receiving end of their malice, has the same level of respect for someone? How can you seek the best for another when you're already envious of what they have?

Holiness towards God also means love for others. Worded positively, loving others means that we seek the best in and for them. Worded negatively, loving others means we avoid any actions or behaviour which breaks our relationship with others.

Tasty Life (vv. 2-3)

Peter closes off this little section with a positively word command, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

We've seen that we love others having already received God's love for us in Jesus. We also noted that this change of life in us is permanent because it is based on God's eternal word, the gospel. However, while the change is full and permanent, there is still more growth to come. Just like a baby, we are to grow by receiving milk. For Christians we are to desire spiritual milk, but what is this spiritual milk we are to crave? Peter tells us when he says, "now that you have tasted that the Lord is good."

One of the prayers that I have prayed for much of my Christian life is, "God, may I grow to know you more, not just know about you." What is the spiritual milk that we are to crave? We are long to know the Lord more and more deeply.

If you read the Bible to know more facts, if you study theology to understand big words, if you traveled to Israel to understand the geography better, if you did those and any number of other things to grow in your knowledge about the Lord, but you failed to know the Lord more deeply and closely, if you don't savour the Lord for who the Lord is, then you've missed the point.

We are to crave spiritual milk and that spiritual milk is to grow closer to the Lord and know our God and Saviour more and more. Will this lead us to reading the Bible more? Yes, because it is in the Scriptures that we encounter Christ, but we will read the Scriptures and do other learning with the right goal in mind.

Conclusion

And as we grow closer to the Lord the cycle of love and growth continues and deepens. The more we know Jesus, the more we understand what he has accomplished for us and God's great love for us. The more we receive this eternal message of God's love the more we are able to love others, seeking the best in and for them for the long haul and turning away from any behaviour which would cause a breakdown in our relationship with others. The more we display love for others the more we desire to grow closer to the Lord to deepen our love for God and others.

Living in the reality of this new life, let's sing this upbeat song, "I Am A New Creation."