



Advent: Agape / Love

Script References

Introduction

00:00-00:31

So if you've heard of Jesus, you probably know about one of his famous teachings called the Golden Rule. "Do to others what you would want them to do to you."¹ And this actually is a restatement of something else Jesus said, that the meaning of life is to love God and love your neighbor as yourself.²

1. Luke 6:31
2. Mark 12:31

Now that's really beautiful, but what does he mean, exactly, by the word "love"? It's an unclear word in English because you can love your mom and you can love pizza. And if the word love means the same thing in both of those cases, your mom's going to feel real bad.

Jesus' Concept of Love

00:32-02:41

So what did Jesus mean in his language? Well, first of all, this "love your neighbor" phrase is a quotation from the Hebrew Scriptures, where the word for love is "*ahavah*." However, the language Jesus spoke and taught in from day-to-day, it was a cousin language of Hebrew, that is, Aramaic, in which the word for love is "*rakhmah*." But then, as Jesus' followers spread his teachings around the world, they translated them into Greek using the word "*agape*."

But here's what's fascinating. The earliest followers of Jesus, who wrote books of the New Testament in Greek, they didn't learn the meaning of *agape* by looking it up in ancient dictionaries. Rather, they looked to the teachings of Jesus and the story of his life to redefine their very concept of love.

So one time, Jesus was asked about the most important command in the Jewish Scriptures. And he first quoted from the ancient prayer in the Torah called the *Shema*. "Love the LORD your God with all of your heart."³ So love for God is the most important thing, but then Jesus quickly followed up, saying another command from the Torah was also the most important—to love your neighbor as yourself.⁴

3. Deuteronomy 6:5
4. Leviticus 19:18

So which is the most important? Loving God or loving your neighbor? Jesus' answer is yes. To ask the question means you don't get his point. For Jesus, they're two sides of the same coin. Your love for God will be expressed by your love for people and vice versa. They're inseparable.

And so this makes it clear that, for Jesus, *agape* love is not primarily a feeling for someone else that happens to you, like our phrase "I fell in love." For Jesus, love is action. It's a choice that you make to seek the well-being of people other than yourself.

Jesus also went on to teach that genuine love for God and others means seeking people's well-being without expecting anything in return, especially from people who are in difficult situations who can't repay you even if they wanted to. According to Jesus, this kind of generous love reflects the very heartbeat of God.

And he took this even further. Jesus said that the ultimate standard of authentic love is how well you treat the person that you can't stand, or in his words, "You shall love your enemy and do good ... to them, expecting nothing in return."⁵ For Jesus, this kind of enemy-embracing love imitates the very character of God himself.

5. Luke 6:35

Love Through Action

02:42-04:24

Now, we wouldn't be talking about Jesus still today if he had only said things like love your enemy. This is how he actually lived. Jesus was constantly helping and serving the people around him in very practical and tangible ways. And he consistently moved towards poor and hurting people who couldn't benefit him in return. He showed love for the forgotten ones, the people who usually fall through the cracks.

And when Jesus eventually marched into Jerusalem, he made himself an enemy of the leaders of his people by accusing them of hypocrisy and corruption. But then, instead of attacking his enemies to overthrow them, he allowed them to kill him. Jesus died for the selfishness and corruption of his enemies because he loved them.

After Easter morning, Jesus, and then his followers, claimed that it was the power of God's love for the world that was revealed in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. As the apostle Paul put it, "God demonstrated his own *agape* for us in this, while we were still sinners, the Messiah died for us."⁶

6. Romans 5:8

Or in the words of the apostle John, "God's own *agape* was revealed when he sent his one and only Son into the world, so that through him, we could have life."⁷ And for John then, this leads naturally to the conclusion, "Beloved ones, if that's how God loved us, then we ought to show love for one another."⁸

7. 1 John 4:9

8. 1 John 4:11

So Christian faith involves trusting that at the center of the universe is a being overflowing with love for his world, which means that the purpose of human existence is to receive this love that has come to us in Jesus and then to give it back out to others, creating an ecosystem of others-focused, self-giving love. And that's the New Testament meaning of *agape* love.