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1 JOHN 4:7-21

We said last week that the Apostle John has three points that he keeps going back to. John emphasizes **love** and he emphasizes **false teachers** and he emphasizes **righteousness**. Today, John goes back once again to the **subject of love**.

I don't believe John ever got over the overwhelming fact that God loved him...that Jesus loved him enough to call him to be his disciple and to lay down His life for him... and to forgive him of all his sins.

I hope you and I don't ever get over it either.

We cannot understand it!

We cannot ever comprehend it!

We cannot explain it!

We can never plumb the depths of it! But, our hearts can experience it and we can live in the light of it and rejoice in it!

So, take your Bibles and turn to **John 4** and let's see a little more about this love...

1) What God Is...God is Love

Verses 7 and 8...

People born physically take on the nature of their father and mother. We say, "Oh, he looks and acts just like his daddy...or she looks just like her mom."

Not only is this true of us physically, but it is also true of us spiritually...

This is also why we are all born sinners. This is why we need a Savior. When we were born the first time, we were born in the flesh and our spiritual father at our first birth was Adam...and we acted just like him.

Romans 5:12...

"...by one man sin entered into the world and death entered into the world and death spread to all men... because all sinned..."

When we were born the first time we took on the nature of our first and therefore we are sinners by nature and we need salvation.

But...when we were born again, we took on the nature of our Heavenly Father and since God is love...then we must love too! See, we must look just like our Father...folks must look at us and say, "She's just like her Father." And our Father must look at us and say, "There goes My child, she looks just like Me."

Love is a valid test of true Christian faith. Since God is love and we have claimed a personal relationship with Him, we are to demonstrate His love to those around us.

See, what God is determines what we ought to be. A Christian ought to become what God is...we should be growing more and more like Christ...and since He is love...we should be love as well.

Paul said that we are to conformed to the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.

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It's one thing to simply use **words** to communicate love but God also gave us the example of using **deeds** to demonstrate love.

2) What God Did...He Sent His Son

verses 9-11...

True love doesn't just sit around and do nothing. True love meets needs. And God has met man's needs in many ways.

See, God knew before He ever created man that man would need saving. God created Adam and placed him in a perfect environment, but God knew that man would choose disobedience over obedience.

So, from the foundation of the world a plan was put into place...and in the fulness of time, the Lord Jesus was brought forth.

My friend Jolly told me about a songwriter who spoke at the recent music conference at a local Church. This man had appeared before the queen of England and he said he had thought of her as being born a baby and becoming a queen...and then he thought of Jesus...a King who became a baby.

I believe John was overwhelmed by this...that God could love man enough to send His Son to die for man's sins. Man had rebelled against God. Man had broken the very heart of God. Man had raised his fist in the face of God and said, "I'm going to do what I want to do when I want to do it with whom I want and I don't care what You say about it!!

And because of this man is over HERE and God is over HERE and there is absolutely no way man can ever get from HERE to HERE except by the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God did not want man to remain HERE. God wanted man to be with Him over HERE. So, He sent His precious Son to die at Calvary!

But, I believe it also overwhelmed John that man could love God. Now, we know that man cannot love God unless God first loved man...

We sing that little hymn...
"Oh, how I love Jesus, Oh how I love Jesus,
Oh, how I love...(Why?) Because He first loved me."

Those are not just a songwriter's words...Look down at **verse 19**...

The bottom line is this...we could not possible love God had He not first loved us.

Think about it...God can take our puny, imperfect and fickle love and do great things through it.

For example...remember a couple of weeks ago how we talked about Peter responding to the Lord Jesus **three times** that he "phileoed" Him...that he loved Jesus with a "**brotherly love**." **Now do you really believe that's what Jesus wanted to hear?...NO!** Jesus' perfect will for Peter was for Peter to express his love for Him in that unconditional, Godly kind of love...that agape love.

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But, even with that little old puny, imperfect and fickle brotherly love that Peter had for Jesus...just look at how God used him!!

Why? Peter's love for Jesus grew and as it grew and matured and was made perfect...then, he began to express it by laying down his life for the sake of the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. **And Beloved, that's what God wants for us and we'll see this mature kind of love in just a few minutes.**

We've seen **what God is...He is love**, and how **He demonstrated that to us...He sent His Son.**

3) What God is Doing...Abiding in us

Verses 12-16...

But John not only was overwhelmed with God's love for man and for the opportunity for man to love God...John also was overwhelmed with the fact that God wanted man to love others.

Please understand this isn't just a casual sentiment. We may end our phone calls with "I love you."

And I'm not putting this practice down...I'm simply saying again that love means more than saying the words, "**I love you.**"

John is exhorting us to love one another. John's heartfelt desire is that believers would truly love one another...that's his exhortation to the believers then and to us now.

Not only does John give us an exhortation...he also gives us an explanation of that exhortation. Why should we love one another!

You know...it's not always easy to love one another, is it? I love what Peter says...he says we're to love each other "**fervently**". This word, "**fervently**" means "**to stretch**"...and sometimes love is a real stretch, isn't it?

Beloved, love isn't always a warm and fuzzy feeling. Many times, love is an act of **true grit** and **determination** and **sheer willpower**. I mean...let's face it...it's not always easy for you to love me and it's not always easy for me to love you.

And yet, John gives us the exhortation to love one another...Peter says it this way...**Love covers a multitude of sins.**

I'm so glad God doesn't focus on my shortcomings the way I tend to focus on the shortcomings of others. My prayer is that God will give me the desire to and enable me to look for the good in other people...every single day!

Life's just much easier to live in our own little world...self-contained...self-absorbed!

But, if we're going to love other folks, we must get **involved in their lives**. I don't mean we're to be nosy busybodies or unwelcome intruders...I mean if we're going to love we must make an investment of our lives in their lives.

And John says we're to do it because of what God is...God is love; what God has done...He sent His Son to save us and where God abides...He abides in us.

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See, the **greatest** demonstration of the love of God was Calvary, but it was not the **last** demonstration of the love of God.

The Holy Spirit of God in you and the Holy Spirit of God in me wants this world that has never at any time seen God to look at you and me and know what God is like. Put simply, the reason we're to love one another is to show the love of God to a lost world!

"By this shall all men know that you are My disciples if you love one another."

This means we're not to be petty or **selfish**, or **critical** or **fault-finding** or **backbiting** or **backstabbing**...***we're to choose and will and determine to love each other.*** And the only way we can do this is because the Holy Spirit abides with us.

Well, let's see more things about love...

Verses 17-18...Perfect love...

These verses focus our thoughts on the future. This reference to judgment seems almost out of place here, doesn't it?

Hebrews 9:27...

"It's appointed unto man once to die, but after that the judgment."

When folks think of judgment, they have one of two attitudes...
They are either anxious or assured.

There are all kinds of phobias and fears...Some people have a fear of **heights**, some folks fear **closed in places**, some people have a fear of **speaking in front of people**, some people fear **other people**, some folks fear **going out in the public**, some people even fear the **unknown**...they just fear...

But I believe the worst kind of fear is fear of God. Now, I'm not talking about that reverential awe of God...I'm talking about being absolute terrified to meet God at the judgment.

And, when you do stop and think about it...it really is an awesome thing, isn't it? Most of us in this room will never stand before a king of a country or a queen of a country or a president or a prime minister. But, we will all stand before God...every one of us will one day stand before God!!!

Now, the believer will stand before God in a different way than the unbeliever. Christians will not stand at the Great White Throne Judgment...Lost people will be there.

Saved people will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. We won't be there to give an account for our sins, but to be rewarded on the basis of our works that we have done for the Lord Jesus, and we will stand there in assurance.

Lost people should be in fear of that day...but believers should have no fear of Judgment Day...and this is true because of the perfect love of God...and because this love is real. We know it is real because it has been demonstrated to us "God loved us and demonstrated His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!"

John tells us that His love is perfected in us. This means His love is matured in us. To go back to Peter for a moment...when Peter denied Jesus I believe he was operating out of fear. When Peter told Jesus, "Yes, Lord I love You, but my love isn't what it ought to be", I believe he said

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this because he was afraid of letting Jesus down again...but when the Holy Spirit came and took up residence in Peter's life at Pentecost, then that little puny love of Peter's began to blossom and develop and mature and be made perfect!

And, He wants to do that in us as well. One way God's love is made perfect in us is when we love the brethren.

Verses 19...Responsive Love...

Our love for God and our love for our fellow man must be on the same par. In other words, you cannot have one without the other. You either have both or you have neither.

Why do we love God? If I asked you that you might say, "Well, I love God because He gave me healthy children," or "...because He gave me a wonderful husband," or "...because He gave me a beautiful home," or "...because He has healed me," or "...because He gave me a wonderful church and great friends."

But, think about it...what if He took away all these things?
Would you still love God?

Folks, I want to tell you when you say, "I love the Lord because..." the only thing that really fits is "because He first loved me." God loved us first. Jesus didn't die **to cause** God to love us, God **loved us so much** that Jesus died for us. *You didn't have to do anything to get Him to either.*

Perfect love is responsive love...and perfect love is also

Verse 20...Expressed love...

We have a vertical and a horizontal relationship in the Christian faith. And that's what the Cross of Christ is...it makes me right with God
it makes me right with others.

I cannot be right **this way** (vertically) if I am not right **this way** (horizontally).

That's why Jesus said,

"If you come to the altar bringing your gift and you remember your brother has something against you, then you're not right horizontally. Leave your gift at the altar and go and make the horizontal right and come back and deal with the vertical."

God expressed His love to us by sending His Son to us and we are to express our love to others by loving other people with that same kind of love.

Well, let's look at one more thing and we'll be through...Not only is this perfect love a **responsive love** and an **expressed love** but it is also...

Verse 21...Obedient Love...

"Commandment" means it's not just a "good idea," it's not just a "suggestion."

Jesus said, "This is My commandment that you love one another,

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just as I have loved you.”

You've seen bumper stickers that proclaim that someone is a Christian. Maybe you have a fish on your car. Maybe you wear a Cross. Maybe you have a Scripture on your front or back door and maybe you have calligraphy hanging in your home that proclaims your love for the Lord Jesus...

And I'm not putting any of this down...I have some of these things...

These things are certainly not necessary to our salvation or sanctification...but when you think about these things, they all serve as sort of a “badge of identification”, don't they?

But, let me tell you what Jesus said would be the “badge of identification” with Him?

Jesus said the badge of identification that He wants us to wear is this...

“if we love one another...”

And may I say that this is a **bigger, bolder, more obvious badge** than any other. Do you wear that badge? Do folks see love “fleshed out” in your life? Are people drawn to Jesus because they see you love the brethren?

By the same token...I want to ask you today...

...is there any brother or sister in Christ with whom you are at odds?

If so, I want to encourage you to go to that person and get things right.

Remember, your vertical relationship will never be right if your horizontal relationships aren't right.

Now, if you are at odds with someone...and that someone is **obnoxious and overbearing and critical** and you know you're right and he or she is wrong...go anyway...ask all your friends to pray for as you go...

Fortify yourself with God's Word. Ask the Holy Spirit for His leadership and guidance and anointing to love that brother or sister in Christ. If you've wronged them, then ask their forgiveness. If they've wronged you, then forgive them.

This is not an option...this is God's commandment!

John's not through...John will return to this very same theme next Sunday.

Let me just leave you with these three very simple truths...

- 1) Life's greatest privilege is to be loved by God!
- 2) Life's greatest opportunity is to love God!
- 3) Life's greatest responsibility is to love one another!