

# Making God Visible

*RPTS Chapel Message*

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**Bible Text:** 1 John 4:11-14

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Please turn in your Bibles to 1 John chapter four and I will read verses seven through 14, to get the context for the text which is verses 11 through 14. Hear God's Word.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Let's pray.

*Father, thank you for your Word. Give us your grace as we come to it. Help us to understand our debt of love, the debt we owe to you and that that debt involves our loving one another. And we pray that as this is the case the world will see you. Bless us as we approach this text now we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.*

If you attempt to see something that is at quite a distance and invisible to the naked eye, you use binoculars to see that distant object. Or if you look at something in the heavens that is so far away that is invisible to the naked eye, you use a telescope. Then you can see it. Or if you want to see the fibers in a piece of paper you might use a high-powered magnifying glass or perhaps a microscope. And if you want to see the molecules or the atoms in the fibers in the paper, you use an electron microscope.

But how do you see God? How do you see God? You can't use binoculars or a telescope

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 4:7-14.

or a microscope or an electron microscope. The most prominent way you see God, of course, is in Jesus Christ and how he is portrayed in the Bible.

But another way in which you see God is through his acts, what he does, how he affects the lives of people like you and me. And when God in his grace and mercy changes your life and changes my life and people observe that change, there is a sense in which they see God. They see him in action.

Our text talks about this sort of thing. It says, “No one has seen God at any time.”<sup>2</sup> But then it also talks about our loving one another. The implication is that these two things go together, that we see God through the loving acts of people in the Church. In other words, the world sees Gods when we love one another.

And so the point that we need to get from this text, it seems to me, is our need to love one another and to let the world see God, if this is indeed one of the ways in which the world sees him. And so the injunction today is very simple. Love one another and let the world see God. Love one another and let the world see God.

We begin at the end of our text this morning, in verse 14. It says: “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

You know, because of what the Bible says, and John knew, because of the experiences he had, that Jesus was the Son of God. John was able to reach out and touch the Son of God. With his own eyes he was able to see the Son of God. We are now able to see the Son of God in the pages of the gospels. And we also know from the writings of Scripture that God sent his Son into the world. Jesus himself testifies of the fact that he came into the world to do the will of the Father. “A body you have prepared for me,” he says in Psalm 40. “And I have come to do you will,” he says, again, in Psalm 40. And in Psalm 2, the Father promises the Son, “Ask of me and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance.” Yes, the Father sent the Son into the world for a people like you and me.

Our text goes on to say: “We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.”<sup>4</sup> John calls the Son the Savior, the Savior of the world. The context gives us a little more information about this. For example, in verse 10 it says: “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”<sup>5</sup> Propitiation refers to a sacrifice that consumes wrath. The wrath is that which is due to people like you and me for our sin. You deserve wrath. I deserve wrath for sin.

I have a good friend back in Kansas who said to me, “Why is it, Denny, when we get older it seems that our sins loom larger?” It is because we understand the gospel better and we understand the awful nature of sin better. And it is embarrassing. It is

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<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:12.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:14.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 4:10.

embarrassing to look back and understand the fullness of our sin. But it is so good that God, through Jesus Christ, has taken the punishment for that sin. He sent his Son into the world for this purpose. He is the propitiation for our sins.

And the world, of course, as we heard this morning in the prayer requests, the world is enemy territory. It is as though Jesus Christ was a Special Forces trooper jumping behind enemy lines to save those who were captives in the hands of the enemy. And he did exactly that. He came into this world, into enemy territory. Do we need any greater testimony than the prayer requests that we heard this morning that a young man has lost a brother due to a shooting, due to the violence and the hatred of a shooting and murder in the streets? Blood is running in the streets. Daily we hear of these things. And so our Savior came to extricate us from the dominion of the world. God sent his Son to bring us out of the dominion of darkness and to bring us into the kingdom of the dear Son.

In addition, Christ is the Savior of the world. This does not mean he is the Savior of every person in the world. Think back to Noah and the flood. All flesh perished in the flood except Noah and his family. And when Noah and his family were spared, humanity was spared. Our presence here today testifies to this fact. Yes, here we are today. In this sense Christ is the Savior of the world. He comes for a people like you and me, people from every tribe and tongue and people an nation.

And when God sends his Son into the world this is a grand demonstration of love. In verse 11 it says: "Beloved, if God so loved us..."<sup>6</sup> Of course, the context, again, is his sending his Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sin. The apostle Paul puts it this way. "God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). That is, he died in our place. This coming of Christ into the world is the grand demonstration of love.

You know what a demonstration is, don't you? A demonstration is something in which you participate. It is not just something you look at and say, "Oh, that's nice." When you go to the art museum and look at the pictures you say, "Oh, that's interesting." No. God's love in Christ is the grand demonstration. And a demonstration involves your participation. When you buy a car you want to kick the tires. You want to open the hood. You look under the hood and pull the wires and grab the belts. You want to get in the car and turn on the radio and let the windshield wipers go and turn on the ignition and see how the brakes work. You want to drive the car. You want a demonstration. You are involved in this.

God's love is demonstrated to us and for us. We are caught up in the work of Christ. God sent his Son into the world for the purpose of saving the likes of you and me. This is the grand demonstration. And you participate in it. How good it is that this is the case.

But the work of Christ is not only objective. It is not only something out there, something that is demonstrative. It is also very subjective. Our text again speaks about the work of the Holy Spirit. "By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us,

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<sup>6</sup> 1 John 4:11.

because He has given us of His Spirit.”<sup>7</sup> When you see the work of Jesus Christ and you are captivated by the demonstration of God’s love, the Spirit energizes your heart and you embrace the love of God demonstrated to you in the cross. You express faith in Jesus Christ. You are united to God and to Christ. This is a work of the Spirit. “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.”<sup>8</sup> This is experimental religion. This is not intellectual religion. This is the experience of being united to the love of God. Paul again puts it this way when he speaks about “the love of God poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

And when the love of God, friends, is poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit given to you, your disposition changes. Now I know that none of you have ever awakened with an ugly disposition. Correct? I certainly have. The ugly disposition is removed by the love of God poured out in the heart. Your disposition is changed to one of peace and joy.

When the love of God is poured out within your heart, your inclinations, the basic inclinations of your heart, are altered, changed. The sinner is inclined toward evil. The sinner is inclined toward X-rated movies, R-rated movies, violence and sex and the desire to imbibe these things. But when the love of God alters the disposition of the heart, the inclination of the heart, you are no longer inclined to read the magazines that are covered on the magazine racks. Rather, your inclination is to read the Bible. There is a sudden desire to read the Bible, to get into the Word of God, to be consumed by the Word of God. This is a different inclination.

The love of God is poured out into your heart also changes your attitude. Airplanes have an attitude. When the nose of the airplane is down this is one attitude. When the nose is up this is a different attitude. And too often we have a negative attitude, our doobers are down, our noses are down. We look at the evil and we are consumed with the blood in the streets rather than looking up. “Keep seeking the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:1-2). This is the new attitude. When the Holy Spirit comes, your attitude changes.

And this objective love and this subjective love have a goal. Look at our text, again. “No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.”<sup>9</sup> The word translated “perfected” in the *New American Standard Version* implies a goal, an objective. God’s love for you and in you has a goal and the text says this: “If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love [reaches its goal].”<sup>10</sup> How does love reach its goal? Love reaches its goal when we love one another. This is what the text is saying. Love is perfected when we love one another.

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<sup>7</sup> 1 John 4:13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> 1 John 4:12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

A football team perfects its offense and then is able to march down the field and reach the goal line, reach its goal. And this is what happens. Love is perfected in us and reaches its goal when we love one another. Love reaches its goal when we tell the truth to one another, when we are faithful to one another, when we are desirous of preserving the material goods of one another. It is an awful thing when the president of the seminary reports to the seminary community that a student's laptop computer has been stolen in the seminary. This is not love. This is not faithfulness. This is not fidelity.

Go back to verse 12. "No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us."<sup>11</sup> Here in this text we now see the connection between the invisible God on one hand and our love for one another on the other hand. When we love one another, God is made visible. When the God of truth changes your heart, you speak the truth in love. According to 1 Corinthians 13 this means you speak the truth with patience and kindness and gentleness and longsuffering. When you do this, when you interact with one another on this basis, you make God visible. This is what the text is telling us. "No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love [reaches its goal]."<sup>12</sup> Love one another, friends, and let the world see God. Love one another and let the world see God.

I remember so well, one Lord's Day morning, going to my study with the leaders of a little church. We were in the midst of an ugly controversy. I said to the elders, the leaders of the church, "Don't you see that the devil is having his way in our midst?" One of the men responded to me and said, "Denny, you are the chief instrument of the devil in our midst." And it was like a spear went through my heart. No. I don't want to be an instrument of the devil. I don't want to make the devil visible. I want to be an instrument of God. I want to make God visible.

When the controversy diminished and I went out into the community to do door to door calling, people in the community asked me, "What church do you represent?" And they said, "Oh, yes, we know that church. That church has had a series of church fights." When the people of the community looked at the church, what did they see? They saw the devil at work. Oh on, friends, oh no! God forbid! Let it not be! Love one another and let God be seen. Let God be seen in the precincts of the church.

Isn't it a good thing when the people of the congregation, when the service is over, don't want to go home? They love being together. They love to fellowship together. They like talking to one another. They like seeking advice from one another. They like helping one another. And they genuinely love one another. How good it is when this takes place. Others will come in and witness the love of God's people; they will see God. Tertullian reported that those of ancient Rome exclaimed of Christians, "See how they love one another." When this is the case, God is seen. God is made visible. And so I say to you this morning, friends, from 1 John chapter four verses 11 through 14, "If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.”<sup>13</sup> This is the point: Love one another and let the world see God. Love one another and let the world see God.

Let’s pray.

*Father, thank you. It may seem easy to talk about these things. Yet it is difficult to plumb the depths of a proper understanding of your Word. Grant us grace that we might grasp your truth. As your people love one another, let the world see you at work. Let the world see you, see your character, see your love. Bless us to this end, we pray. Perfect your love in us as we love one another. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ the Lord. Amen.*

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<sup>13</sup> 1 John 4:11.