

The God of Love

Knowing God

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We have this morning read one of the most amazing statements of Scripture. In verse 8 of 1 John 4 we read, "God is love." A very simple little text, isn't it? It's a text that children learn, it's a text that's familiar to us and yet it contains so much. The man-made religions of this world have gods that are greatly to be feared and feared in the wrong way. They are gods that have to be appeased and offerings have to be made, whereas the true and living God is such a God of love that he sent his only begotten Son into the world to die for sinners, to appease his own wrath. That's amazing isn't it? That he should come to satisfy his own anger and his own wrath and punishment for our sin. And so, not only is this statement amazing that God is love but it's amazing that God should shower his love upon sinners.

On Sunday mornings we've been looking at the thought of knowing God and looking at various things in the Bible that God has chosen himself to reveal about himself. And last time we looked at the wrath of God, that God is a God of wrath. We saw, first of all, the character of that wrath, how that it's always righteous. It's not like our anger which is sometimes misplaced. We saw then how his wrath can be instant - think of Sodom and Gomorrah, but it can also be a delayed wrath. The Scriptures say that God is slow to anger. That's his very nature but although it's delayed it is certain. We then looked at the wrath that pertained particularly to his Second Coming and the judgments of God at that particular time. We looked at God's Judgment Day wrath. We then looked at the present day wrath in the withdrawal of his power and blessing upon the land. And finally we looked at how we might be delivered from the wrath of God by the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Thus when we understand more about God's righteous wrath, we begin to see more in the sense of wonder and amazement of his love. And when I preached on wrath a couple of weeks ago, I said I had intended to preach on the love of God that morning and the wrath of God this morning but it dawned on me that they really ought to be the other way around. Not that one is more important than the other but that if we understand the love of God, we understand it in a more logical sense if we understand that God is also a God of wrath. It's a wonderful thing that he should love those on whom his righteousness demands wrath.

So I want to see a something from this statement. It's only three words, God is love. We will also look at a number of other verses also but it's a great statement and it's a

statement like the other statements we've been looking at, that should impact on us. So, when we learn about the immutability of God, how he doesn't change, when we learn about the omnipresence of God, that he's everywhere present, by knowing that, God wants us to realize that he's with us all the time. By those things he wants us to realize that the things we find in Scripture do not change and so, all the other things that we're learning about God. And the great impact here is not only knowing that God loves us, but as he says in the passage here, then we ought to love others also. So, there's a lot of things not only coming into this text, there's a lot of things that come out of it also. I am conscience we will only scratch the surface this morning.

1 The source of this love.

Well, of course, it comes from God Himself. It says, God is love. And as God is the very essence of love as we found in our other subjects for example holiness, we want to know what real holiness is, then we look to our God. And so, do you want to know what real mercy is, we look to our God because he is mercy, he is holiness. And so here, if we want to know what real love is, we look to God because he is love. He's not just like love, he is love.

There's a danger there. There are people who have fallen into this trap. They say, "Well, let's make a logical conclusion then. If God is love, then love is God." And, therefore, people have gone off into all sorts of organizations that say, "Well, we are only interested in love and we worship love and by doing that we know we're worshipping God because God is love." My friends, if we really know God is love, then we know that there's a lot more to it than that. We can't turn these things round and say we're going to worship love. We must only worship God. Love is one thing about God. It's a part of his character, it's one of his attributes.

Every true aspect of love, whatever type of love we look at, if it's a right love, it finds its fountainhead in God. In the previous chapter, in 1 John, and we couldn't possibly read all the passages that deal with this issue, but in 1 John 3, we read there, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God." – 'manner' is an interesting word. When we think about manner, we think of what type of love? We'd say, well, this is the best of love. There's that lovely hymn we'll sing in a little while, "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." Bunyon wrote a book by that title about the love of God but actually when I looked at the book, he didn't call it that, he called it something else, somebody changed the title. But it was a good title, "Love Divine All Loves Excelling."

This says what manner of love, what type of love but the word that was used in the original Greek has a connotation not only of type but location. Behold, where did this love come from? is what the writer is really saying. This is a strange love. This is an alien love. This is not a love that comes from this earth. This is something that has come from outside of this earth. It comes from glory. It comes from the eternal God who dwells in eternity. It's a love that would not otherwise have been found on this world had it not

been for God showing and showering us with such love. We would not have experienced such things. There isn't another love like this.

Because such love comes from God, as sinners we have no access to it. We can't say, "Well, there is a God of love, I want to access that love." Because as sinners we're dead in trespass and sin but we found in verse 19, it says, "We love him because he first loved us." So, the source of this love is God himself, the eternal God and that God, as it were, dwelling in heaven is a type of love that comes from heaven. It is a heavenly love in our God.

2 The nature of his love.

Okay, it's outside of this world and so is it's nature. The love of God is something that is not natural to humanity, not natural in our sinful state. Now, we learn something of the nature of God's love from what we've already learned about God. So, because God is eternal, so is his love. Everything about God will match those things. His love is without beginning, it is without end, it is an everlasting love. Because he is holy, his love is holy. It is pure. We mustn't associate the love that we're looking at here with the love that we often see perhaps on the tabloid press or in the magazine rack that you'll see in the news agents. This is something that is pure and spotless. Because God is immense, his love is immeasurably vast. We sing in one hymn about God being a sea without a shore. We used to sing with the boys and girls about his love being wide as the ocean. We know God's love is wider than the ocean, deeper than the deepest sea.

In Romans 8, which we are looking at in our mid-week meeting, we find there that once we know the love of God in Christ, we're inseparable from it. He says in Romans 8 towards the end, verse 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" All of those things will separate us from a number of things. It will separate us from other members of family. It could even separate us from life. But none of those things can separate us from the love of God, "For thy sake," he says, "we are killed all the day long: we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors." He is "persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers." So, the devil himself. "Nor things present, nor things to come, height nor depth, nor any other creature." In case he's forgotten something. None of those things "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

In the passage that we've read in 1 John 4, John is warning the readers of those that would come in and had come in that would give them false teaching. And he draws their attention to this error and tells them, about a couple of keys there whereby they might know that that is error that is being taught. So, he says in verse 2, "Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God." In other words, there are those if they deny the deity of Christ, then that's the first key to know that they're not of God. There is something different there.

And he reminds us here that sadly, such people, being of the world, being of the world's thinking, being of the world's lifestyle, that the world will hear them. It's amazing to think that you could have people standing in a pulpit professing to be some kind of religious leader and yet denying the very deity of Christ. And he says there, that people will actually follow them. Verse 5, "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world," I've not really noticed that phrase before. And the last phrase says, "and the world heareth them." You know, there have been times when I've either been in a church or I've listened to something on the television or whatever, you've seen a service, and you know that the person taking that, really hasn't got much of a clue. And you think, "Well, why do people turn up there? Sometimes in their hundreds to worship in such a situation, to sit under preaching that really has nothing in it?" And there's one of the answers there. Because they are of the world, the world will come and hear them because in our old nature, we're not particularly interested in a God that gives us responsibilities, in a God that puts demands on us. If people can come and hear something about a nice man, Jesus, and nothing is really said about God and nothing said about conversion and holy living, then that's an easy thing. And it says, the world will hear them.

But, then he makes a contrast between those who deny Christ's deity and those who belong to Christ, those who know who Christ is. The initial key, remember I said, is knowing who he is, the deity of Christ. And then he says the second key, is knowing the love of God. And so, verse 6, he says, "We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error." So, there's a difference. How do we know that? Verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." And so, an evidence there of our being right with God, of being a believer is our loving of God indicating that we know that he first loved us and the fact that we love one another.

Whenever we think of the nature of God's love we think of the famous verse in John 3:16 where we read that "God so loved the world." It's not a passing phase, is it? When he says he so loved the world, it's an emphatic statement. It's not a momentary expression. His love is an intense love that is directed upon us for a purpose. You know, we can bandy the word "love" about, we say we love this, we love that or maybe including people. But it can be a very, kind of, shallow way of using that particular word. But when God uses that word, it's an intense word. It's something that's directed for a purpose. A man or a woman may be capable of love, they may display their love in many ways. And there may come a time when that love is intensified and it's focused upon an individual and so, a marriage takes place. And then, maybe, as children come along, then that love is intensified upon the children. It's something there on a purpose, isn't it?

God's love is so intense it's directed with a purpose of saving sinners. And, you know, although God gave love at creation in the sense that he gave marriage love which has a particular distinction about it, how Adam and Eve could love one another. There is love between children and there is love between children and parents and you can find the various types of love, brotherly love and sisterly love, etc. When it came to the New Testament, we find writers speaking of God's love for sinners, they actually struggle to find a word because it was an unthought of concept in the main. We're told that Roman

and Greek gods in New Testament's times, if you said a particular god loved someone, people would look at that in an immoral way. They wouldn't understand God's love in the way that we see it in Scripture because those gods were renowned for immoral love and certainly could not love sinners.

James Packer, writing on this passage, says that New Testament writers had to introduce what was virtually a new word. It's a word that we've become familiar with, a new word to express the love of God that was something pure and wholesome. They used the word we know in the Greek of *agape* and the definition we have for that is really a love that is spontaneous. It comes from the very nature and character of God and it's expressed irrespective of any rights. Because when we look at God, we say, "Well, we have got no right to say to God, You've got to love me." I suppose a child has a right to say to a parent, "You've got to love me because you're a parent." That doesn't make him love them, it depends on how lovely the child is, I suppose. But, you know what I mean. There can be certain demands because of a relationship. But we have no demands on the love of God.

Scripture tells us, that God's love was upon us even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We have no rights, but his love was there for sinners. The Bible tells us that he loves us as sons and daughters. We are also told that he loves us as friends, even as a husband loves a wife. There are many aspects of how God showers his love upon us. They are all strands of the great love wherewith he loves us. And they are, in fact, illustrations that we can cope with. We can understand how a husband loves a wife. We can understand about brotherly love. We can understand about friendship between one and another. But the actuality of the reality of his love, is beyond description. It's far deeper than we can understand. It's a love that is on a different plane to the love that we know. "And God so loved," it says, "the world." The world that was in rebellion. While we were enemies of God, he loved us.

But, you know, while such love is spontaneous and irrespective of rights, it comes with a relationship, doesn't it? The relationship we have is not forged by us but a relationship that is forged by God. We read recently, maybe even last week in Ephesians 1, "He has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love." But he'd have to shower his love upon us in order that that may be seen because we could not love him without him first loving us. And we call that, in Scripture, it's a covenant relationship. A covenant of the Godhead, a covenant of God's grace that he has placed his love upon us that we might be born again of the Spirit of God.

The Lord Jesus' prayer in John 17 gives us a further glimpse of the nature of his love. He says there, and he's praying to his Father, it's a wonderful passage from 17. It's like listening at the door, it's listening to someone praying. And to listen to the Lord Jesus praying is a tremendous thing and it's wonderful that that has been preserved for us. And these are the words he says, speaking to his Father, "Thou hast loved them," that is, Christians, "as thou hast loved me." What a wonderful power there is in those words. The same love that the Father had for the Lord Jesus is a love that he has for us.

I suppose, really, we can't lift the curtain on this mystery any further but to read what the Lord said to Israel. Speaking of them as a nation, he said that he loves them because he chose to and because it was his good pleasure to. Notice, God doesn't have to give explanations for that, God simply showers his love upon us.

3 The object of his love.

We go back to John 3:16, "God so loved the world..." Why? Who for? "That whosoever believeth in him." You know, whilst God's love is showered upon the world and he calls all men everywhere to repent, we read in Acts 17, the object of his love are very much those who come to know him, who receive his saving love. "God so loved the world." The word "world" there is cosmos. We're familiar with that, aren't we? We think of the cosmos, the spaceships that have taken that title. Cosmos, the order of things in creation. God's love for what he had created. He loved the whole scheme of things. He saw what he had created and said it was very good.

Again, we have to be careful. Some have gone off and misinterpreted those words and ended up with adoption of what we call Universalism. It doesn't mean that his love in salvation is poured out on all the world, that they should all be saved. It makes no sense. In the text it lays other texts on its head, leads, as I say, to the doctrine of Universalism. That is that Christ died for everyone and everyone will be saved and that's deceitful, and goes against Scripture and it's very sad when people make proclamations like that because then everyone thinks, "Oh well, it doesn't matter what I do. Christ came at Christmas and he died at Easter so that we could all go to heaven and that's very wonderful." Yes, God's love is there for the world but for those who come to know its worth, the text says, "Whosoever believeth in him." Whosoever is a very wide word, it's a wonderful word. If we believe in him. You know, these are great truths that can be a great comfort to us. 1 John 5:1, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God." Well, this is the love of God, "that we keep his commandments." In other words, our belief in him, our knowledge of his love, our receipt of his love is seen by the fact that we keep his commandments, we keep his Word.

4 The fruit of his love.

There is something to come out of this. Verse 9-10 indicates the great manifestation of his love is that Jesus Christ came. Verse 9 then, "In this was manifested," or revealed, "the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Sent him to be the appeaser, sent him to be the wrath bearer, sent him to be the sin bearer. That must be the greatest manifestation of the love of God. That Christ should come, the perfect, only begotten Son of God to bear what he hates, sin.

There are, of course, many fruits of the love of God but any fruit we see of the love of God comes to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. The thrust of the matter is that God gave Jesus Christ to a world of sinners and there was no other way whereby men could be

saved. God had it within his heart, a heart of love, that there should be sinners saved and therefore he did only what he could do, the only way that it could be done. A very painful way. And the giving of his Son wasn't a hit and miss job, was it? I've heard some people say, "Well, God made creation and that went a bit wrong. So, then he gave us the law and people couldn't keep that, so that went a bit wrong. So, God thought, well, I'll send my Son into the world." As if each of these things went wrong. Nothing went wrong. The Lord knew what was going to happen and he made this plan before time began. No, it wasn't a hit and miss job to see what could be done. A carefully planned, loving scheme that was sure to save sinners because he was going to meet all of the demands that he had himself. in the giving of his Son. In the perfect obedience to the holy law. The perfect sacrifice for sinners that our sin, as the hymn writer says, 'my sin not in part but the whole was laid on His cross and I bare it no more. As it says in our verse that I've just read, he was the propitiation. He was the wrath taker. He was the atonement. He was the perfect sacrifice to the Father. In Christ, the fruit of God's love, the manifestation of his love, he gave his all. There are so many hymns that we could sing this morning but another hymn says, "O for this love, let rocks and hills, their lasting silence break, and all harmonious human tongues, the Savior's praises speak."

There's more. There is deliverance from hell. John 3:16 reminds us, doesn't it, "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish." And we know what that means as we go to other verses. Our natural destination because we are sinners, is changed. Without such an intervention of the love and grace of God, we go off to a lost eternity, it's plain biblical truth. We're under the wrath of God and yet he loved us. We go to hell because of our sin but when we're converted, when we're saved, that sin is removed and, therefore, death and hell have no more claim. There is everlasting life. What a gift we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. The wages of sin is death. The wages of sin. We know what our wages are, we know what we're going to get at the end of the month and we know what we're going to get if we stay in sin but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Application. We've seen already the source of this love, it's God, it's a heavenly love, it's from outside of this planet. We've seen something of the nature of this love, he so loved, it's the intense love, it is agape love, it is something different. The object is upon the world but particularly his lost sheep. The fruit, he gave his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. He's delivered us from hell. He's taken our sin and he's given us eternal life.

What can we do with these things? Well, the first thing must be just to praise and marvel, really, in many ways, isn't it? "Pause, my soul, adore and wonder, Ask, "O, why such love to me?" Why? Why to me? Why to you? You can ask the question for yourself. Have we been better than others? Have we done some great stuff? Of course we haven't. Now the hymn asks, "Why is it that millions make a wretched choice, And rather starve than come?" Well, it's grace, isn't it? We might well turn that round and say rather, Why did any make the right choice and come? If we were incapable of making a choice, it is of God's grace, isn't it? And it's good to take time out? You say, "Well, we know these things." But when do we sit down in our quiet time and just meditate quietly and think,

“Why am I a Christian? What have I done?” And realize afresh, “I’ve done nothing. In fact, I’ve done stuff that means I shouldn’t be a Christian. And yet, the Lord has saved me. He has showered his love upon me.”

And then also by way of application, we ought to insure that the fruit of God’s love is seen in our lives. And what is that? Verse 19 speaks about our love for the Savior. We love him because he first loved us. We are very familiar with the fact that he first loved us, but we do need to express our love to him. He first loved us. So, we feel a love for his Word.

John 5, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.” Love for his house. Love for his people. Verse 11, “Beloved, if God so loved us,” and surely we know that, then “we ought also to love one another.” That’s the fruit of it in our own lives. Even loving the unlovely and those that we find most difficult to love, is something that we have to do.

Verse 20, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.” In other words, you can’t do that. You can’t love God and hate your brother. You see, it’s incompatible. “How can he love God whom he hath not seen? If he can’t love his brother who he has seen?”

Verse 21 says, “And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.” That’s strong word, isn’t it? This is a commandment. We think of the commandments of God, we don’t do this, we know the Ten Commandments. This commandment, it says, we have from him. We are commanded that if we’re Christians, that we love also our brother. You know, that’s something Christians say, don’t they, “Well, I don’t really like that person, but I know I’m a Christian and I ought to love them.” That’s not good enough. We have to work our life round and our thinking round and we have to ask the Lord to forgive us and we learned some of that last Sunday night. And we come before the Lord and say, “Look, I’m struggling with this individual or whatever, but, Lord, I want to love them. Not in a second-rate way. I want to fulfill that commandment.”

We need to love sinners, we need to see their end. We need have our hearts touched. You know, when our hearts are full of love for sinners, then we’ll find, particularly in our family nights, there will be many prayers and perhaps some tears also for those who know not the Savior.

I’m going to finish. May our hearts be filled and overflowing with his love. We read in Scriptures that the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. So, part of the work of the Spirit of God, shedding abroad, splashing over, if you like, the love of God that when we’re with people and we’re doing various things during the week in our business, in our colleges, or whatever we’re doing, there’s something about us that the love of God just seems to be shed abroad. Not because of what we do, particularly, but because of what the Spirit of God enables us to do.

And then we close with this thought of whether we really are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ in the sense that his love is showered upon us. That little verse in John 3 says, “Whosoever believeth.” So, we have to ask the question whether we are believers, whether we’re willing to leave our sin and trust in Christ. You know, whosoever, I have to say, is a lovely word but we find it elsewhere in the Book of Revelation we read two weeks ago, it says, “Whosoever was not found in the Book of Life.” Just some powerful contrast between those whosoevers. “Whosoever believeth.” “Whosoever was not found in the Book.”

You know, whilst God is a God of love, he’s also the God of wrath. And that means that we need not face the wrath of God because his love, as I think I’ve said then in one sense where we look at the gospel the love of God and the mercy of God trump his wrath. It doesn’t bypass it. Wrath is dealt with on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ took that wrath. And if you ignore his offer of mercy, then you are right to fear his wrath “for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of God.”

So, which whosoever are we? We’re a “whosoever that believeth,” or a “whosoever that is not found in God’s book.” We are one or the other. And the joy of this moment is, that if you’re in Christ, then you have been passed from being lost to being found, from darkness to light, from death to life, all because God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. And the Scripture tells us that his love is showered upon us and as we seek him, then we shall be found. And that’s the joy of the moment, isn’t it? that whosoever will, may come.

Well, may you come and may that coming be today, for Christ’s sake. Amen.