

## **INTRO: READ 1 JOHN 3:11-18**

- “God loves you.” In one way or another, nearly every sermon (good sermon, that is) that I’ve ever preached has basically been about that. “God loves you.”
- Now, there’s a lot of different ways you can hear that.
  - For the non-religious or atheist it doesn’t make sense to you: love is just a chemical reaction that helps us procreate.
  - For the religious, love is something we must give but there are usually limits. In fact, in some religions there are actually people you should hate. And as far as being loved by others or by your god, that must be earned. What you do, the status you hold...all those determine how lovable you really are.
- But for the Christian, love is something that is freely given because our God is love. The Trinity is something that is difficult to comprehend but yet is taught about over and over again in the Bible. There is one God in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All are fully God, all are distinct from the others.
  - And because God is Triune, He has always existed in community. And this community has always been marked by Love, the desire to serve and glorify the others. This is why John will say in **chapter 4** that “God is love.” It is the very nature and heart of God to serve and seek the glory and good of others.
- And this is the life God brings us into. It’s the life Jesus died to give us, it’s the life the Holy Spirit brings down into our hearts when He gives us a new birth, and it’s the life we live as God’s children (which we read about last week). AND this love of God, which we find ourselves living in now, is the love that should mark our relationships within the church. We should love one another; not just in our words but in actual actions. And this love should not have limitations on it but should be sacrificial, if necessary.
- For the first half of this letter, John’s explored how those who are really Christians will be obedient to God. They will live in the light.
  - This morning, we start the second half of this letter, (marked by the words, “this is the message”). And John is going to continue to say we should be obedient but he’s to hone in on the most important command that we should obey: We should love one another as Jesus has loved us.
- In fact, that command actually begins and ends our section this morning. That’s because our passage is set up in what is called a chiasm. What’s that? Well, I’ll show you.

*1a. Command to Love (3:11)*

*2a. Example of Hate: Cain (3:12-13)*

*3. Love = Life, Hate = Death (3:14-15)*

*2b. Example of Love: Jesus (3:16-17)*

*1b. Command to Love (3:18)*

The big idea for this passage is: **The Church Is A Community Of Love.** We’re going to use this structure to help us out this morning. So, the first point is there is:

## **1. One Command: Love One Another (3:11, 18)**

- “The message you heard from the beginning” (11) means that this command is Discipleship 101. We are commanded to make disciples and teach them all that Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:18-20). Well, this command is the first thing they were taught.
- “Love in Deed and Truth” (18) means not just words but real action..
- Now, does it seem weird to you that we are commanded to love? How can we make people “feel” a certain way? But biblically speaking: Love and hate are always a choice because while they may contain how we feel or what we say, they are both truly shown by our actions. For instance:
  - We know people who can sweet talk you and make the most lavish promises and make you feel wanted and cared for...and then they don't do what they say. They got what they wanted from you and now they ignore you and don't want anything to do with you. They loved in word but not in deed.
  - On the other hand, let's say I made you really angry. Like so angry that you stormed out on me. But later you hear that I don't have any food, so you go and get some groceries and come by and drop them off at my house. Now, even though you are angry at me, you have shown me that you still love me.
- This is what God is calling us to. A life where our emotions and feelings don't keep us from actively loving one another.
  - And this is important because there will always be reasons to be upset with people in your life. I mean, we're all sinners aren't we?
- It's easy to love someone when you don't know much about them or when you agree on everything. But eventually, you must make a choice to love someone even though they frustrate you or have disappointed you or even hurt you. And even though it may cost you. And Jesus says in Matthew 5 that it's this kind of love that imitates God's love to us as our Father.
  - Those who follow Jesus must eventually choose to put their personal feelings and desires aside for the good of other people. This what makes **The Church A Community Of Love**
  - But will you? That's the real question at the heart of this command: Who you will love more: those around you or yourself?
- John gives us two examples of the path our choices can take...

## **2. Two Examples: Cain and Jesus (3:12-12; 3:16-17)**

- In Genesis 2, God creates Adam and Eve and everything is perfect. They live in the love of God, as He rules over them and provides for them. But then Adam and Eve sin against God. They want to be their own rulers and they rebel against God. They choose to love themselves more than God...and in effect they choose to hate God and in hating God, death enters into the world. They are kicked out of His presence in the garden.

- But God gives them a promise in **Genesis 3:15**: Eve's offspring will crush the serpent who lied and tempted Adam and Eve to rebel against God.
- So, imagine reading this story for the first time. You get to **Genesis 4**. Adam and Eve give birth to Cain. *Is this the offspring promised?* And then they give birth to Abel. *Well, maybe it's Abel.* You keep reading.
  - They both bring offerings to God. Abel's is a blood offering, while Cain's is an offering of fruit and veggies. God has regard for Abel's but not for Cain's. So, now maybe you're thinking: *Abel's definitely the offspring who will save us.*
  - Cain gets angry. He's jealous of Abel.
  - But here's the thing: God didn't reject Cain's offering because He's angry at Cain. In fact, God comes and tries to encourage Cain. God is being merciful and gracious with him. And he warns Cain, be careful unless this anger becomes sin and it consumes you.
  - But Cain rejects God's grace and he kills Abel. And you are like, "*Whoa!!! What happened!! That feels like such an overreaction!!*" And now, you know neither of them are the offspring...
- John's point in using Cain as an example here is two-fold: first, hatred for God's people has existed from the beginning. Second, what seems like a small issue to those on the outside is actually incredibly serious to God because of what it can lead to.
  - In fact, John is just teaching us here what Jesus taught him in **Matthew 5:21-22**, that anger and hatred are the seeds for murder and are taken seriously by God.
  - Because hate is not merely about the way we feel. It's always active. Hatred looks at someone and believes their own life could be better if they could just use them OR if they could find some way to get rid of them.
- On the other end of this spectrum is Jesus. The epitome of love. He sees us as we are, fully knowing all that there is to know about us, and He lays down His life for us. This is the love we are called to imitate.
  - Real love is sacrificial, hatred is self-serving.
  - Real love is focused on the good of the other, hatred is self-centered.
  - Cain demanded Abel's life in order to feel better about his own. Jesus willingly gave His life so that we could have one.
  - In Jesus, we have the fulfillment of God's promise to Eve: He is the offspring who was promised, crushing the serpent's head by laying down His life to rescue sinners like you and I.
- This is why for John, it does not compute for him to see someone who says, "I love you" but then watch as that person refuses to share what they have to meet that person's need. Especially people who would call themselves Christians.
  - How can someone who knows the love of God, "close their heart" to a brother or sister in Christ in need?

- This is why **The Church Is A Community Of Love**. Because at the center of our existence is a God who is love. We are not only loved by Him but we are brought into His world, into His presence where His love transforms us.

### **3. Two Realities: Life and Death (3:14-15)**

- “Passed out of death into life...” What does that mean? Earlier I said that Adam and Eve chose to love themselves more than God, effectively choosing to hate God. And because of that: death entered into the world. You and I and everyone you meet have inherited that spiritual DNA, where we hate God and love ourselves. And this means we live in a world of death.
  - Now, I know we are alive. We exist, right? But there is a way of living that is actually leaning into non-existence, into the way we were NOT designed to live.
  - We were designed to love God and others more than ourselves. But that brings real risk. It means putting our lives in their hands. It means trusting them. And we don’t know if we can trust them.
    - I mean: Who’s going to look out for us? Who’s got my best interest at heart? No one cares for us, like we do. Right?
- Wrong. There is One who knows you better than you know yourself. And He loves you more deeply and profoundly than you could ever truly know. Our God is love. And when you know Him, it will open you up to trust Him and in trusting Him, you will find the freedom to love others...
- In **Exodus 34**, Israel had revolted against God and created and worshiped another idol. But Moses interceded for them and God was going to forgive and restore them. Moses asked God to show him His glory. And the LORD came down and revealed Himself to Moses. And this is what we read: **Exodus 34:6–7**  
 [6] The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (ESV)
- He wants Moses and Israel to know, even in the midst of their sin, how much He is for them. God’s love for them is marked by mercy and grace, patience and faithfulness, and yes, real justice. Who doesn’t want that from God?
- Now, think about that and then think about what the opposite of God’s character would be like. The opposite of mercy, grace, patience, faithfulness, and justice. You would have someone who:
  - Judges others by their worst mistakes, but demands to be known by their best actions.
  - Takes what they can get but is stingy with what they have.

- Is intolerant toward others' shortcomings, but demands understanding for one's own.
- Is flaky and unreliable, but throws a fit when others' let them down.
- Believes it is always the victim; never the perpetrator.
- Now, be honest: does this describe you more than you care to admit?
- How does that person change? How does that person become a person who loves like Jesus? By turning and looking at Jesus. By trusting Him. By seeing how, even in the midst of all your sin, God is still for you. Jesus told the crowds in **John 5:24**:  

Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.
- Jesus did not come to give you good advice on how to love people or how to be loved by God; He came because God loves you. And in His love for you, He laid down His life so you could live. And all you need to do to receive this love, this eternal life, is believe in Him. And in believing in Him, He will forgive you of your sin and give you His Spirit...so you can live with Him, and like Him, right now!
- On the other hand, some of you may look at your life and say "I do believe in Jesus but I am not really loving others, why is that?" It's because you have stopped trusting His love for you...that he wants what's best for you. You need to turn and look at Him again this morning and believe.
- The questions which lead to hate and self-centeredness -- Who's going to look out for me? Who's got my best interest at heart? -- When we behold the death of Jesus, we know that the answer has to be: God. He's taken care of the greatest dangers of my life: the sin that would cast me into Hell and the death that would separate me from Him forever.
  - And knowing that, we are empowered to trust Him. And in trusting His love for you, you will want to take the first step of obedience. We may not have the "want to" but we know we "ought to" and so we will obey.
- That trust in Jesus' love is what prompts us to give up time on a Saturday to help a single mother move. Or walk our neighborhood and pray and invite people to come to the Easter Block Party. It's what prompts people to arrive early on a Sunday morning and set up sound and slides. What leads people to prepare and teach kids on a Sunday morning. It's that love that leads us to say "yes" to opening our homes for Gospel Community during the week, to sharing our lives and our energy with one another. The love of Jesus is what pulls us to give financially to the church, to help out someone in need, to sit and listen to a brother or sister who is struggling, to heed the sound advice from another Christian who calls us out of sin.
  - And here's the crazy thing...as we trust Jesus' love for us and we strive to imitate His love in the church and in our world: something begins to happen in us. As we love and serve others in these sacrificial ways - the people we serve become more

loveable to us. They are no longer people we have to muster up energy to serve. They are people we genuinely start to care about.

- We begin to see them and understand them and to really care about them, and we find ourselves truly loving them. And over time, the sacrifice of love doesn't feel like a sacrifice.
  - We no longer need to be forced to do it, but our hearts are opened to these people: to our brothers and sisters. Our heart becomes attached to them and we want their good so badly it hurts us to see them suffer, to see them make unwise decisions.
  - As we trust in the love of Jesus and obey His call to love, we actually start to really feel the love of Jesus through us. This is how **The Church [becomes] A Community Of Love.**
- So, how should you step out in trusting Jesus this morning?