

God is Love!

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, today we're going to go back and we're going to look at the passage that I read earlier, John's, the first John, letter, first John, page 103, and Corrie last week looked at the first six verses, and I'm going to look at the, from verse 7 onwards today.

And as we do so, I'm going to start just by taking a little breather and thinking about the author for just a few minutes, just to think about John, the beloved disciple, because he's the author of this letter that went out probably to the church in Ephesus, primarily.

And we've been studying this letter for a good number of weeks now, and I hope being encouraged and built up and enthused by what he was saying, challenged as well by what he's saying.

But this section, I like the rest of it, I guess, but this section does reveal a lot about John himself as a person, and I think that's important, not just here, but as we think about the letter as a whole, because God inspires his word through the characters that he speaks through, and through their own characters and their individuality.

And what's interesting, maybe you haven't noticed, I'm sure you have noticed this, and I get it at this stage by way of covering myself, that he can't stop repeating himself.

[1 : 2 6] This is a short letter, but he really can't stop repeating the important message that he wants to bring again and again and again to this people. It's not that he's forgetting, I repeat myself because I'm forgetful.

He's not forgetful. It's not that he's just getting nothing that he's forgetting what he could say, and it's not because he's annoying. Some people can just be repetitive, and then being repetitive, they're simply being annoying.

But he's being repetitive throughout this letter because what he is saying is so important to him as it's been laid on his heart by God, and as he has lived his life, he's an old man by now, and he's seen what's really important in the church.

Every verse is jam-packed full of very significant and important and astonishing truth about who Jesus is, who the Christ is, and what God has done for you and for me as believers.

And I think his repetitiveness is just part of his way of trying to say that it's just greater than anything that we can ever have grasped or imagined.

[2 : 3 8] And it's like he takes every verse, it's like a diamond, and like every verse, it's just a slight movement of the diamond, and you see it in a different color, and the different angles in a diamond reveal different aspects of its beauty.

And he's doing that, it's as if he's doing that with every verse. It's the same truth really, but he's just slightly tilting the angle of divine truth so that we can see it differently and understand it more.

If you do have time, a good exercise would be just to read the whole letter again and write down the number of times he repeats himself and see what he's repeating and why it's important.

And I think if we could see, I certainly long personally to see like John sees, because I think if we could see like John sees, if we'd see similarly to John, then I think I certainly know my preaching would be different.

I think our praise, our prayer life, the unbridled joy that we have in Jesus Christ, whatever our circumstances would be, I think would blow the roof off this building.

[3 : 48] I think it would make us different if we could see the way John sees. And it's as if he's got a holy obsession. Now, obsessions can be negative, of course, but I think they can also be positive.

The Oxford English Dictionary definition of obsession is an idea or thought that continually preoccupies or intrudes in a person's mind.

It's something that governs our whole life. And that was clearly the case with John, is a positive obsession with the love of Jesus Christ, changing everything in him and in the churches that he worked with.

For him, it was a positive obsession. It's something very big, very significant. It's not an appendix to his life. His faith was not just added extra, something that he dipped into now and again.

It was something that was significantly important and real. And it may be good for us this morning if we do nothing else this morning, but just look in the mirror into our own hearts and into our own lives and ask what our obsession is.

[4 : 59] What obsesses us? What takes up our time and energy and our focus and our desire and our whole lives, really? Because maybe probably in one degree or another we're all obsessed with something.

Maybe for most of us, the challenge or the temptation is to be just obsessed with ourselves. But here we find John's obsession and his repetitiveness.

But also we see him in this letter being as sharp as a tack as well because he recognizes the issue that is in that church and it's a church that's been divided.

It's a church that's been separated because there's false teachers have come in who don't recognize the gospel message and who are causing division and separation and disunity and a lack of love between the people and all kinds of turmoil.

And he's as sharp as a tack and he recognizes that. And what he's focusing on with those he's writing to is by your fruits you'll know them. You'll know those who are followers of Christ by their fruits.

[6 : 05] And the love of God is at the very core of this fruit. And he recognizes and he's intent on dealing with this just damage and division and the wolves that are coming in, in sheep's clothing as it were.

And he's saying their hearts are revealing the falsity of what they believe and what they are teaching.

And he's encouraging the people of that local church to be careful about how they live and to be careful about their walk and their witness.

And he's asking them to judge that by how they treat one another. And he says, because you can't hide what's in your heart.

And as we love one another with the love of Christ, which is what he's speaking about, he's saying that is the evidence. That is beware you stand lest you fall. Look at your own heart and see, look around you and see how you speak about others and how you respond to others in this local church community.

[7 : 18] And he's as sharp as a tack recognizing that that is the key. So I want to emphasize two things in this passage that he speaks of.

There's much more, but we just have time for two. The first is a very significant thing, which is what he says in verse eight, which is a very famous statement.

He says in verse seven and eight, beloved, let's love one another for love is from God. Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

So this great statement that God is love. And we've seen it before, isn't it? We're not just talking about family love. We're not just talking about marital love. We're not just talking about friendship love, but it's this unique agape love, this love of God that is uniquely burst in the hearts of believers who come to Jesus Christ as His adoptive gift to us.

And it's because God is love. He's the author and the genesis of love. And we see it in relation to the other God is statements that John makes.

[8 : 30] We saw it right at the beginning of the series in the first chapter of 1 John where he says, God is light. And then in the gospel of John, he also says that God is spirit.

Remember in that interaction with the woman, Samaritan woman. And so we've got this trinity of statements about the character of God.

Not that He just does love, not that He has light, not that He can be spirit, but that in His simplicity is all of these things. God is love in the glory of that.

He is light and He's pure and truthful and just. And He is spirit making Him, as we've seen, and as we've talked with the children in the cataclysm, He's infinite, eternal and unchangeable.

And this is the God who is revealed in this passage. And it reminds us that this God of love is a unique God.

[9 : 36] And the significance of the trinity, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is emphasized powerfully through that statement that God is love because He is a society, a divine society of love.

The simplicity of that and the complexity of that come together in His love. You see, it's impossible. It would be impossible for a single, unitary, lonely God to claim eternally to be love.

But it is this society of Father, Son and Holy Spirit that enables Him to be described and characterised in this way as where there was perfect love within that trinitarian persons for all eternity with one another.

But we see that primarily in the cooperative rescue for us, that God who is love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit is involved in our salvation, a cooperative rescue.

Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is spoken of interchangeably in this passage. But we do see that this rescue of us today is God's initiative.

[10 : 51] It isn't, first of all, our idea is God's initiative in verse 10. We're told, and this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for us.

And then in verse 19, there's a lot of repetition here. We love because He first loved us. So today we come together and worship, and we come to worship the living God, and we do so because He first loved us because salvation is His initiative.

As a Christian, your character and your salvation was wrought in the mind of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit before creation, before we were even considered and thought about.

And after our birth, when we were still enemies of God, He still had us in His mind as those who would receive and respond to salvation.

This is, our salvation is driven by His commitment and His love for us. His love for a people who He created, who He knew would rebel, but we were always in His heart, and we recognize that that salvation comes from God first, His initiative.

[12 : 11] We love because He loved us. And when we are saved, when we trust in Jesus Christ, we're brought into this elevated company of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In verse 12, we're told, no one has ever seen God but will feel love one another. God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

And then again, it's repeated in verse 16. I'm going to repeat a lot here because John does in verse 16. It says, so we have come to know and believe the love that God has for us. God is love.

Whoever abides in love, abides in God and God abides in Him. So you have this teaching of being reborn and reborn into His character, into His person, into His relationship with Him, where we live in Him and He and us in a mutual indwelling, which has mystery in it, undoubtedly, but reflects what John would have heard from Jesus in the last discourse, particularly in John chapter 15.

And so that as Christians today, as a believer today, you and I, in all our ordinariness, in all our lack of feeling of being different from anyone else, as believers by faith, we accept that we are engulfed in the Trinitarian life, that we have God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in our lives with us, outworking the promises that were made before the creation of the world.

[13 : 44] You know what it would be like if you met someone really famous, and we all are moved by famous people one way or another. You met someone famous, and you're kind of overawed by that, by meeting someone famous.

I'm not going to say anyone because my famous will probably not be your famous. For me, it would have been someone like George Best, but he's dead now, so that's not very good. But someone famous, someone important that you respect and admire, and instead of just having to kind of look from a distance or go for a nautograph, they actually turned round and, you know, called you by name and welcomed you, said, it's great to meet you.

Why don't you come back to our house for dinner? In fact, why don't you stay with us for a while and get to know us a bit better? Can you imagine how great that would be? You know, someone you've been in awe of, and you've seen on the television, and you've seen on this, everyone in love, that you're invited into their home, that you're invited into their family, that you get to know their kids or whatever it might be and see what they're like in real life.

Well, it's like, it would be like that. Well, it is, sorry, it is like that as a Christian, but times a million, times a billion. And I know it is different because it's spiritual, but I think sometimes we need to think about the privilege that is ours and the benefits that is our belonging to this King of Kings, to the Lord of Lords, that whatever happens in our lives, we've been embraced into His family, we've been taken into His home, that life and death can't take that from us and that we live in company with Him.

I think it's good to think about that when we're struggling with the poor me's or with aging or with illness or with let down or when we feel alone or we're struggling financially. Or one of the battles that we face, it's good to be reminded of the spiritual truths that we need to keep going back to.

[15 : 35] And we're called in this great Trinitarian salvation to know and rely on Him, verse 16. So we have come to know and to believe or to rely or to trust the love that God has for us.

We're therefore, we're to, that's why we, it's one of the reasons we come at church. It's one of the reasons that we have fellowship together, that we are discipling one another because we want to know Him more and know Him experimentally and know Him intimately and trust in Him, rely on Him, lean on Him.

It's one of the beauties of the spiritual disciplines we're trying to encourage and inspire and help each other with with the grace groups.

It's just so good to be in His company and yet it's a battle and a struggle all the time for us, all of us. It's a battle of faith. And we're called just to remind ourselves to know Him and to grow in that knowledge of Him, to be like the tree and discipleship tree in Jeremiah 17 whose roots go deep down into this living water, not be self-reliant so that even when the drought comes that we can bear fruit for Him.

That's our source of life. So God is love. That's the first thing I want to say about this, in this short section.

[16 : 57] The second thing I want to do is look at how that sometimes plays out in our lives and how it ought to play out in our church life. And there's two things here.

There's two points, two things in here. The first thing is that it should provoke within us as a church family, it should provoke sibling provocation. What would that mean by that?

So look at verse 7 and then another repetition in verse 11. Let us love one another for love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

And then verse 11 starts the same way, beloved if God so loved as we ought also to love one another. And so speaking there about brothers and sisters, how we treat one another in the church.

Now if you've got brothers and sisters, you understand and know sibling provocation. You know exactly what it's like to be provoked by your brother or sister, sometimes negative, okay?

[18 : 00] I dare you to put baking soda down the toilet or something like that. Have you ever tried that? You may have tried that at some point because when you flush the toilet, it goes everywhere.

And your sibling might provoke you to do that, something negative, something provocative, something that will get you into trouble, especially a big brother, big sister, little brother, little sister.

There's always that going on. But also maybe they will help provoke you to do something positive. You know, you should really go and help your mom or your dad do whatever they have to do and it may be negative, it may be positive.

People we know that siblings have the unique ability to provoke one another negatively, to just wind each other up.

Sometimes we're like that in the church as well. But we're called to be provocative to one another positively as brothers and sisters in Christ.

[19 : 03] See what I call, he says beloved. Man, it's a difficult letter he's writing, but he says to them, beloved, that just means is recognizing their loved by God. That's just what beloved means here.

It means loved by God. And I think that is a really helpful way of thinking of one another as Christians. So often we're categorizing people.

We're putting them in pockets. We're putting them in corners. We're putting them in different areas. And we can be judgmental, but it's great to remind each other that we're loved by each one of us as Christians, I love my God together, and grasp that because it changes the way we think of and consider one another.

Because immediately when you call someone beloved, there's that bond, you know? It's like when you meet someone who's a relative that maybe you haven't met before.

You don't know them for whatever reason. There are cousins that you've met, maybe they live in Australia or whatever, you haven't met them. Maybe before the days of phones and videos and everything.

[20 : 07] And you meet them for the first time and there's an immediate bond. You've never seen them, but they look like your dad or they look like, there's a common bond. They look like you. And there's an immediate common bond of blood in that context or even nationalities when you go abroad and you hear, when I go abroad and I hear a Scott, Scott's accent, I'm attracted to that because there's a bond there that lives in.

And much more so with us in Christ, we've got this, we're again a million times more, we're beloved because we have come to Christ. So look around you this morning in church.

What is your first thought about the other Christians here in St. Columbus? Would beloved be what we consider them to be?

Because you owe a debt to one another, you and I owe a debt to each other. See that in verse 11, you know, beloved, if God so loves us, we also ought to love one another.

Eleven times in this short section, John says love one another. Eleven times, I talked about repetition, eleven times he says it.

[21 : 23] And he speaks here in terms of debt or obligation. We looked at that a couple of weeks ago when I was looking at the Holy Spirit in Romans chapter 8, that we'd obliged to live, we'd indebted to live in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

And so we've indebted as Christians to love one another because what Christ has done for us, it's a weight that is on us, a beautiful weight nonetheless.

But we're to provoke one another. We're to spur one another to love and good deeds, as Hebrews 10 tells us. And that's a really important and probably underplayed characteristic of our Christian lives is that we have a responsibility not just to live and spur ourselves on as Christians, which is hard enough, but we're called not to be islands.

We're called to spur one another on and be brave enough to tell one another because we love one another about the importance of sticking close to Jesus.

Keeping each other on the main things with each other, maybe highlighting our lack of love, discourage being the person that stops gossip, dead when it comes to you, or deals and challenges, division and hierarchies and cliques within the church community because we love one another and share this debt of love to one another.

[22 : 55] Why is that important? Well, verse 12 tells us, no one has ever seen God. That's one of our biggest problems, one of our biggest challenges. We can't touch Him.

We don't seem to feel any different even as Christians. What He says, if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. And what John is saying there is, that's when we see God.

It's the biggest struggle, isn't it? Faith. But when we are among God's people, if there's a draft of sin and disinterest and loneliness and isolation, God is shrouded.

We're not seeing Him properly. The church, the gospel community, the family of God is the world's window to seeing God.

We've seen that recently. You know, Jesus said, this, by this will all people know that you're my disciples, that we're Jesus' disciples if we love one another.

[24 : 05] This is the window to the world, is the window to God of the world. The world will see God when they see us loving one another.

And so we, we will see God more when we're loving one another. So it has both a powerful, I think, internal, assuring influence on us when we live this way and deny our sinful nature and also as a powerful evangelistic message for us.

And that's a great challenge this morning. So it plays out in sibling provocation and lastly and briefly, knowing this God of love and living, constantly going to Him for forgiveness and grace and just renewal and refreshment and relying on Him gives us the second thing is confidence on the day of judgment.

By this is love perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment. John just states that. He states with absolute confidence as one who was the beloved disciple who heard the teaching of Jesus, who knew that Jesus had died, who knew that He rose again, they ascended and that He would return.

The basic truths of the gospel, He was utterly convinced that Jesus would return. It's part of the message, part of the truth, it's part of the tradition that was handed down to Him even at this point.

[25 : 42] His legacy is that His come once in salvation, He will return to bring His family home and in judgment as His legacy.

And I wonder if as Christians we are certain that Jesus is coming back. Do we live as if we have that certainty of Jesus coming back?

Because the amazing thing about it for the Christian is that this confidence of His return removes fear from our lives.

Verse 18, the next verse, there is no fear in love but perfect love casts out fear for fear has to do with punishment. We've come to recognize and understand that the punishment due to us for our sins was taken by the divine Son.

This great Trinitarian act of outstanding committed love for us, where He appeased the Father's wrath against sin and where God gave His only true response to pure love and pure justice, taking the cost Himself, enabling us to be in relationship with Him.

[26 : 55] And that work is complete, it's finished. There's an interesting connection here, I think. If you remember the great single word cry that Jesus made on the cross, it's the same word that's used here four times, three times, four times, I think, of His love.

And it's the word complete or perfected. It uses it in verse 12. If we love one another, His love is made perfect in us.

In verse 17, but this love is perfected in us so that we may have confidence on the day of judgment in that verse we're looking at. And verse 18, excuse twice, I think, perfect love casts out fear because fear has not been perfected in love.

So it's used four times, this word complete or perfected. It's the same word that Jesus used on the cross, tittle estai. It is complete.

It's finished. It's perfected. In other words, He's saying it can't be bettered. What Jesus did on the cross can't be added to you. It's complete.

[28 : 08] It's great, astonishing work of God is complete. And if we trust in Him, our sins are taken and dealt with. And it's complete. It can't, He's just, He can't, He's never going to punish sin twice.

He's taken it and paid. The price has been paid on the Sunday, He will not pour out again. The debt has been paid. It's finished. It's written off.

And that love and that freedom and that release and that forgiveness is available to every single one of us here. Can't be bettered. You can't come up with a different way of getting to God and dying and meeting Him on that last day.

There is no other way. So we should be Christians who are not afraid because of that. We're not afraid of the day of judgment. Not in a kind of, you know, bullish, kamikaze way, but in a humble and thankful way, we're not afraid because we're in gulfed in the love of God and because we know that the price has been paid on the cross.

And we are called today as believers to respond to that. I wonder how the false teachers responded to this particular letter. I think they must have felt stripped naked and exposed and empty by the sublime truth that John repeats again and again, not just for Ephesus, not just for the ancient Near East, not just for the New Testament times, but for all time, for every single human being.

[29 : 46] Nothing compares with what we have. His work is complete, and we will worship very shortly at the sacrament and meditate on what He has done and renew our vows.

Amen. Let's pray briefly. Father God, we ask and pray that You teach us Your way. You'd help us to understand more clearly what we have.

Forgive us for treating it like rubbish sometimes. For complaining and for being thankless and for being complacent or for... because we know it so well, just taking it for granted, but not really doing what we will symbolically do shortly, eat and drink it and be nourished by it and be refreshed and renewed.

So just like we look at a meal sometimes, Lord, and just then throw it in the bin. It's of no value, no nourishment to us, no joy in it, no pleasure.

It's just something we look at. So Lord, help us not to be like that, but grant us Your presence at the table, we ask. Jesus' name.

[31 : 04] Amen.