

God is Love

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Date: 18 November 2023

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn to the Word of God together. Let's hear God's Word from 1 John chapter 4. 1 John chapter 4, reading verses 7 to 21.

It's page 961 here, which I will take on trust, because it's not 961 in this Bible. But page 961, 1 John chapter 4, and reading from verse 7.

Let's hear God's Word together. So that we might live through Him.

In this is love. Not that we have 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 ever seen God. 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.

[1 : 34] And we have seen and testified that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in Him and He in God.

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love. And whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him.

By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment. Because as He is, so also are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

We love because He first loved us. If anyone says, I love God and hates His brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

[2 : 45] And this commandment we have from Him, whoever loves God must also love his brother. Amen. And may God bless His Word to us.

Well, tonight we're just going to be thinking about three words that we read together there. We read them a couple of times, in fact. God is love.

Now, I know it's Saturday night. I know you're tired, but all a wee bit sleepy on a Saturday night. I know preparatory service, or maybe it's a dark, cold night, and some of us thought, I could do with staying in, but much of the day is not on tonight, so okay.

But I have a question for you. What was there before there was anything? I'm going to test your brains. What was there before there was anything?

It's a big question to ask after a busy week. You see, where science and the Bible are absolutely agreed on this, there was a time when the universe started. There was a beginning.

[3 : 46] There was a distinct moment when space, time, matter, all came into existence. But what was there before that? I don't know about you, but my brain hurts even trying to think about that.

There's concepts to do with the universe that just make my brain hurt trying to get my head around it. We can't even imagine what would there be without a universe.

What would there be without this material world that we're familiar with? And as we say, everyone has agreed there was a beginning. And really, you know, when we think about it, we're left with only two choices.

Either nothing made the universe, which doesn't make sense to me, or someone or something, God, in other words, created everything that there is.

And I know which one I find more logical. You see, the Bible gives us a clear answer. What was there before there was anything? There was God. In the beginning, God.

[4 : 50] Or John 1, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God. He was with God in the beginning. The Bible tells us before there was anything, there was God, and because there was God, there was love.

So before there was a universe, before there was a particle, an atom, a molecule, there was love, because there was God. And John utters three profound words here.

He says to us, God is love. And as we prepare for a communion, it's quite simple how we're going to prepare tonight. We just want to remind ourselves that the God that we worship, that we know is a God who is love, and to remind ourselves that despite our sin and our failings and our brokenness, that we are loved more than we can imagine.

God is love. So over the course of this weekend, we're going to be looking at three statements the Bible makes about God, that God is love, that God is light, that God is spirit.

We're going to be thinking about who God is, because there's nothing better to think about than who God is. And we start tonight with God is love. I always find it odd that the Shorter Catechism missed this out, when it describes God.

[6 : 08] God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and is being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. It doesn't mention love. It's strange, isn't it? And yet, in many ways, it's not all, of course, it's not all there is to say about God, but it is a fundamental definition the Bible gives, a statement the Bible gives us.

God is love. It's not all there is to say about God, but it's an important thing to say about God. And we're going to say four things about God being love. God is love.

And the first thing to say is God loves eternally. God loves eternally. The reason that you and I are even here, that we even exist, is because God is love.

I would quite often get asked in the schools around Aldous and Invergordon, the kids, one of their classic questions is, well, if God made us, who made God? Often being asked that question.

And the Bible's answer is simple. Nobody made God. He has always existed. Again, my brain starts to hurt. He's got no beginning. Can't even get my head around that very concept.

[7 : 14] He's got no beginning and he'll have no end. He is eternal. And the Bible reveals to us that God is one God, but he exists in a community of three persons.

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Relating to each other. Loving each other. Being loved in return. Interacting with one another. Loving and being loved.

God is a community of love in his being. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. You see, John's words about God here, they go deep.

He doesn't just say that God loves, but God does love. He doesn't just say that God is loving, though he is. He says God is love.

He is love. His being is love. So all he does, all he says, flows out of this heart that is love. And God made the world because he is love.

[8 : 16] God made human beings, not because he was lonely. He didn't make the universe because he was lonely. He made it so we could share in his love. So we could share in his joy. We could share in who he is.

And you see in Genesis 1, there's all these arguments about how long were the days and how does it relate to the theory of evolution and this, that, and the next thing. We missed the whole point.

We missed. That's not what Genesis 1 is talking about. What you see in Genesis 1 is a God who is crafting, spending time and energy, working. Went off piste here, but we'll go with it.

Bear in mind, Genesis 1 was first spoken to the Israelites who spent 400 years in slavery in Egypt. You've been worked like a dog by the pharaohs of the day. And imagine you get set free from slavery, and then God reveals to you, who's doing all the work in Genesis?

God is. And what's he working to do? To make a beautiful home for the people that he's made, that they could enjoy the garden in Eden with him and enjoy rest in his presence.

[9 : 19] God does the work that they might enjoy his presence. God creates the universe that you and I, the human race, can enjoy him. You see, God made people so we could know his love and enjoy him.

We could say that the universe and us exist because God's love overflowed. Too good not to share. To go back to the catechism, what it does get right, man's chief end, is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

It's such an important part, to enjoy him. It's a good thing to know him. It's a joyful thing to know him. It's why we're here. We're made to know his love.

And he wants to share his love with you. He wants you to know his love. To shower his love over you. And our very purpose in existing is to know the love that God has for us.

Do you know how much you are loved this evening? Do you know the love that God has for you? Do you know how deeply that you are loved? And maybe tonight God's brought you here just for that simple reason, to remind you of that.

[10 : 32] You're loved. It's easy to forget that. Life is hard. We go through struggles and pains and difficult situations. And we can wrestle with God as to why he's allowed certain things to happen.

We've all done it. And it's okay to do that, by the way. People in the Bible do it. It's okay to do it. It's okay to ask God why. It's okay to pour your frustrations out with God.

We can forget so easily. But God is reminding us tonight that we are loved. And we come to know this love through the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the way to come to know and to experience the love that God has for us. Do you know how deeply you are loved this evening? God loves eternally.

It's who he is. Secondly, God loves his world. God made everything that there is. And he made it to showcase his love and his glory.

[11 : 32] To have a world to share himself with, basically. And it's true to say at one level that God's love is shown everywhere. Psalm 145, verse 9. The Lord is good to all that he has made.

Matthew 5 says that God's love and goodness is shown to all people, even his enemies. The sun rises, the rain falls on the wicked and the good. He gives good gifts and blessings to all people.

Isn't God's love remarkable? He loves even his enemies. He's good even to those who hate him. And isn't that the standard of love that we are called to follow as well?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, If you only love those who love you, what do you do more than the pagans? Everyone does that. But I say to you, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. Bless those who curse you.

And he's not asking us to do anything. He's not doing himself. Jesus never asks us to do anything he's not doing himself. Because that's the love that God has for us. And the remarkable thing is that it's God's love that turns his enemies into his family.

[12 : 38] It's his love that changes his enemies to be his friends and to bring them into his family. So in that sense, whoever we are tonight, we can say we've tasted something of God's love.

We can say we've tasted something of God's goodness. But there's also a special love the Bible speaks of. A special love that God has for his people.

That God has for those who trust in him. Whose trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ. God loves eternally. God loves his world.

Thirdly, God loves his son. Maybe it's fair to say that above all, God the Father loves God the Son. At his baptism, the Father spoke from heaven and declared his love for Jesus.

And he said, You are my son whom I love, in whom I am well pleased. And throughout his life, Jesus spoke of his consciousness of that love.

[13 : 38] John 3.35, Jesus said, The Father loves the Son and has placed everything into his hands. In John 5.20, Jesus said, For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he does.

From all eternity, God the Son was the object of the Father's love. Jesus, when he was in this world, had this consciousness, awareness of the love the Father had for him.

Did that mean everything in Jesus' life was easy? If you just looked at Jesus' life, his own family at one point think he's out of his mind, try to take him home by force.

One of his friends betrays him to the authorities where he's handed over to be crucified. At one point, people take him, try and throw him off a cliff. There's death threats, assassination plots against him.

Jesus weeping at gravesides of his friends. If you just looked at the circumstances of his life, he would never go, Well, there's the beloved Son. There's the object of the Father's love. But Jesus didn't determine how much he was loved by the Father by his circumstances.

[14 : 46] He faced the circumstances of the knowledge that the Father loved him and was with him. From all eternity, we could say Jesus was the object of the Father's delight and love.

And that's what makes the gospel story even more remarkable, doesn't it? How much does God love you and me? How much does God love this world? He loves us so much that he would send his Son into this world.

It says in our passage in verse 9, In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

That's a big fancy word, propitiation. It just means he's the one who turns away the anger of God. In his death on the cross, he took the anger of God so we don't have to. He was punished in our place.

Who was it that went to the cross? Who was it that was made a sacrifice for our sins? It was the one who was the focus of the Father's love. It was the beloved Son.

[16 : 03] From all eternity, the heart of the Father had focused his love on the Son, and it's this Son the Father sends into the world. It's this Son the Father sends to rescue those who hate him.

It's this Son the Father sends to go to the cross and give his life for sinners like you and like me. What did it cost the Lord to save rebellious sinners?

It cost him his precious Son. It cost him the apple of his eye. It cost him his beloved. The Gospel reveals to us that the Father, God the Father, could not have given any more.

He could not have given anyone more precious. He could not have given any more to rescue us. And yet he was willing to send his Son, and the Son was willing to come, and the Son was willing to lay down his life for you and for me.

You see, it's true to say that the cross that we see, for God so loved, that's the extent to which God loves us, and God loves you, that he did not spare his one and only Son.

[17 : 13] And if he did not spare his one and only Son, he's not going to stop short of anything else. He's already given the greatest. He has given the most. He has offered up his beloved Son.

The cross is the greatest act of love that this world has ever seen. As we said, at the cross, God the Father gave the most precious thing that he had.

And why did he do that? Because he so loved. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son. So that you and I could be saved, that you and I could have our sins forgiven, and you and I who are the enemies of God, would become his family and be with him forever.

God loves eternally. God loves his world. God loves his Son. And fourthly, God loves you. God loves you. I know those words can seem like such a cliché.

Jesus loves you. And we can trot it out so much, they lose some of their impact, and they can lose some of their meaning. But they are meaningful words. We are here because God made us to share his love.

[18 : 29] Jesus came into the world because he loved us. Jesus went to the cross because he loved us. Indeed, it's probably also fair to say that he went to the cross because he loved the Father.

Equally true. John 14, verses 30 to 31. Jesus says, I will not say much more to you for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

Jesus loves his people eternally. He loves his people in the present, and he will love his people for all eternity to come.

Even now, Jesus looks forward to the day that he gets to be with us. He says he has gone to prepare a place for us, and he will come again and take us to be with him where he is.

So much he could have told the disciples about heaven, isn't there? It's going to be like this, or it's going to be like that. And he doesn't say any of that. He just basically tells them this. I get to be with you, and you get to be with me.

[19 : 41] That's what you need to know. That's what heaven is. The people of God getting to be with their Savior forever. Jesus loves you.

You are loved more than you can ever imagine, and the gospel is the reality, the proof of this. The cross is the evidence in time and in history of how much that God loves his people. Nobody could love you more than you are in this moment in Jesus.

Let me finish off this with a few words of application to us off the back of this. The first thing I want to say is that all this talk about God's love, it reminds us that we matter.

We matter. It might seem a strange thing to say, but if God is not love, then what basis do we have to say that? If there is no God, we are just a collection of particles in a cold, unjust universe, and nothing means anything.

If we take the humanist viewpoint, we might say that, yes, people matter, but really we are alone in this great, vast universe. There is no guarantee of any justice, any good outcomes.

[20 : 59] We are alone and uncared for in the vastness of space. But the Christian can say, I might seem insignificant in the eyes of the world.

Sure, I might even seem insignificant in my own eyes. But God made me. And the Lord loves me. And I matter.

In Psalm 8, King David looks up at the stars and he says to himself, he feels so small and insignificant, and he says, what is man that you are mindful of him? The son of man that you care for him.

And it's true. That God sees us. He numbers the hairs on our heads. He gathers our tears in his bottle. He records our sorrows in his book. And one day he promises that he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

You see, our circumstances, our situations, our lives, they do matter to God. He cares for every detail. Every sorrow, every hurt, every joy, every encouragement.

[22 : 03] He cares for it all. Because God is love. It says to us that we matter. That we are not alone. God is with us.

And he loves us intensely, deeply, passionately, and will never be parted from us if our trust is in the Lord Jesus Christ. So if you're going through hard times this evening, maybe, again, it's a reminder from God that while our experiences are hard and our hearts are sore, that we are loved.

And when Jesus comes again, there will be a day when our tears are wiped away, our broken hearts are put back together, and we will rejoice with him eternally. I know it seems very counterintuitive.

You might think, well, if God loves us, then why does he not just make life easy? That would be great. But Jesus never says that. Jesus never says, follow me, and everything will go well, everything goes smoothly.

In fact, he says the opposite. He says, in this world, you will have trouble, but take heart, for I have overcome the world. He says, in the Old Testament, when you go through the fires and the waters, I will be with you.

[23 : 20] The waters will not overflow you, and though you walk through the fires, you will not be burned. Notice it's not an if. He doesn't say, if you go through fires, and if you go through deep waters, of course, figures of speech, meaning difficult times in our lives, he says, when?

When you go through them, not even Christians are spared from that, but he does make an incredible promise. In fact, two promises. He promises to be with us, and he promises to take us through.

These are the promises Jesus makes. As we said, the troubles in Jesus' life did not mean that he was not loved, but he was upheld through his troubles, in the knowledge that he was loved, upheld by the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

He knew he was not alone. And we can do the same. We can face our struggles, and our troubles, and our griefs, with the assurance that the Holy Spirit is in all of God's people, and his ministry, and his upholding.

We're not alone, because in the ministry of the Spirit, Jesus is with us. So don't doubt your value this evening. You matter. You matter immensely. You're precious to God, and you're loved by him more than you can know.

[24 : 39] As Psalm 73 puts it, our flesh and our heart may faint and fail, but God will fail me never. Our flesh, at least my flesh and my heart, fail all the time.

But as the Word of God says, when we are unfaithful, when we are faithless, he is faithful. Our flesh and heart may faint and fail, but God will fail us never. And this is the love that we all need.

The love that we are all made for. And it's ours in Jesus. So we matter. Second word of application. We must be mirrors. The reality of God being love has implications for all of us who are Christians.

You see, when we come to trust Jesus, he takes up residence in our hearts and he begins to make us like himself. And as we read in 1 John 4, one of the criteria John uses to assess if someone is a Christian or not is whether or not they love their fellow Christians.

John's pretty brutal, isn't he? He says, anyone who does not love does not know God for God is love.

[25 : 51] John would say, someone would come to him and say that they love God but they don't love their brother, their fellow Christian. He'll say, you're a liar and the truth isn't in you. There's no messing about with John. He's got no qualms about it.

He says, you say you're a Christian but you don't love. You don't know God. If you did, you would have love, not perfect love, but love to some degree would be evident.

And that is one of the things that the Bible calls us to assess in our hearts before we come to communion, isn't it? I grew up in the Western Isles and communion was very much it was always presented as an individual thing.

Everyone focused upon themselves, heads down, eyes closed. It's called communion for a reason. It's not communion with the Lord but it's also communion with each other. Remember with 1 Corinthians, the great thing that Paul takes them to task over is how they relate to each other.

Some of you are going ahead and eating and others are going hungry. Others of you are getting drunk and others are going without. He's challenging them about their relationships with each other and he says, anyone who eats and drinks but without discerning the body, who is the body of Christ?

[27 : 03] Look around. You're seeing them. So one of the great things we are to challenge ourselves with and examine our hearts over before communion is how am I relating to my fellow Christians?

Is there something I need to repent of? Is there someone I need to forgive? Is there someone I need to ask for forgiveness from? As we said, God loves his enemies and we're called to do likewise.

We're to be his mirrors. God loves the created world. We're to mirror that. We should do as well. We should care for it and enjoy it as God wants us to. And God in his love loves his son.

We're to be mirrors of that too. The greatest mark of being a Christian is simply this. We love Jesus. It's not necessarily that we have a huge experience or we've had a road to Damascus type moment.

The greatest mark that we belong to Jesus is simply that, that we love him. If you can say that you love the Lord Jesus Christ tonight, that's not a natural thing. That's a work of the Spirit of God.

[28 : 11] If there's love for Jesus in your heart, that's a sign that you are his, that you belong to him. God loves his enemies. God loves his world. God loves his son and God loves his people.

I'm guilty of this and maybe, well, hopefully not just me. It's easy to knock the church, isn't it? It's easy to sit and slag off the church. The church will always have failings.

We don't have to work too hard to find them. We don't have to work too hard to find faults and imperfections, things that could be done better, things that were not handled well. But it's a reminder that God loves his church.

Jesus loves his bride. And how much does he love his bride? He gave his life for the church. It'd be a bit like going up to somebody and saying, listen, I really like you, but your wife, oh, she's a horror.

I don't think that'll go down too well. So please don't try that when you go home. But we try that with Jesus. So I love you, Lord, but your church, your bride, the one you love and gave your life for.

[29 : 29] But I hear you say, but the church is really unlovable. You're right. Sometimes it is. Sometimes the church is particularly ugly.

Sometimes the church is a particularly difficult place to be and a hurtful place to be. But the love of God is love for the unlovely. The love of God is love that is undeserved.

Nothing in us warrants God to love us. He just gives it freely. And it's that love that Jesus showers on his bride. And it's that love that we are called to mirror.

It's the love of God in us coming out to our enemies, to the world, to Jesus, and to God's people. If we're not loving, what do we need to do?

We need to examine our hearts. If we're not loving, could it be that we're not in Christ? If our love has grown cold, and again, let's be honest about this, it can and it does, doesn't it?

[30 : 38] I'm very thankful for that letter that Jesus wrote to the church in Ephesus. He says, you're busy. Your doctrine's great. You know your catechisms. You've memorized the Westminster Confession.

You've got various outreaches and lunches and different activities going on, but I have this against you. You've lost the love that you had. You've lost your first love. Go back and do the things.

Repent, and go back and do the things you did at first. If our love has grown cold, that's what Jesus tells us to do, to repent, to turn around, to go back, to do the things we did at first, to do the things that fill our hearts with love for Jesus and his people.

And we have to go back to the cross. We love because he first loved us. When we had no word of him, he gave his life for us. We need to think on his love for us.

We need to meditate on it. And we can experience it and enjoy it. We love because he first loved us.

[31 : 46] Jesus says, abide in me and in my love and you will produce much fruit. Here's how to be a fruitful Christian. Make much of Jesus and abide in his love. Delight in his love.

Think in his love. And he does a work in us. So we matter. We're to be mirrors. I'm no good at alliterations. I don't have a third M.

But we are to know this love. We mentioned already Ephesians 3, Paul praying for the church. In Ephesus, we had a church that lived in the shadow of the occult.

A church that was under huge pressure, spiritual warfare, various attacks, persecution, so much Paul could pray for. And what does he pray for? I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the Lord's holy people to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

All the things he could pray for, essentially he prays, I pray that you might know God's love better. Isn't that amazing? That you might have power together with all God's people to grasp how wide, long, high and deep is the love of Christ and to know the love that surpasses knowledge.

[33 : 09] There's a contradiction in terms right there. To know it and it passes knowledge. This is the love that we've been made for and God wants us not just to know it as a theoretical concept, but to experience it, taste and see that God is good, that those who trust in him are blessed.

In Jesus, this is the love that we've been set apart to get to know, to experience. And God loves to pour his love out on us. Jesus delights to bless, to give good gifts to his children.

He delights to answer prayer. He delights to meet us in our need. And in the love of Christ, we have a love that we will spend eternity getting to know. That's the journey we're on.

And what a wonderful journey it is. God is love. Amen. Let's bow our heads and let's pray.

Our Father, we thank you for your love for us. If we're honest, we struggle to believe it sometimes. We see our sin and we find ourselves so unlovable. But we thank you for the reality that there is nothing in us that warrants your love, but you give it so freely.

[34 : 32] And because there's nothing that warrants our love, that we've done nothing to earn it, there's nothing we can do to lose it. There's nothing we can do to make you love us more, nothing we can do to make you love us less.

You have chosen to set your love upon us. And for that, we thank you. Thank you for the awesome demonstration of your love at the cross of Calvary, that Jesus would stretch out his arms to embrace the nails, to embrace the cross because of the great love that he has for his people and for the joy that was set before him, the joy of being together with his people for eternity.

May we each know that love, not just know about it, but that we might know the reality of it in our own hearts, even in this moment. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.