

The Wonder of His Love (1)

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Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn this morning to the passage we read in 1st John, that's 1st John chapter 4 and reading again at verse 9. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

We are going to look at this verse today, both this morning and also this evening, looking at the various aspects of what is contained in the verse, what surrounds the verse, what is behind the verse, as we find John here expressing how the love of God has been made manifest among us, how it has been revealed, made openly visible to us.

And of course that is explained as in the fact that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins in verse 10, but here it was manifested that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him.

There is no greater subject than the love of God. Not even in the Bible, in everything the Bible contains, there is no greater topic, no more important subject than the love of God.

Because the love of God is the source from which the river of salvation flows. Everything that is contained in that great river of salvation, that has been revealed down through history as recorded in the Bible.

[1 : 39] Everything that is contained in that river of salvation. Things like the forgiveness of sins. Things like our justification, our coming to be accounted righteous before God.

Things like our being sanctified and prepared and made ready for heaven. Things like heaven itself in its preparedness as it awaits God's people. All of these things that belong to our salvation.

If you think of it as a great river, this is the source of it. God so loved the world that he sent, that he gave his only begotten Son.

And that emphasis is something that is focused especially on Jesus Christ. And especially here on his being sent by God, by God the Father into the world.

This is how God's love has been made manifest among us. It's come to be revealed and it's come to be exposed to us so that we can actually see it. It's been made visible.

[2 : 41] The love of God has been made visible in the person and the work of Jesus Christ. In his coming into the world and all that is involved in that coming.

In his being sent by the Father into the world. And I'd like us to just consider two things today. First of them this morning and the second this evening.

You'll find it said out that way in your notes. First of all we'll just consider as a subject the wonder of his love. We sing of the wonder of his love many times.

There are songs as well as things in the Psalms that speak about the love of God. And the wonder that God's people have in respect to the love of God as they see the love of God made manifest.

The wonder of his love. And this morning we're going to look at the wonder of his love in the sense that it is a wonder that he loved us at all.

[3 : 40] Now that's going to involve looking at how this passage is set in terms of connecting the love of God with our sin. Connecting the love of God with the propitiation that's in Jesus against our sin.

Or against our sinfulness. As it has drawn the wrath of God. And we're going to look at that this evening. How it finishes off the verse. But this morning we have to look at the wonder that God loved us at all considering our sinfulness.

Considering that we are sinful in the ways that the Bible describes. And we're just going to pick on three of them. Now you might not think that's a terribly positive Christmas message. That it's not really something that's vibrant and filled with joy.

Well it's not in itself. But the point is the love of God is. And you cannot understand the love of God. And appreciate the love of God. Except that is it love for sinners.

And love for the kind of people the Bible describes. And that we actually are. You cannot actually come to the love of God in Jesus Christ.

[4 : 45] And leave the topic of sin aside. It is that that gave him his name. Jesus. You shall call his name Jesus. For he will save his people from their sins.

We don't celebrate Christmas as such. We're not killjoys in the way some people are. That suggest that everything to do with Christmas is just nasty.

And pagan. And Christians shouldn't have any involvement in it whatsoever. When we're saying that we don't celebrate Christmas. What I mean is we don't celebrate the worldliness that you find associated with Christmas.

But we celebrate the love of God. We celebrate it at all times of course. Not just at this particular time of year. But there is a focus more than at other times.

Even for people who don't usually or don't at all come to church. At least there's a semblance of recognition. That something happened in the history of this world.

[5 : 48] That is quite amazing and out of the ordinary. Even if they don't believe in the Jesus the Bible speaks about. And we're here to wonder at that love.

That he loved us at all. Considering what we are. Let's look at it in the way it's set out for us. First of all it's a wonder that he loved us at all.

Considering our enmity. He will save his people from their sins. And the Bible makes it clear. Right from the outset of its description of the creation of human beings.

We've looked at recently in the prayer meeting. And as it goes on in chapter 3 of Genesis. To describe our fall. To describe that event. That historical event. That took place when we rebelled in Adam and Eve against God.

From then on we have been enemies of God. We have been at enmity with him. We've put up the barriers of our souls against him.

[6 : 53] We don't want him to be lord of our lives. As we are in ourselves. As we are left to ourselves. And the Bible makes it clear. Romans chapter 8 for example. And verse 7 is just one verse that tells us.

That the mind of the flesh. That's the carnal mind. The mind that is sinful. The mind that has not been changed by the grace of God. What is it? It is enmity against God.

That mind is enmity against God. Now you don't find that very often emphasized at Christmas time. In the Christmas message of the world. You don't find that nicely packaged up.

And presented as something that really is important for us to accept of ourselves. But the Bible presents it as something. If you like it's gift wrapped in grace.

So that we'll appreciate the love that came to deal with it. That came to tackle it head on. And actually overcome that enmity. That is in our hearts.

[7 : 55] Yes there's something on the part of God too. We've looked at that very recently. As a study in itself. But we're looking here at the enmity that you know is in your heart.

And I know in my heart. And that enmity is an enmity that is dishonoring to God. That's dishonoring to God. He created us for himself.

He created us for fellowship with him. He created us that we should be and remain friends with him. That he should be our greatest friend and our best friend. And we've turned from that and you can see it in Adam the moment.

He sinned against God and had a bad conscience. What did he do? He didn't rush into the presence of God. He didn't welcome the voice of God. He hid himself. There was something in his heart that caused him.

Instead of approaching God and taking delight in God. There's in his heart now that which resists God. Which doesn't want God near him. Which considers God as an enemy.

[8 : 57] As someone to be opposed. As someone not to like. That is what God loved. That's the kind of person that we are.

And that's the kind of person God loved when he loved sinners. When this verse tells you that the love of God has been made manifest among us. That God sent his only son into the world.

He sent him even though we are enemies of God. Isn't that what Romans also tells us? That while we were still enemies.

Christ died for us. He came to die. He came to die for such people as we are. In other words he came to die for his enemies. If you were asked to go and hug your dearest, your direst enemy. And make him your dearest friend. You know how difficult that is. Somebody who has really shown enmity towards you. Somebody who doesn't want to know you.

[10:04] And is set on making life as difficult as possible for you. I'm not sure if we have someone like that in our lives. But you know that kind of thing exists. And you know that to a measure.

You and I have come across that in our own lives from time to time. When to a degree at least we are at enmity. Or others are at enmity with us. Have we fallen out?

Have they fallen out with us? The thought of actually going directly to them and saying. Look. I love you so much that I want to make you my best friend.

You know how difficult that would be. How contrary to your nature that is. But it's not contrary to the nature of God. Because that's what he loved.

When he loved the likes of you and I. His love has been made manifest. That he sent his son for enemies to be made friends.

[11:06] Secondly. It's a wonder that he loved us at all. Considering our guilt. The Bible tells us that. One of the things attached to our sin and our sinfulness.

Is that we are guilty before God. Now we're not awaiting trial. We're not like a prisoner on remand. That has to go to face the accusations against him.

In a court of law. And wait to hear what the judge has to say. We've been sentenced. We've been found wanting. God from the moment we sinned.

Marked us up as guilty in his books. We've been tried in his court. Under his judgment. Under his perfect. Unerring judgment.

Unerring judgment. And we've been found guilty. Of transgressing his law. We've been sentenced. You remember what he said to Adam. You may eat.

[12:05] Of all the trees of this garden. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. You may not eat. For in the day that you eat of it. You will surely die.

And the fact that we die. Is evidence enough. That God has already sentenced us. Death. Has already come upon us.

Romans 3. Verses 19 to 20. A passage that demonstrates. In relation to God. And to the law of God. And all that Paul is dealing with there.

By way of grace. Against the background of the law. But he tells us there. That everyone is guilty before God. Without exception. Every human being.

That's no more than a human being. Every human being. Since the fall. Is held accountable to God. And announced by God. As guilty in his presence. And there's no appeal against that.

[13:06] You cannot undo. Yourself. What has taken place. So that God holds you guilty.

And anyway. Doesn't it actually. Make itself known. In your conscience. In my conscience. When you have a bad conscience. Where does the bad conscience.

Come from. It's impossible to explain. Conscience. And the workings of conscience. By evolution. That's not something that. Developed.

In the way evolution says. From a very simple form of life. Into what you now know. As a sophisticated human being. That has a conscience. There's such a thing. As a conscience. Because human beings. Have a relationship. With God. And with God's law. And with God's standard. Conscience. Is God's prosecutor. In our soul. When it is.

[14:04] A bad conscience. Conscience. One of the Puritan writers. William Garnell. Put it this way.

Conscience is God's prison. In the person's own heart. And no one can release him. Except the one who put him there. And God brings about.

In your conscience. The knowledge of sin. And a knowledge. And an awareness. Of the guiltiness. That is attached to you. In being a sinner. In it. That's when your conscience.

Strikes you. That's when. The pain of conscience. Hits you. No one can actually. Do. Away with that. No one can actually. Take you out of that prison. To use Garnell's word.

Except the one who puts you there. That's the beauty. Of the love of God. Because the love of God. Came. To be manifest. In Jesus Christ. So that your bad conscience.

[14:58] Will be turned into a good conscience. So that instead of. Your conscience. Accusing you. Of being guilty. Before God. Your conscience.

Would assure you. That you are righteous. In Jesus Christ. As if you had never sinned. And don't you come. When you confess. Your sin to God.
In a penitent confession. Isn't the fact. Of your guilt. There actually. Also clear to you. We don't come. To confess. Our sins. To God. Blandly.
Without emotion. We don't come. To confess. Our God. Our sins. To God. In a way. That does not know. Anything. Of conscience. As we do so.
When you come. To God. And confess. Your sin. Like David did. In Psalm 51. You don't have to read. Very far. Into that Psalm. Before you realize. The death.
[15 : 55] Of David's sorrow. I'm so sorry. Lord. That I ever. Did this. Against you. And you only. I have sinned.

And I feel. So bad. About it. Why does he feel. Bad about it. Because he knows. That in his conscience. He cannot rest. Until this is dealt with.
That's what you find. In every penitent. Confession. A sense of sin. A sense of guilt. Psalm 130. One of the great. Psalms.
That we know so well. And off by heart. Probably. Lord. From the depths. To thee I cried. If thou were to mark. Iniquity.
Lord. Who could stand. But there is. Forgiveness with you. There is. In fact. The word that's used there. There is steadfast love. With you. The love. That's been manifested.
[16 : 53] In Christ. Now we're not dealing with. These issues. Of sin. Such as. Enmity. And guilt. So that we'll leave this place. Saying well that was really. A pretty negative affair.

We're not dealing with it. Just because we think. That it's right. To include sin. Or because people will regard. Just as a very free church. Thing to do. We're doing it. Because you cannot come. Really. To appreciate. The birth of our savior. Without it being attached. To our sin. Sin. And dealing with our sin. And overcoming our sin. And the guilt of our sin.
Have you ever thought about. The love of God. In regard to it being. The love of your judge. We usually think of the love of God. As the love of.
Our father. The love of. The father of his children. Loving them in Christ. With an everlasting love. And sending Christ. For them. To die for them.
[17 : 48] Yes of course it is that. But God is many things. Beside being father. He's the law giver. He's the judge. Of all the earth.

He's the sovereign judge. And when you think about his love. You cannot detach his love. From the fact that he is judge either. He has sentenced us.
He has pronounced that sentence. Over us rightly. And justly. We hold our hands up. And say Lord. I acknowledge. That I'm guilty. I have no appeal. I've done it. I've brought it on myself.
But here is God. And what's he doing? What's he doing? Sending his son into the world. What's he doing? As the judge.
Sending his son into the world. To manifest his love. He's acting for our benefit. You know that the Bible.
[18 : 45] In many places. Pictures our salvation. In terms of a court of law. Well just picture for a moment. All of us together. In the dock.

In God's court of law. There is the judge. Sitting on the bench. And you're looking up. And staring into his eyes. And you know that he's made his pronouncement. On you. That you are guilty in his sight.
That you have no appeal against it. And unless he's merciful. And unless he does something. That you yourself cannot do. That's where you'll stay forever. And then the side door opens.
And in comes someone else. And you realize this is the judge's son. And the judge says to his own son.
You go and take the place of all these people. So that they can be set free. From their sentence. And the son goes.
[19 : 44] And stands in the dock. And God the judge says to him. I'm putting all their sins. Onto you. And along with all their sins.

I'm applying to you. All their guilt. It's going on your record. You have none of your own. You have always been perfect. You remain perfect in yourself.
But I am taking the sins of my people. I'm putting them onto you. And onto your record. Onto your account. And you will have to pay for them. And the son says.

I willingly do it. And the judge sentences him. And says.
 Son. You must die. And you must die the death. That they deserved. And then the judge says.
 [20 : 48] Take him down. And he's put away. Think about this. The love of God.
 For his children. Sent his own son. To hell for them. Now you're saying. That's too strong. That's going too far.
 That's very strong language. It's the language. Of truth. Because what Jesus experienced. In his death on the cross. Even if we.
 Are not. Saying that he went. To the place. Called hell. For his people. He took all. That is. In hell. Into himself. He took it.
 Upon himself. The father. Laid it upon them. Because he laid all. Our sin upon them. And when you lay all. Your sin. Upon the son. That means.
 [21 : 49] That all the penalty. That's attached to that sin. Becomes his as well. And he took it. The love. Of God. Was made manifest. Where is it made manifest.
 That he sent his son. Into the world. To do what. To take the place. Of the condemned. To die their death.
 To go to hell. For them. Oh the wonder. That he loved us at all. Considering our enmity.
 And considering our guilt. And thirdly. Considering. Our filthiness. Yes. Because.
 The bible again. Tells us. Right through. From beginning to end. That our sin. Has defiled us. We are filthy. In God's sight. Morally.
 [22 : 43] And spiritually. Filthy. God. Smells. The stench. Of our sin. From us. It's something. That rises up.
 Into his nostrils. In heaven. If you like. And the bible. Again. And again. Shows us. The truth. Of that. You know yourselves. What it's like.
 When a farmer. Has been spreading. Slurry. In the fields. Maybe it doesn't. Happen very often. In Lewis. But when it does. You know it's happened. Why? Because the stench.
 Of it is overpowering. It comes in your windows. You have to keep the windows shut. Especially if you're living near. That place. All of that stuff.
 That's been held. In that huge tank. On the farm. Building up over the. Winter months. And as it comes to the springtime. And this is spread. All this liquid dung.
 [23 : 36] Is spread. On the fields. To nourish the fields. The grass. For it to be. To be fertilized. But the stench. Of it is unbearable. And that's how God.
 Smells. Our sin. Although it's much worse. Than that to him. It rises up. With its obnoxiousness. And its offensiveness.
 To God. Even the best human being. And Saul of Tarsus. In terms of diligent.
 Keeping of God's law. Was among the best. In that sense. Is. Is. But he came. To the point.
 When he met Christ. You realize. That that was just. A stench. In the presence. Of God. That he was filthy. That he needed.
 [24 : 38] Cleansing. And that only God. Could do this for him. And so it is. With David as well. You're aware.
 In Psalm. 51. That that's his prayer. Of confession. He had done. Evil things. He had sinned. Against God. He had sinned. Even to the extent. Of causing.
 The death. Of Bathsheba's husband. Placing him. Deliberately. In battle. In a place. Where he would get killed. Why? So that would cover up. The fact that David.
 Had committed adultery. That he had taken. This man's wife. To be his own. And it's a way. By which he was trying. To cover his track. So that nobody. Would ever find out. About it.
 Although of course. One thing. That he had forgotten. The most important thing. He had forgotten. Was that God knew. And that God knew. All about it. And that just like Adam. In the garden of Eden.
 [25 : 32] Couldn't hide from God. Or hide from his bad conscience. Nor could David. And all the way through that psalm. You find the burden. Of his heart. And the burden.
 Of his heart. Includes this. Wash me. He mentions. His blood guiltiness. He mentions also. His defilement. Wash me.
 Purge me. Cleanse me. And I shall be whiter. Than the snow. That's the burden. Of his heart. He comes to the God. Who alone. Can wash him.
 And it is. A wonder. That God loved us. At all. Considering. Our filthiness. It was.

As. Filthy sinners. That he loved us. He didn't love us. After we'd gone away. And washed ourselves. A bit. After we'd made ourselves.

[26 : 28] A bit more respectable. To him. Before we could come. Into his presence. He didn't love us. With the kind of love. That said about us. Well yes. I will love them.

But I'll do it. At a distance. I won't hug. I won't. Actually love them. To the extent. That I'll hug them. Close to myself. All you've got to do.

Is look at Luke 15. The parable of the prodigal. A picture of Christ. Receiving sinners. And coming to eat with them. The fellowship. That he enjoys. With those that he receives.

Those that come back to him. Here is this younger son. Where has he been? He has been. Lost. Sharing. Groveling with pigs.

In the open field. Anybody who's. Been with pigs. Even if you haven't been. Working with them. You know that they smell. And you know that the smell of them.

[27 : 25] Attaches to your clothes. Even after a few minutes. If you've spent. A fair while with them. You can't. I can assure you. You can't. Keep your boilers.

It's too long. You've got to throw them out. Because not even the washing. Will take the stench. From them. You just think of this young man. And he's coming back. To his father.

And to his father's house. He's not washed himself. He's not prepared himself. For that. He's just made his way back. There's nothing in the passage. At all. That suggests.

Somehow or other. He went to make himself. A bit more respectable. He couldn't. Because he had nothing. He couldn't buy new clothes. His money had run out. He had nothing.

Whatsoever. By which to commend himself. To the father. That he left behind. So long ago. And in one of the most.

[28 : 21] Emotional and beautiful passages. In the bible. You read. The following words. When he was yet. A great way off.

His father saw him. And he ran towards him. And he embraced him. And he kissed him on his neck. To the father.

The important thing. Was not where his son had been. But where he now was. That's not where he had spent. So much of his life.

Wasting it. It's that he was now back. Where he should have been. Where he ought to have been. Where he was welcome. Where love embraced him.

Despite the stench of his clothes. And one of the first things. The father said was. Bring out the best robe. And put it on him.

[29 : 25] You know. If you try to tidy yourself up. And come to God. After doing so. You'll miss out. On this greatest blessing. And you won't have that blessing.

At all. Because only God. Can dress you. In a way that's acceptable. To himself. And only the provision. Of his love. Can do that for you. When you come.

When you're filth. And say. Lord. Here I am. I know what I'm like. I accept your word. I accept its verdict. I accept its description.

I think in myself. That I'm very clean. Presentable. Respectable. The world thinks well of me.

People don't see me as filthy. I don't use bad language. I don't deliberately wrong people. But when you come to God.

[30 : 25] That doesn't matter. It's insignificant. It's not important. You know how he sees you. And that in the filthiness of our sins.

He's pleased to welcome us. As we repent of them. And turn to him. And come back to him. Isn't it a wonder. That God loved us at all.

Considering our enmity. Considering our guilt. Considering our filthiness. That he has come to love us. And to love us in such a love.

That sent his son into the world. To die the death he died for us. Tonight. God willing we'll look at the other side of this.

Another aspect of this. The second part of the verse. That he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. And we'll look at it. Under the title of.

[31 : 30] A wonder that he loved us so much. But before we finish with. A wonder that he loved us at all. Let's just think of this. Let's put it to myself first of all.

And you put it to yourself. It's a wonder that he loved us. Considering our enmity. It's a wonder that he loved us. Considering our guilt. It's a wonder that he loved us.

Considering our filthiness. And now it's a wonder to me. That I don't love him more. That I don't love him more than I do.

When I think of all of this. That he has loved me. In such a way. That he has loved me. Jesse Ryle. Had a great point in one of his writings.

That said something like this. That when we get to heaven. For all who get to heaven. One of the great surprises. Will be.

[32 : 30] When they see the beauty. The glory. The magnificence of Christ. Christ. When they come to appreciate. There as they cannot. Anywhere else. The love. With which God loved them.

In this Christ. One of the great surprises. He said. Will be. How little. We loved him. While we were in this world. It's true.

Why do we love him. So little. Compared to what we should. It's because. We just don't appreciate. As we should. The sheer love.

That he's had for sinners. In sending his son. Into this world. For us. I wonder. That he loved us. At all. I wonder. That we don't love him. More than we do. Let's pray. Lord our God.

[33 : 38] We come before you. Seeking humbly. That you would impress upon us. Something anew. Of the majesty. Of your love. Of its wonder.

And its grace. In our hearts. That you would impress upon us. The provisions. Of that love. When especially. In your son. You have provided for us. That fullness of life.

Help us Lord. We pray. As we go onwards. Through life. Increasingly. To come. To consider. That love of God. As the source. Of all blessing. To us. Continue with us.

Now. Throughout this day. Bring us back. We pray. This evening. To once more. Reflect upon. And give thanks. For this love. With which you have loved us. So wondrously.

Indeed. So surprisingly. In many ways. And that you have loved us. To such an extent. That you sent your own son. To die for us. Lord hear us we pray.

[34 : 36] For his name's sake. Amen.