1 John 3:11-18

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Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[0:00] Heavenly Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening. In Christ's name. Amen. Yeah, folks, grab a seat, grab a seat, grab a seat. If you're here for the first time, my name is Aaron. I'm a minister here. Come and say hi afterwards.

We are in a series looking at this epistle, 1 John. So we're looking at, we're going through 1, 2 and 3 John. And today's passage is obviously about love. I really like hearing when celebrities I like are genuinely nice people.
I don't know why. It just, it's kind of nice to hear. Apparently Post Malone is really lovely. I don't know if you knew that. Did you know that?
Yeah, yeah, apparently really nice guy. I've heard Tom Holland is very warm interpersonally. Millie Bobby Brown, I've read, is also like a really lovely woman.
When the writer of chapter 3 is talking about love and saying love one another, I want to make a distinction. He is not talking about this kind of natural warmth that like the folks I mentioned have just, that we just talked about, okay?
[1:22] That's a different thing. It's wonderful that they're like that. But the kind of love that John is talking about is different. He wants to tell us some hard things about love.

He wants to talk about real love. Hence the title. Is that up here? There we go. The Truth About Love. And the truth about love is it's more than just being sort of warm and nice.
So what he does in this passage is he raises the stakes when it comes to telling us what love is. And here's what he does. In these verses he says a lack of love is a very serious thing. If we don't have love for one another, that is a very, very serious thing.
He also tells us that real love is at the heart of the gospel. So let's get stuck into it. And the way we're going to do that is just getting our heads around a structure of the passage. And there's a number of ways that you can structure it.
[2:29] But let me tell you how I'm going to structure it. First, verse 11 is the summary verse, of course. But this is the message you've heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Love one another.

And then really simply, John gives us a negative example. And then he gives us a positive example. A negative example and then a positive example.
Very simple structure. Let's start with the negative example. Verse 12. We should not be like Cain, who was the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him?
Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Okay, very clear. Don't be like Cain. So what's the story here if you're new to faith?
What's the story here? Well, Cain and Abel were brothers. They were the children of Adam and Eve. You may know the story. They both brought offerings to God. And Cain... Sorry, I wasn't pointing to you.
[3:24] Okay. Okay. And Cain, right? Cain just kind of... He just phoned it in. He just phoned it in. Right? He brought some vegetables, right? Like turnip or something like that.

We don't know what he brought. He brought turnips or something. Right? Just phoned it in. Abel brought something from his flock. Something that was of great personal cost to him. And his offering was accepted by God.
And Cain's was rejected. Abel did right by God. He brought his best. Cain didn't. After that, Cain got really angry. He was really jealous of Abel's efforts. He was jealous of Abel's righteousness.
Abel's righteousness made him angry. So angry that he lured Abel into a field and killed him. It's the first murder in the Bible.

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Most famous murder. So when John brings up Cain and says, don't be like Cain, it's really serious. For the listeners of back in the days, Cain was like this, the archetype of treachery.
[4:22] He was like the original bad guy. For us, if it was written today, it would be like saying, don't be like Hitler or don't be like Pol Pot or don't be like Stalin.

Cain was like synonymous with hatred. And it was a hatred born out of this ugly jealousy. He was so offended by Abel's relationship with God.
Abel thinks he's so spiritual. Look at him. I want to pause here for a moment and just apply this. So when John says love one another, something you've probably already worked out, is actually talking about love within the church, within the body of Christ.
Now, let me ask you a hard question. When someone seems to be really jonesing with God, trying hard, is really involved, super keen, you know, got the hand, the plow.
Is there anything in your heart, and be honest with yourself, is there anything in your heart that annoys you about that? Right? There's a little voice in your head go, goodness.
[5:42] They're a bit showy, aren't they? They seem quite keen. Bit too eager. And when your heart is really unhealthy, do you ever sort of like just diagnose it in your brain?

Like, ooh, probably some daddy issues there or something going on, you know. That's probably why. Probably a bit insecure. Something like that. Do you ever get jealous of someone's relationship with God when they're too eager?
They seem a bit too eager, a bit too righteous. Does that offend you? Folks, that is a spiritually dangerous place to be. It's a Cain way of living.
It has the smell of death about it. And if that's you, you need to repent. Okay, that's verse 12. And the writer goes on a little bit of a tangent.
In verse 13, he says, Now, how does that relate to the verse that's just happened? Well, here it is.
[6:46] Cain was offended by Abel's righteousness. It was an offense to him. John is saying, John is saying, you know, Cain is kind of like a prototype of the world.

And the relationship you have with the world is going to be a bit like maybe Cain's relationship with Abel. Let me explain that. So as Christians, we're going to live a certain way. We're going to make certain decisions. We're going to talk a certain way. And that's going to rile up some people around us.
Do you remember when Jesus turned over the money changers table in the temple? I'll read it to you to remind you. This is from Matthew 21. And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple.
And he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he said to them, It is written, my house should be called a house of prayer. You've made it a den of robbers. And the blind in the lame came to him in the temple.
And he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things he did, they were indignant.
[7:48] Jesus was doing wonderful things. And their response was they were just angry. See, for some folks, they're going to find righteousness. They're going to find goodness offensive.

John's saying, Just don't be surprised if you're at the receiving end of that, like Cain. That's how that relates. So let me summarize. Where are we at? All right, okay?
You can say it like this. Do you know how bright lights hurt your eyes? It's a bit like that. When you live brightly for Jesus, some people are immediately going to think, some people will take that as a judgment on them when you live really well.
Your righteousness is going to sting in their eyes. It's a bit too bright. And their position, maybe unspoken, it might be, and who are you to judge? Even if they say nothing.
And that's because I think we all want to be at the top of the moral pyramid, right? We're all scrambling to the top of the pyramid. We want to be the most right. And so when Christians live out their faith, saying yes to something, saying no to other things, that can be threatening to some.
[8:55] And sometimes the response from others will be anger. So John says, don't be surprised by that. And a reminder of the first point here. If you are the one who feels threatened by the faith of another Christian, it gets you back up.

That is a dangerous place to be. You're in trouble. You're in spiritual trouble. You're in spiritual danger. You need to bring that to Jesus. And the reason you need to bring that to Jesus is in verse 14.

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Verse 14. We're still in the negative example. Remember the structure? Negative. Don't be like this. Be like this. Negative example. Verse 14. Now we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers, the brothers and the sisters.
Whoever does not love abides in death. That's very full on, isn't it? Everyone who hates his brother or sister is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.
So at the start I said Jesus raises the stakes of everything. What's he doing here? He's raising the stakes, isn't he? He's saying that the love you have for the Christians around you is a litmus test for the reality of your faith.
[10:09] Let me give you a good example of this. A positive example actually. A lovely example. So I was at my mother's funeral like a month ago in Australia.

Thanks for your prayers on that. No, I guess it was about three weeks ago actually. And at the reception afterwards I spoke to a cousin of mine who I speak to once every five years. And they were there.
He's about the same age as me. They have two children aged 14 and 17. And we were chatting away. There is no Christians in my family except for one brother.
My immediate brother Hilton who listens to this. Hello Hilton. And speaking to my cousin Chris and he said to me we're chatting at the reception he goes, he says to me oh my daughter.
I said how are you kids? He goes oh my daughter. She's found the church. And which was his way of saying she's become a Christian. And I said this is fantastic.
[11:04] And he told me the church. And it's a great church in Auckland. I know this church. And I said how did this I said are you okay with this?

I said yeah, yeah. And I said how did this happen? And he said well it actually happened when we come and stayed at your place for the weekend four years ago. So they did an Alaskan cruise and they came over as people do in my family.
They come over, they stay with us for a few days and then they do the Alaskan cruise and go back to the other side of the world. And he said yeah, it happened when we visited. So when they were visiting with us they were here for a weekend and I said look no pressure but do you want to come to church?
And they said sure we'll come to church. I think they were being polite. Which is fine. And so they came to church. I don't remember it being a particularly good service. It was just like a normal service. It's just like a service.
I got up here, I said some stuff. I said afterwards, I said how was that? I went no, that was good. Thanks for the invite. No conversation, nothing, right? So my friend Chris said to me, my cousin Chris said to me, yeah so she came, it happened when she came to your church four years ago and she said yep this is for me.
[12:18] And went home and joined the church. Ten years old. She was ten years old. And I'm thinking in my head, I wonder how genuine this is. And I said so what does it look like on a Sunday?

And he said we drop her off at 7.30am and she serves at the first service in Sunday school so that she can attend the next service and sit in the pews.
And I thought oh yeah she's all in. Isn't she Jacob? She's all in. Isn't this wonderful? She's passed from death into life and the evidence of that is she loves the children in the church and so she serves them.
So John says look, the preeminent virtue of a Christian is love. And I'll remind you of a few verses here. Galatians 5. For in Christ there's no circumcision or uncircumcision.
Doesn't count for anything. But only faith working through love. Another one from Galatians 5. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word. Love your neighbor as yourself.
[13:31] Verse 22. For the fruit of the spirit is love and then joy and peace and kindness etc. 1 Corinthians 13. But if I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing.

So John here is reminding us of the importance of love and particularly the importance of loving other Christians. But he's not just saying it's important.
Look at verse 14 again. We know we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers and sisters. Whoever does not love abides in death.
He is saying if you have the new life in Christ that should lead to love for other believers. And he is also saying if you don't have that new love maybe you don't have that new life.

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If you don't have that love maybe you don't have that new life. It's very full on, I know. I can't make that say anything else though.
[14:43] This is what it's saying. And then he raises the stakes again in verse 15. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. And you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. It's very extreme language.

You know it's pulling from the cancer and it's pulling from the Beatitudes as well. He's saying if you hate you need to ask yourself do I have the life of God in me? It's very challenging, isn't it?
Okay, negative examples. Positive examples now. We'll start with verse 16. But this we know love. By this we know love.
That he laid down his life for us. This is Christ. We ought to lay down our life for the brothers and sisters. So the negative example don't be like Cain. The positive example be like Jesus. And what does it look like?
It looks like self-sacrifice. It looks like real sacrifice. Christ laid down his life and this is, John is saying, is the grandest picture of what love should look like. And why is it the grandest picture?
[15:45] It's because this is the greatest thing we've got. The greatest thing we've got is our life. And the worst thing you can do to somebody is take it from them.

Which is what Cain did. So to give your life for somebody else is the greatest expression of love. But now do you see the word ought in there?
By this we know love. That he laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. John is telling us that Christ's sacrifice is not just something to be in awe of and go, wow, that's amazing what Jesus did.
Thank you, Jesus. It's not something just to be in awe of. There's an ought in there. We're supposed to copy it. Now you may have heard the story of John Harper.
Have you heard the story of John Harper? No. Well, I'm quite well read. It was on the... So... The Titanic.
[16:48] Does it ring any bells? John Harper on the Titanic? Oh, there you go. Oh, what don't you tell us? So apparently... So the ship was going down and there's this guy called John Harper and he's a Christian guy.

I think he's a minister. He's going around asking people, do you know Jesus as the ship is going down? Because he knows they're done for. One guy gets really angry with him.
Good example of what we just talked about. Doesn't have a life jacket. John takes off his life jacket, gives it to the guy who's angry with him and says, look, man, you need this more than I do.
John Harper goes into the water without a life jacket. He leads a man to Christ whilst in the water. That man remained a Christian and said he was Harper's last convert before Harper slipped under the water.
I love hearing stories like this but they're also a bit much, aren't they? They're also a little bit much. We're unlikely to face these situations which is why verse 17 is here.
[17:53] Look at the next verse. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? I'll read it again because it's really full on.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees a brother in need yet closes his heart against him, the question is, how does God's love abide in this person?
So we're not talking about really big things here, giving up your life jacket at the Titanic. We're talking about small things. And again, it's talking about other people in the church. What's the big idea?
It's pretty simple. It's saying, it asks the question, if a Christian can meet the need of another Christian responsibly and doesn't do that on a regular basis, John's question is this, has God actually opened that person's heart?
That's a great question, isn't it? It's a searching question. If we make a confession of faith, if we say, we're a Christian, but we don't want to be involved in God's people, what do we conclude?
[19:10] What do we conclude? What's going on? The question's got to be, what's happening in this person's heart? You see a need, you have the means to help, your default position is always no.

If that is a pattern in life, you have to ask the question, have you really understood the love that God has for you?

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Have you accepted his love? And then verse 18 doubles down on this. Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.
What's he saying? It's pretty clear he's saying, we can't just be theoretical about love. If love is genuine, it's got to be constructive. And I do want to say at this point, because it's quite heavy, well done.
I mean, in my job, I hear lots of stories. I hear lots of encouraging stories in my job about how people have been helping each other out around here. So, brilliant, well done. My family's been at the receiving end of that help and we are very grateful.
[20:19] But we can't just be theorists on this stuff, can we? Okay, let me wrap up here. Let me reiterate a couple of questions John raises for us.

If we have Cain-like tendencies, if we are offended by other people's eagerness, I want this to be very clear for you, you are in spiritual danger.
second, if we make a confession of faith and we do not want to be involved in God's people, what do we conclude?
Does that person with no costly love for the people of God, does that person know the love of God? It's a really good question. You know, David Short, who retired, who was just about to retire, preached his last sermon last week, in his pastoral exhortation at the end of the service last week, said something similar, even more full on.
He said, if we're unloving towards each other, we're doing Satan's work. And now, just a caveat before we finish here, because I know how serious this is.
[21:31] If you've ever gotten really annoyed at somebody around here, I am not saying you're not a Christian. if you have these kind of one-off annoying things.

I'm not talking about these casual, over-quickly hatred moments we have sometimes. We're talking about just the way of being in the world. Like, you know, I would go to Costco every couple of weeks.
I hate, like, four people at Costco every time I go. Have you been to Costco? Oh, it's horrible. People who are walking around like they're enjoying this.
Moving slowly, leaving their cart in the middle of the lanes without moving it to the side. I hate these people, right? Just for a minute and then I get right with Jesus. This is not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a pattern of life that suggests you're in spiritual danger. Another way of saying it, just to finish here, the fruit of your life points back to something, yeah?
[22:40] And if there's ongoing resistance to loving God's people in practical ways, I think maybe you haven't experienced God's love for yourself in a really deep way.

Do you know God's love? And if you do, like David said last week, that's going to produce lots and lots of invisible acts of love, small and big. So perhaps a really good thing to go away with out of this is, is this something we can work on?
Right? Can we work on this? Can we do better at this? Because of the way Jesus has loved us, can we do better at this?
And that's something for you to bring to Jesus. Amen. Amen.

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