

1 John 4:7-5:5

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[0 : 00] Friends, while you're standing, let me pray for us. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this evening, in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Yeah, be seated. Lovely to see you all.

If you're visiting with us, my name is Aaron. I'm the minister here that looks after this service. Well done on getting to church tonight after a weekend of huge celebrations and wonderful to have Steve James with us this evening and Bishop Charlie. We're looking at one John tonight. It's a longish reading and pretty much, I'm just going to focus in on verses 7 to 12 of chapter 4. Most of the stuff that's in here is captured in those verses and it's wonderfully Trinitarian, which is brilliant for Trinity Sunday. So, you know how very clever preachers, they have like, you know this Jacob, have like these three-point sermons and each point starts with the same letter. You probably do that, Steve James, do you? No, okay. Anyway, very clever preachers, so they, each point starts with the same letter like passion, power, praise or something like that.

I've never been able to do that, to be honest. And I've recently discovered there's a whole another level of cleverness. It's where each point starts with a, each word is a letter that spells a word. Does that make sense? That's, that's really good. And so it's like your points are like Jesus, others and yourself. And so that spells joy. That's joy, right?

There we go. I get that a lot. So that's next level, that's next level preaching. Tonight, I thought I'd have a crack at it because it's a special weekend. We have a special guest.

[2 : 05] This is my first time. I'm excited. Jacob's excited. Let's go for the big picture first though. Okay. Verse seven, let us love one another. So that's the big idea. And John's been banging this drum for a while now. I think this is the third time in one John he said that, let us love one another. It's like, it's like he knew we'd find it difficult. So he keeps repeating it. But this time, the third time he goes much deeper. So he's already been talking about loving one another, but he doesn't want us to think, well, let's just, let's just try really hard this time.

Let's just try harder. So what he does is he fortifies this command to love by pointing us to three things. Doctrine, history, and the why. Doctrine, history, and the why. What's that spell?

Jacob? Why? Now, genuine question. I have no idea what that spells, to be honest. Like I, I really wanted to impress the visitors. And I think it's like, da-hee-wa. Let's just keep going.

Okay. So love one another. What does John do first? He tells us some doctrine, just doctrine, basic doctrine, verses seven and eight. Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. What's it trying to tell us? It's telling us something about the doctrine of God.

It's telling us we love one another because love is central to who God is. He's saying he is love, God is love. When God speaks, when he acts, it's a lover at work. And that's a remarkable thing to remember and to think about. Behind the universe is not some old man like pulling levers.

[4 : 04] Behind the universe is a lover. And love is at the core of who God is. So all he does is loving. All his actions, his thoughts, everything. Love drives it all. And you could say, yes, but I've read stories about God being angry. That's true. But it's not central to who God is. When God is angry, it's because he loves. Like we get angry when somebody we care about is ruining their life through poor decisions.

We get angry about that because we love them. So if that is true, if God is love, and if it's true that God lives in us through his Holy Spirit, then the thing that is central to God becomes part of you. The thing that's central to God becomes part of you. That's what verse 7 says right at the end there. Whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. That's what that means. And verse 8 says this negatively. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. That's all the

abiding stuff that that's what that's talking about. So let me just say it differently, okay? So we believe in cause and effect, right? Cause and effect. You go for a run, you feel tired. I remember at university, daring a friend of mine who was new to sushi, daring him to eat a whole tablespoon of wasabi, right? And afterwards he said, I don't feel very good, right? So that's just a stupid example.

But it's just cause and effect. Something big happens, there's going to be a result. When God invades your life, things are going to change. God, who is love, invades your life. That becomes, should become central to who you are. You may know the story about Augustine. Augustine was this fourth century theologian, the Bishop of North Africa. And shortly after his conversion, he runs, he sees an old girlfriend coming towards him on the street. And before his conversion, he was a bit of a lethario. And anyway, he, he, he recognizes her. And so he quickly just turns around and starts walking the other way. And the woman's quite surprised by this. She's really surprised to see Augustine walking away. And she cries out and she says, Augustine, it is I. And Augustine's continue moving away. And he replies, yes, but it is not I. Because Jesus had invaded his life and it has changed his life. So on Trinity Sunday, let's just remember this part of doctrine, about the doctrine of God. The Holy Spirit is in us to help us be more like Christ, to love because God is love. [6 : 56] So when John says love one another, first, he reminds us of a doctrine. God is love. We share his nature. We should also love. That's first point. Then John moves from doctrine to history. This is verses 9 and 10. If 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.

And this is love. Not that we have loved God, but he loved us and sent his son to be a propitiation for our sins. So John moves from abstract to concrete. He says, let me tell you about God's love, how it has shown up in history, what that looks like. And he points us to the cross, the most incredible example of love. So the love that John is talking about is not mushy.

It's not soft. It's not without teeth. It's not sloppy. It's not hollow. It looks like sacrifice. And to emphasize the sacrifice, do you notice, and I love this, it talks about God sent his only son, his only son. It's a great reminder, isn't it?

When there needed to be a propitiation, when there needed to be the sacrifice, God didn't say, okay, you know what? I'm going to just, you know, I'll find some middle management angelic being to send down. He sends his son, his only son. The father loves his son, his precious son. And he sent him to die for us. And Jesus was willing to do that. And verse 10 says, this is what love looks like. So if you wonder what God's love looks like, or if you ask yourself, does God love me? [8 : 52] Think history. Remember the cross. Because the way God loves you now was the way God loved you then, with that kind of sacrifice. The way God loves you now is the way God loved you then. God was so determined to be with you, he delivered up his own son to make that happen. And just for a moment more, let's just pause on verse 10 for just a little bit longer here. In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but he loved us. It's a reminder that God's love is not like human love. It's not the mature.

It's not dependent on being loved back. There's none of this kind of 12-year-old, you know, like when you're, well, I don't know, but you know, like you're at a school yard, you're like 12, and you're like some girl, and you say, oh, ask my best friend to ask their best friend, and, you know, find out if they like me. And if they like me, I'll like them. But if they don't like me, then I hate them, you know, kind of thing, right? This says something quite radical.

It says, even when we ignore God, even when you and I pretend God doesn't exist, even when we don't let him get a look into our lives, God loved us. He loves us. Not that we have loved God, but he loves us, and he died for us. So when we look back in history, we remember this radical love that is not dependent on us. We don't have to be in some good emotional place with God. We don't have to be working up loving feelings towards God for him to love us. He just loves us. He preemptively loves us. So love one another, John says, and here's a really great example of it, he says.

Love preemptively. Love courageously. Love sacrificially. So we move from doctrine to history, the greatest example of love, and now we move to the why. Why should we love? This is point three, why should we love? And this is verses 11 and 12. Beloved, if God so loved, 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. Okay, there's a lot in there, but I'm just going to keep it pretty simple here.

So we've moved from the doctrine of love to the greatest example, and now why we should love. And there's two reasons in here, I think. And those two reasons you can get to by looking at two words.

[11:26] The words ought, ought, ought, and seen. Art and seen. Let's talk about ought, okay?

This doesn't feel right. Ought. So the verse here says, we ought to love one another, and it sounds very heavy. And you might think, you know, up to this point, I was feeling pretty good about this, what John was saying, but now it just feels like he's guilt tripping us. Because we ought to do something. It feels like it's an obligation. Ought, ought, ought, right? It's not a guilt trip. Remember what John has said up until this point, when he's talked about the doctrine of God mainly. The ought here means this. It's like we ought to love like a fish ought to swim, or birds ought to fly.

It's who we are. It's who we are. We have the Spirit of God in us. We have the very life of God in us through the Holy Spirit. So it's not let's pretend to love. Not trying to work it up. It's who we are. And that's why we do it. God's nature, who is love, is in you. Now let's look at that second word there. Seen. Seen. This is the other reason why we love. I love this. No one has ever seen God. If we love each other, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. Okay, no one has ever seen God. So it's telling us God is invisible. So that's a problem, of course, isn't it? This is a problem. It was a problem for the early Christians, is the pagans. You know this. The pagans would make fun of the Christians back in the days because they couldn't point to God. Whereas the pagans could point that, you know, they had thousands of statues they could point to. Here's our gods. Where's your God now? It's like, oh, we've got nothing to point to, you know. How does God address this? Very simply. John says, God makes himself visible through the love of a Christian community. So I'll say it a different way because it's so great. John's hypothesis is this. No one has seen God, but if we love one another, we make an invisible God visible to each other and the world.

[13:36] The early churches, let me tell you a great story. So way, way back in the days, you know, 1800 years ago, there was this Emperor Hadrian and he got this philosophy, this philosopher called Aristides. He said, just come and explain Christianity to me. What are these Christians doing? And we actually have a recording. We have the recording that we only found not that long ago of what he said. And let me quote what this philosopher said the Christians are doing to this Emperor Hadrian. He says, they do not bear false witness or embezzle. They do not cover what is not theirs.

They're bondmen and bondswoman and their children. If they are any, they persuade them to become Christians. And when they have done so, they call them brethren without distinction. They're joyful people. They go their way in all humility and cheerfulness. Falsehood is not found among them.

They love each other in action, not just words. And listen to this part. The widow's needs are not ignored. They rescue the orphan from the person who does him violence. He who gives to him who has not ungrudgingly and without boasting. If they hear of any in their number who are imprisoned or oppressed for the name of the Messiah, they provide for all his needs. And if it is possible to redeem him, they set him free. Isn't that brilliant?

It was this kind of stuff that turned the Roman Emperor upside down. We can't see God. The world can't see God. But when we love each other, we make the invisible God visible. Our love shows the reality of a living, speaking God. So that's the other reason we love.

That's why we love. It's a doctrine. Why do we love each other? Doctrine. History and the why. Let me finish with a story from a Bible fan in Ezekiel 16. This is kind of a crazy example.

[15:31] example. So Ezekiel 16 is a book. Ezekiel, big picture. Ezekiel is a book that's filled with visions. So God gives these visions to this guy called Ezekiel. And they're very vivid pictures of who God is. And these visions are supposed to represent these different aspects of God's character. And so there's one vision that says, here's a vision of God.

God is like a shepherd. It tells a story about that. It's a vision of God as creator. It's a vision of God as a king. Chapter 16, it's God as a lover. And it's probably the most gripping and most graphic story in the Bible. And in this vision, it tells a story about a relationship, a very difficult relationship between a man and a woman. The man represents God. The woman represents God's people. And it starts with a vision of an abandoned baby covered in blood because it's a newborn. It's a baby that's been rejected by its parents, which was practiced back in the days. Let me read verse 6 and 7 to you. And when I passed you by, I saw you wallowing in blood.

So a newborn, I said to you and your blood live. And I said to you and your blood live. And I made you flourish like a plant with a field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. So a guy comes into this field. This man comes to a field, rescues the baby that's been abandoned. And the first shock of the passage is that God doesn't rescue the baby to become a slave, which again was a bit of a practice. He rescues this child and cares for this child until it has grown up to be a woman to become his bride. Okay, verse 8. And when I passed you again and saw you, behold, you are for the age of love. And I spread the corner of my garment over you. And I covered your nakedness. And I made a vow to you and entered into a covenant with you. So this child that is rescued grows up and becomes a woman and they get married. And he's very, very good to her. [17:44] Verses 10 and 13. I clothed you with embroidered cloth. I wrapped you in fine linen. And covered you with silk. And I put bracelets on your wrists. And a chain around your neck. And a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver and clothing that was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You grew exceedingly beautiful. It sounds like a fantastic story so far. And it goes very sideways when you hit verse 15. But you trusted in your beauty.

You played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby. And it gets worse and worse. Verse 20. You took the children we had together and instead of raising them in love and fear of the Lord, you sacrificed them to the pagan gods. And verse 25. And at the head of every street, you built your lofty place and made your beauty an abomination, offering yourself to any passerby and multiplying your whoring. I have just picked out the tamest parts here, by the way. And these are all, this is allusions to Israel making alliances with foreign pagan countries instead of trusting God. And I'm almost at the end here. And when we get to verse 59, the greatest shock of the story is this.

For thus says the Lord God, I will deal with you as you have done. You who have despised the oath and breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant. God has the last word in the story, and it's a word of grace. God says, despite everything, despite everything you have done, I choose you. I choose you again. And I keep, and I will keep choosing you. I'm staying with you.

I chose you as that abandoned child, and I choose you again. Folks, this is God. This is who God is. God is a lover, and he loves you. Despite all the stuff swirling around in your brain, right? He loves you. And that spirit is in you. So you might love others. Amen.