

1 John 2:3-17

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Our Heavenly Father now as you speak to us through your word we pray that you would pour your love into our hearts and through us shine that light to others driving back to darkness so we might as a congregation learn how to love one another and we ask this in Jesus name Amen.

Amen. Please be seated. I want to add my welcome to Jordan's at the beginning and say if you're with us visiting today it's a great Sunday to be here not just for the reasons Jordan said but because we're looking at this letter from the Apostle John.

The famous paintings of the Last Supper the one always sitting closest to Jesus at the Last Supper was John. He is known as the disciple Jesus loved.

John calls himself that the disciple Jesus loved not because he was full of himself but because this love that he had experienced in Jesus is different than any other kind of love the world had ever seen before.

So the Bible writers coin a new word for this love all together. It's not sentiment. It's not feeling. It's not bromance. It's not endlessly flexible. Can't make it mean whatever we want.

[1 : 23] It's a love that it's not caring. Can't make it mean whatever we want. Can't make it mean whatever we want. It's a love that's not caused by anything attractive or beautiful in the one we're loving. Like I love you because of your smile. But it's self-sacrificial giving and it's most clearly revealed in the death of Jesus in the agony of Jesus suffering and dying on the cross for us giving himself away.

it's a love that all young mothers know at 3 a.m when the baby wakes and starts screaming again and the wakes the other three toddlers and but doesn't wake the snoring husband it's that kind of love yeah yeah it's got a moral shape to us uh sorry the love has a moral shape to it that's why jesus can command us to love each other and it was this love that landed in john's life and had drastic and eternal consequences and the reason i'm saying this is because this letter is written to a group of churches in the first century under great pressure they're under pressure from the lies of the culture about them and a group of new teachers had come in saying you don't need to believe all that primitive stuff about jesus being god in the flesh or dying on the cross for our sins and you don't really need to love one another in the other person-centered way and they said sin is not really a thing we don't sin you know that's for neurotics and a whole group of the congregations had left leaving these genuine christians behind wondering whether they were real or not and the way john assures them and brings confidence back to believers and he's been doing it now for 2 000 years is to focus on the key reality that's at the heart of our relationship with god and with one another and that is fellowship now as soon as i say that i know fellowship is a weak and pale word today we use it for a general friendliness when people have common pursuits like bird watching or formula one or mountain biking i'm trying to cover the congregation here what the bible means by this word is very different in the ancient world fellowship it was a secular word that then got used got brought over into the bible it's when two or more people participate in a third thing so imagine peter and james decided to form a fishing business on lake galilee which they actually did and they would call it the fellowship of the fish stay with me it's a third thing that they have fellowship in and the nature of the connection that they share together is entirely drawn from the nature of the thing that gives them the fellowship you understand so they'd be talking about boats and nets and markets and fish scales and all those sorts of things now the new testament reveals this astonishing truth that by faith in jesus christ you and i have fellowship with god father son and holy spirit and this is the living bond that unites us with each other in a new life where together we participate in the divine it's almost too much to believe and the nature of our connection together as believers is supernatural and it's completely determined by this third thing god himself so a christian is someone whose life has been invaded by the love of god and it doesn't matter whether this is the first week that you are a believer you've just come to believe and you can hardly believe it's true or whether this is your last week of life on earth it doesn't matter his life has come into our hearts filling and flooding our hollow hearts and giving us a purpose that begins now

and is bigger than the world in which we're in and you know what the key sign of the reality of that fellowship that we share with each other in god is love and what's got john so troubled as he writes this letter is that the destructive work of the false teachers is undermining is poisoning the precious fellowship among the christians with god and with each other how do you encourage and strengthen believers in the face of lies and normal life pressure and false teaching and give them confidence they're on the right track what john does in this passage is he makes two points the first is he the first is this that god sets his own love in us verses three to seven second god shines his own love through us verses seven to eleven and then he gives us two illustrations so like usual i've got two points one actually they're four points but i've snuck the two in as illustrations you see that but you know this is my second last sermon so i can do what i want so point number one god sets his own love in us now verses three to six the key verse is verse five whoever keeps his word in him truly the love of god is perfected god's own love that came down from heaven in the death of jesus now comes down into our hearts by the holy spirit and is brought to purpose brought to perfection in us as we listen to his word and seek to obey it as we hear god speaking to us week by week and we try and take it in and live it out god works his love to completion in us isn't that amazing and these verses are packed with the language of fellowship so many words of connectedness that are all intensely personal look at verse three by this we know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands because you can't separate how we live from what we believe because the one in whom we believe is the love is the god of love we can't say we love god and disobey his commandments happily so when we christians disobey god's commands we always do it unhappily which is why we said in the general confession earlier but you oh lord have mercy on us miserable offenders you ever thought about that line it's not that we're miserable groveling as low as low as low it's just recognizing the fact that when we sin we're unhappy we lose the joy of god this all comes from god we've come to know john says we've come to know him not a bunch of data but him the person of god and the command that he's talking about here and throughout this passage is the command from the lips of jesus love one another love one another love one another so if you feel stalled or stuck in your christian life the best place to start is to confess your sins to god and begin doing something active choose to do something active to love and serve others verse five by this we may know that we are in him could you have a closer relational connectedness than being in god whoever says he abides in him or to walk in the same way that he walked and that is very blunt you have to walk the walk not just talk the talk it's a mark of bogus christianity to say you're close to god and not care about other christians

it's a sign of true fellowship with god not to have huge feelings or you might have them that's great um just don't expect them for everyone around you all great words or claims but the simple lifestyle of obedience and trying to love others i shouldn't tell you this but the best way to undermine the fellowship of god in a congregation is to just not care about your brothers and sisters thinking about them with contempt having a polite exterior but deep down they're just odd and that shows in fighting and biting and it poisons fellowship and stops the love of god working through us the lovely thing in this first point is that god doesn't give his love to us and then abandon us let you know go go live out your faith he comes into our lives in full fellowship he shares his eternal life with us now he sets his own love in us and then begins to perfect his love in us as we learn to love him and learn to love each other that's point one point two verses seven to eleven god shines his own love through us now through us now to others and the key verse in this section is verse eight just look down at it with me for a moment at the same time john says it is a new commandment i'm writing to you which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining what commandment is he talking about do you remember on the night that jesus was betrayed he gave his disciples a new commandment and john makes the point it's not completely new because it was in the old testament you know love god and love your neighbor what was new about the commandment was the qualification jesus gave to it in john 13 34 he says a new commandment i give to you that you love one another just as i have loved you so you are to love one another did you pick that up just as i have loved you he goes out from that room he's arrested he's crucified so the way jesus loved us was the ultimate self-sacrifice giving his life away for our forgiveness so the love that he is commanding has a whole new shape to it is costly self-giving sacrificial action now i command you jesus says love one another as i have loved you it's very high isn't it that standard but look what he says in verse 8 this new commandment is true in him i saw it i was there i was there that night i watched him go out to the cross for us i witnessed that divine love in action but look what the next words say this is this is amazing he says and it is true in you see what he's doing he's saying you demonstrate the same love that jesus showed on the cross i see the same love of god working in you in the way that you love one another so encouraging and i just want to push pause on the sermon i want to say one of the highest privileges of being your pastor for the last 30 years there have been lots of pains to it i don't want you to think it's all been happy but it's been witnessing the way god shines his love through you to each other in this congregation i see the marks of christ in you

and i don't say that to flatter you or butt you up or even to compliment you it's an affirmation that the work of god in you is visible to all around and even to those who come who are new as a congregation you are bearing the genuine fruit of love the aroma of christ who gave himself on the cross is evident yes we have a long way to go but the marks of god's love are authentic in you and that's what john is saying to this congregation and the reason for that is that the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining because every act of self-sacrificing love it doesn't matter how small it is is a little explosion of light in our world so god has shone his love in our hearts and as we love one another he blazes his light into the darkness around us isn't that amazing so i mean the world is a pretty dark place you don't need me to tell you that and every time we put others ahead of ourselves every time we act in deliberate self-sacrificial love we put that we push the darkness of death and sin and satan back a little bit we damage the darkness not by grand schemes but by small acts of genuine love to one another and if we ask that question that everyone asks you know how is the darkness to be defeated ultimately god will defeat it and sweep it away at the end of the age but until then till that time we punch holes in that darkness by every act of practical love that's why he says in verses 9 11 that if you hate your brothers you're still in the darkness i mean every act of hatred and that doesn't have to be outward your brothers and sisters just extends the darkness back into your life until you're completely blind and lost verse 10 whoever loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no cause for stumbling so part of christian love is caring about what you do and your attitudes and how they affect the brothers and sisters around you and if you're someone who consistently offends or causes christian brothers and sisters to stumble you're doing the work of darkness and you need to ask god's forgiveness and grace to change i read this week about a naturalist whose name is eo wilson when he was seven his parents were divorcing he was taken on a holiday down to florida and he was sitting on the dock and underneath the dock a massive stingray floated by under his feet he said it was a creature beyond my imagining because as a child you see animals twice as big as you see them as an adult it's a great picture to love others we need to see them as twice the size they really are we need to stand before them in awe and wonder as they are miracles of god beyond our imagining to treat them as infinitely more important as more significant than ourselves the only way to see deeply into each other's lives is to magnify them see them as twice the size and if you want a list of what that looks like all you need to do is turn to 1 corinthians 13 you know love doesn't insist on its own way it's not always right it's not irritable it's not resentful and this christian the reality of christian fellowship and love is a growing reality and we grow in our assurance with god and a fellowship with god as we love one another and we experience the love of god being perfected in us how?

[17 : 58] as we're exposed to our brothers and sisters in church and in small groups and in prayer so that's the big second point and I want to ask quickly as we finish what does that look like?

and what the apostle does is he gives two fairly long illustrations two living illustrations of what this looks like one is positive and one is negative so track with me now the positive illustration is in verses 12 to 14 where john deliberately models this kind of love just look down at the verses there he signals how important this is by completely changing the style you see right here in the middle of chapter 2 he breaks into poetry I don't know whether you often do that it's not my metier but here it's even formatted in the bible there for us john has no other poems in his gospel or his letters and it's intensely personal he keeps repeating I write to you I write to you I write to you six times it's full of purpose because love gives us purpose and the beauty of the poem is to see how john strengthens his brothers and sisters demonstrating how the love of god works through him so so three are the same three are the same the first one he says little children every time he uses the term little children he's speaking to the whole congregation so he says little children and then he has two groups in the congregation fathers or fathers and mothers they're not gender specific and young men and young women the fathers and mothers are those who have been on the christian path for a little while longer they will mature in their faith and the young men and women are those who are who've come into christianity later and the standout of these six lines is the first one to the whole congregation verse 12

I'm writing to you little children because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake so all the encouragement and love he wants to pour out on his brothers and sisters comes from this from the death of jesus the cleansing of their hearts from sin the basis of fellowship with god it's why we confess our sins at every gathering it's to show we're all on the same level we're all as needy as each other there's no one here who deserves god's grace more or less than any of the rest of us but we all come into the love of god through the death of jesus and the forgiveness of our sins and then he says to the more mature believers twice fathers and mothers you know him who is from the beginning he's talking about jesus here i think he is he says this knowing is a personal thing and it deepens and it grows as you abide in his love and i see that in you he's saying and then the younger believers he encourages them that they have overcome the evil one because the word of god abides in them we don't have time for this we're going to get to this in chapter 5 but in chapter 5 verse 4 the victory that all believers have is not our great youthful natural strength but that we hold fast our faith in jesus christ why is this here why is this little poem here john is modeling the love of god through him to them he is speaking the great truths of the faith over them and by doing that he is imparting christian confidence in their fellowship would not would it not be a wonderful thing if we could just find one word a week of positive encouragement a positive word in the gospel that we might speak to someone else here in our congregation that we make it our task as we come together to speak into someone's life the word of god and the word of life how long is it since you've done that be a great thing to start or look at the negative illustration in verses 15 to 17 do not love the world verse 15 or the things in the world if anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him what undermines the fellowship and love of god in a christian community is when we believe the lies our culture tells us and here are a couple of lies our culture tells us

I've borrowed them from David Brooks number one career success is fulfilling he's a man he's had great success in his career he said it helped me avoid shame but it didn't bring me any positive good secondly I can make myself happy if I have just one more victory you know lose a few pounds do some more exercise he says it's the lie of self-sufficiency just last week in New York City the Global Well Festival was held experts, writers, artists scientists and their advice for happiness you know what was the top one take your shoes off and walk on the grass I've tried it that's why I'm so happy eating well you know getting good sleep Brooks says that on our deathbeds nobody talks about those things what do we talk about?

we talk about deep relationships the reverse of self-sufficiency we're longing we're longing for this what we long for is the love of others the deep connection that comes by sacrifice it's the opposite of what the world offers you know the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life they lie to us they say you don't need those other believers go to church for a quick spiritual top-up but don't make yourself accountable to anyone there verse 17 and the world is passing away along with its desires but whoever does the will of God abides forever because what is really important brothers and sisters is not what the world tells us it's not what we imagine in our own minds and hearts it's the will of God and loving each other and the darkness of this world is right now on its way out and to love the things of this world is unspeakably foolish not just because they erode our ability to love each other but because they're passing away here is our mission here is our purpose it's to love others as Jesus loved us it's to allow the love of God to be perfected in us it's to allow that love to shine through us to others that's what makes the Christian fellowship what it is and that's what makes it so compelling in a city that is as lonely and disconnected as ours so let's kneel for prayer