

1 John 4:7-19 - Amazing Love, How Can It Be?

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

It is an honor and a privilege to be here this morning at Southwood. Thank you so much for having me. And I also want to mention, he's exiting the stage here to the right, not only did George and Kathy Mayer play a big part in my life, but Blake Stewart, who is here in your worship group, was very instrumental in helping me start a church, plant a church in Madison, Mississippi.

It's a suburb of Jackson. And I remember he was with us in the very early days, and we were desperate for people who could sing. And I remember when he came and visited us the first time, and I found out that not only was he from Alabama, but that he could sing.

I knew I had to do everything I possibly could to keep him at our church plant. So I'm very grateful for Blake and what he meant to Madison Heights in the early years of helping start the church. It's great to be in Huntsville. I grew up down the road in Gadsden. My uncle worked here and lived here for many years, played Westminster in basketball many times, was beat every single time.

[1 : 21] So those are not fond memories. But most importantly, I remembered as I was sitting there with my wife that one of our first dates almost 20 years ago was to Huntsville when we were students at Samford.

I brought her to the Space and Rocket Center. No, I'm just kidding. We came to a play. So it's good to be here. Again, thank you for having me.

Our text this morning is 1 John 4, verses 7 through 19. 1 John 4, verses 7 through 19. Let us hear the word of the Lord.

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.

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. In this is love.

[2 : 23] 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.

Verse 14. 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 the world.

[3 : 29] 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. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever.

Before I started the Mid-South Church Planting Network, I planted a church, as I told you earlier, in Madison, Mississippi, and was the pastor there for nine years.

And before we bought land and built, we met in a Catholic school. And in the beginning, we met in a very ugly, just really distasteful gym.

Thankfully, the school built a wonderful performing arts center, and we were able to move the church into the performing arts center. Now, it was not designed like a sanctuary.

[4 : 35] It was designed like a place that you would go to see a play. And so there was a middle aisle, and you could enter the auditorium at the halfway point, and you could make your way down the middle aisle before almost anyone in the auditorium would notice.

But those who were on the stage would see a person come in immediately. Well, it was one Sunday morning, and my wife's uncle was gravely ill.

And we had worked out a plan whereby if she got a call that she needed to drive to Tupelo, she would take my daughter, who was three years old at the time, and would immediately leave.

If I saw her leave from the sanctuary, I would know that I needed to wrap things up and that I needed to get on the road to Tupelo. So I'm preaching, and I see my wife get up and leave with my daughter.

So I know what is going on. A few minutes passed, and the doors of the back of the auditorium suddenly open.

[5 : 50] And a curly-haired, brown-eyed little girl comes walking in the back. And she is afraid, and she is scared.

You can see it written all over her face. And she comes running down the middle aisle with her arms outstretched to me.

The next thing I know, I look down at the stage, and I see these little fingers on the edge of the stage, and I hear, Dad!

Daddy! Daddy! Well, I do what any father would do. I reach down, and I pick her up, and I keep preaching.

Now, guess what my sermon was on that day? The Father's love. Every woman in the auditorium was wiping her eyes.

[6 : 54] And every man in the auditorium said, I can't believe that he staged this. But I promise you, it wasn't staged. She was lost, and she was scared, and she was afraid, and what did she want more than anything in the world?

She wanted her dad. And so I held her, and I loved on her, and I kept preaching until our youth director came and got her from me.

Isn't that true of us? Now look, I know that there are some big, strong, strapping men in this congregation.

But isn't it really true of all of us that because we live in a broken, and fallen, and sinful world, we are like a small child.

We are afraid, and we are scared, and we are lost, and what do we need more than anything? The Father's love.

[8 : 10] Let's pray. Our Father and our God, we thank you for this opportunity to be here this morning. Lord, we pray that you would reach down into the very depths of our soul, and that you would plant your word there.

Father, help us not to hear this merely as information, but help us to hear you and you only. Father, may we leave this place this morning, not only with a greater desire for your word, but a greater passion for your Son, Jesus Christ.

Lord, let your Spirit work in us so that we look more and more like our older brother. Father, give us eyes to see and ears to hear.

Do not let your word return void. Father, I pray that you would be with us this morning. May your presence sit heavy upon us.

Father, forgive the one who speaks, for my sins are great. Set me aside as you speak this morning. For the glory of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 37] Amen. Our text this morning is from, excuse me, I just drew a blank there, from 1 John chapter 4, 7 through 21.

We're not going to go verse by verse through this text. There are a couple of things that I want us to look at, and there are two questions that I want us to ask as we reflect on 1 John.

The first question is this. How special is the gift of God's perfect love? How special is this gift?

God desires for us to know and experience the perfect love that exists between the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

He longs for us to enter into that perfect communion. I want you to think about that. In the throne room of heaven, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit exist in this perfect, perfect, eternal relationship of love and fellowship.

[10 : 55] And what they want more than anything is for us to be a part of that, to experience that, to know that, to understand that truth.

And so, God gives us a special gift of love by making that a promise that is certain in Jesus Christ. But I think sometimes we fail to realize the lengths that our God has gone to to give us this gift. So let's focus in on 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.

How special is this gift of God's perfect love? It is so special that the Father loves us and He serves us by giving up His Son.

[12 : 02] Now, we are moving into the time of year where we will begin to think more often about the coming of our King. But do we really understand what God the Father has done for us in giving up His Son?

do we really get it? So, my father died of cancer when I was one.

I don't know that I thought much about that as a child. But I do remember the first time that I thought about it. I was five years old and I played soccer for the first time.

and I specifically remember running out onto the soccer field and noticing that something was different.

That most of the other little boys on my team not only had mothers, but they had fathers. And I never thought about that before.

[13 : 21] And I remember that. Looking around and seeing fathers cheer on their sons and thinking to myself, I want that.

I want that. So a few months ago, we signed my son up to play soccer. He's in children's church this morning.

His name is John Hunter. I am Hunter Townsend Brewer. He is Hunter Townsend Brewer Jr. Why we call him John Hunter is a long story.

And I remember taking him to his first game. And I can't tell you how emotional that was for me. I remember one of my good friends at the game looking at me going, I know he had to be thinking, it's just a five-year-old soccer game. He didn't know the back story.

[14 : 29] It was a very emotional moment for me to watch my little guy run out onto that soccer field with his shorts hanging down to his ankles, with shin guards underneath those shorts somewhere, sitting on the ball more often than he kicked the ball.

You're a wonderful group of people. And I know some of you. And I don't mean this to be offensive. I don't go around offending people.

That's not me. I hope you will understand this in the right tone. But I'm not sacrificing my son for any of you.

I'm not thinking about it for a nanosecond. I wouldn't do it. No way. now, think about the father.

He gives up his only begotten son for a group of rebellious people who wanted nothing to do with him and his word.

[15 : 49] A group of people that turned their backs on him. A group of people who would murder his son.

In the throne room of heaven, God the father looks to the son and he says, go. Because I want them to experience and to know and to be a part of this fellowship and this communion that we have.

I want them to be integrated into this relationship. I want them to receive all the blessings of the covenant. I want this for them.

And so you must go and you must be sacrificed. That is who our father is and that is what he has done for us.

But we also see the son at work in giving us this perfect gift of love. Not only is the father involved but the son is involved.

[17 : 00] Look at verse 10. And 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.

Let's go back to the throne room of heaven. And the father asked the son to go. And the son willingly goes knowing that he is going to be the propitiation for our sins.

I love reading the gospels. I love going through Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and seeing all the examples when Jesus says that I am here to do the will of my father.

He was so obedient. He was perfect in his obedience. The cross is a terrible thing.

The cross is a horrible instrument of death. But you need to understand that it's not the physical violence that's inflicted upon Jesus that makes the cross so difficult.

[18:20] That is not why Jesus fell to his knees in the garden of Gethsemane and sweated blood. The reason the cross is so difficult is because he is the propitiation.

Because on the cross all of our punishments the punishments of all of God's people for all eternity at that very moment those punishments are placed on Christ.

So he experiences hell for us right there on Calvary. it's hard to get your mind around to be truthful. The internal punishment that we deserved for sin and rebellion and treachery is placed on Christ and he fills it and he experiences it and he knows it and even though from an earthly perspective it's only a moment from a kingdom perspective he fills the eternal wrath.

So not only is the father involved in giving us this perfect gift of love but we see in verse 10 that the son is intimately involved in giving his life so that we can have this perfect gift.

[19:58] we know what our creeds and our confessions say that our God is three in one that is why it's so important to know what you believe not only is the father involved not only is the son involved but guess what the spirit is involved the holy spirit is involved in giving us this perfect gift look at verse 13 by this we know that we abide in him and he in us because he has given us of his spirit the spirit loves and serves us by giving us new life that is holy spirit power it's something frankly that we don't talk enough about as those who belong to the reformed tradition those who are presbyterian we talk about the father and we talk about the son but we'll let others talk about the holy spirit we can't do that because the holy spirit is god and the holy spirit gives us new life the holy spirit rescues us and changes us and enables us to see and to hear and to know and to believe without the holy spirit working in us we can't enter into that perfect love relationship we cannot walk boldly into the throne room of grace without the holy spirit we cannot know that perfect communion it takes the father and it takes the son and it takes the holy spirit our triune god goes to great lengths to rescue us and redeem us and to make us his own are you overwhelmed by that this morning holy i hope you are i hope you are i hope you leave this place and you go throughout your week and you reflect on and you pray about and you worship the fact that your god has done something incredible for you first question was what links does our god go to to give us the perfect gift of love second question is this what is our response what do we do with this what do we do knowing what god has done for us in christ by the power and the work of the holy spirit look at verse 19 of chapter 4 this is one of those kindergarten verses one of those verses that you learn in vacation bible school but it's one of those that you need to highlight and underline fold the page down because this is one of those verses that you go back to over and over and over again during the more difficult times of life we love because

he first loved us we love because he first loved us so what is our response to this perfect gift of love what do we do with the fact that from all eternity God has loved us and he has been thinking about us and he put a plan in place to rescue us from sin and death what do we do with that what do we do well the text is very clear it says we love we love we will love our family members we will love those in our family that are difficult to love we will love our neighbors we will love our co-workers we will love our community we will be known as a people who exude the love of

Jesus Christ because we understand the rescue mission that has been carried out for us when we realize how great the Father's love is how great the Son's love is how great the Holy Spirit love is our hearts will break let me explain that you probably all heard this our hearts because we live in a fallen and sinful and broken world tend to produce idols they manufacture idols our default mode is that we want to be our own God we want to be high and exalted we want to be in charge we think we know best and our hearts are busy producing idols and so when we fall desperately in love with Jesus Christ and we understand the love of the Father here's what happens to our heart it is so filled with love that it cannot be contained and it breaks and the love of Christ spills out everywhere in all directions God's love will consume us and so we will love the people in this room we will love the people in this room because these are our brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ we will love starting churches because new churches reach people who are not in church and they don't know the love of Christ we will love this community and we will go out into this community and we will tell people about

Jesus because he is our only hope and we are desperate we are going to be so filled with love that we are going to do radical things this challenges me because I know more often than not that I'm not consumed with the love of God for others God help me to be overwhelmed by your love help me

to be overwhelmed by your love mentored by an older pastor and I asked him one day after 50 years of ministry what is one of the things that is most surprising to you he looked at me and he said oh that's that's easy how few people are actually consumed and blown away by the love of [28 : 32] Jesus Christ that was challenging to me made me examine my own heart I hope this morning that we will all approach the cross of Christ and that we will dig down deep into the dirt at the base of the cross that we will offer up our hearts and our lives to King Jesus and that we will be consumed with him and that we will love others because we rightly understand all that he has done for us this is not a ten point profound theological sermon this is a nuts and bolts heart issue sermon think about how amazing his love truly is and let it wash over you this week let's pray our father and our

God we thank you that your love for us is so real and so active and so powerful and so lasting father God Lord Jesus and Holy Spirit we we stand amazed at all that you have done to save your people to rescue us to redeem us to adopt us may we worship you with a greater intensity and may we love others so that you receive all the glory may your spirit be at work changing us and drawing us to you Lord Jesus help us to drink deeply from the fountain of grace it's in your name we pray for more information visit us online at southwood.org and as looking at■■■