

A Loving Christian

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Preacher: John Lau

[0 : 00] Thank you.

After the war, Mary received a long-awaited phone call from her son, Jack. Oh, baby, is everything okay? Are you still coming home next week?

Yes, Mom, I'm in transit now, just waiting on a few more paperwork. I'll be home in a few weeks at the most. By the way, Mom, I have this buddy that fought with me.

He had taken a nasty hit and will need some permanent care. I have invited him to stay with us. Oh, that would be nice to have your buddy for a few days.

Is he from our town? No, Mom. I have invited him to stay as long as he likes so that he can be taken care of. Oh, what sort of care would he need?

[1 : 17] How threatening were the injuries? I'm not sure how well I would cope with someone with a disability in the house. Don't the government have a department to look after them?

I would love to have something. I would love to do something for your buddy, but I'm not sure we are the best care for him, my love. But anyway, you come home first. We'll see.

Okay, Mom, I'll be in touch. I can't wait to see you. Be home soon. I love you. I love you, Mom. After a week, there was a letter with a photo of Jack in the mailbox.

He's in a wheelchair with one of his legs amputated and half his face deformed with an eye missing. Mom, I'm in an excellent care home provided by the government.

It's about a couple of hours' drive from home. I'm learning to drive, especially feed the car, and I will come by to visit as soon as my car is ready. We come to a challenging passage of the Bible, and I would say it's as challenging as Mary seeing her son Jack's photo for the first time after the war.

[2 : 29] However, it's about a topic that all Christians should know well and have experienced a lot. But also somehow struggle with a lot.

It's a topic Jesus identified as the greatest commandment in the whole Bible. It's a mark of those who genuinely belong to Jesus.

It's what signified a true Christian. It's a topic of love. Love is such an essential but often misunderstood subject.

It often turns out to be utterly different from what we think it is. Maybe that's why John repeatedly repeats, like a broken record.

I think not a lot of people know what that means. If you have the black broken record, it will just keep looping back to the same place. So he keeps looking back, looping back into the same line or same idea as he writes this letter of 1 John.

[3 : 38] Please keep the Bible open to 1 John. We'll be going through the chapter 3 and 4, but I'll refer some to the previous chapter as well. In 1 John 2, 5, John says, If anyone obeys God's word, love for God is truly made complete in them.

And then in the same chapter in verse 9 to 10, Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them that makes them stumble.

And then in chapter 3, verse 1, See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.

And in our two passages today, the word love repeated more than 30 times. It's actually mentioned 34 times. Chapter 3, verse 16, and chapter 4, verse 9 to 10, It's almost the same.

3, 16 says, This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ lays down his life for us. And then in chapter 4, verse 9, This is how God showed his love among us.

[4 : 55] He sent his one and only Son into the world, that we might live through him. This is love. Not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And in this two passages, it's repeatedly calling us to love one another. As the new year begins, we start on our new 5G plan to learn to be an authentic follower, an authentic disciple of Christ.

Let's look into three areas that will help us start our journey well. I have three questions. Who or what is love? Who do you live like?

And who do you love? When I start preparing this sermon by calling the first poem, What is love? But then after reading the two passages over and over again, especially from chapter 4, verse 7 to 8, and 10 and 16, I think I should call the first poem, Who is love?

If you turn to chapter 4, verse 7, it reads, Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

[6 : 15] Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love. And then verse 10, this is love. Not that we love God, but that he loves us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

And then verse 16, And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them.

Apostle John repeated God is love a few times and defined love as what God has done for us through Jesus in chapter 3, 16 and 4, 9 to 10, which I read out before.

This identification and definition of love are very different from how we categorize love in this world. Don Carson says, One of the chief ways we distort the biblical picture of God's love is when we purposely presuppose that love demands freedom.

The world is saying love means no boundary, no restriction. We distort the ideas of if you love so-and-so, set them free, to mean if you love so-and-so, let them do what they want and be what they want to be.

[7 : 41] If a boy wants to dress up like a girl, or a girl wants to be a boy, let them be. If people want to start a relationship with the same sex, we shouldn't stop them.

Some politicians go as far as proposing laws, including prison for up to 10 years, or heavy fines for anyone caught trying to suppress or change someone's sexuality.

The world puts up slogans saying, Love is freedom. Love is lust. This kind of thinking and slogan feeds into all the gender identity debate, gay and lesbian movement, the redefinition of marriage, and many other problems our world faces today.

Humans are saying, Love is God. And motivated by my love, I should not be stopped. I should be allowed to choose or control my destination and decision.

We have a microscopic and distorted view of love that is all about us, ourselves. Very self-centered, self-serving, self-fulfilling, self-glorifying, and self-honoring kind of love.

[9 : 02] That is not true and authentic love at all. The kind of self-guided misconception of love drives King, the person mentioned in the first passage, in chapter 3, to become upset when his offering to God was not as favorable as his brother.

He harbored hatreds towards his brother and ended up murdering him. Get rid of his competition for God's love. John reminded us that love is from God and God is love.

Love cannot be found in this world without God and cannot be defined in any human terms or any human construction because love is not from this world.

Same is true freedom. True love can only be found in the words of God, in the Bible, which recorded all that God says and does to set us free truly.

The Bible also shows us what it costs God to do so. I've been reading a book by Jared Wilson called Gospel Deeps.

[10 : 18] He says, The Bible shows us our God who is love, saying and doing all sorts of things, most our more sensitive souls will not consider loving at all.

We must remember that God's ocean and love occupies space in the perfect balance of the infinite universe of all his attributes.

He is love, yes, but he is also just and jealous. In the Bible, we find the love of God violates human freedoms regularly and consistently.

If there's one thing any Bible figures can count on, besides that God loves them, it's that they're not in control of their destiny.

God has a plan for us that awaits ours. Jared concludes that the Bible picture of God's love is much bigger, stranger, and more complex than how humans can imagine it or try to construct it in humans' terms.

[11 : 31] Love is from God and God is love. God sent his one and only son into this world as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. God shows his love by sending Jesus to be among us.

Love is Jesus Christ laid down his life for us so we might live through him. To live through Jesus is to focus on this area of his sacrificial love.

Sacrificial love refers to the offering of oneself for others' benefit, often without any reward in return. It's not natural for a human to be sacrificial in love or other-centered in how we live.

God knows that, so he repeatedly remind us and command us to do so. In chapter 3, verse 11, for this is a message you heard from the beginning.

We should love one another. And then verse 16, this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our life for our brothers and sisters.

[12 : 46] Jesus. Verse 23, and this is his command, to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commands us.

And then in chapter 4, verse 11, dear friend, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. And he has given us, and verse 21, and he has given us this command, anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sisters.

Jesus. Apart from all these commands, John also warned us from chapter 3, verse 14, that we know that we have passed from death to life because we love each other.

Anyone who does not love remains in death. What is remain in death means? It means we are separated from our God and others.

it means we stay in our old life and have not been born again in the kingdom and family of God. It means we are not experiencing the full intention of what God has made us to be because God made us to glorify and to enjoy him forever.

[14 : 03] And the consequences of not meeting up to God's expectation, of not completing what God has set out for us to achieve will be the diminishing in our confidence before God and we grow in fear.

And God knows that as well. God knows we feel this way too. So he tells us from chapter 3, verse 19, this is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence.

If our heart condemns us, we know that God is greater than our heart and he knows everything. God tells us that he is greater than our heart and he knows everything.

He knows we will fail him and disobey him and treat him with hostility. But he still addresses us as friends, not as enemy. In verse 21, chapter 3, verse 21, dear friends, if our heart do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.

The key to have confidence before God is to keep his commands and do what pleases him. God is encouraging us to keep our focus on pleasing him with everything that we do and how we live our life.

[15 : 31] that is the key to our confidence before him. And then again in chapter 4, verse 16 to 17, and so we know and rely on the love that God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in them. And this is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of the judgment.

is in this world we are like Jesus. Jesus is our best example of someone who keeps God's commands and does everything that pleases God.

And more than an example, Jesus is our substitute when coming to fulfillment of God's command, of all God's command, to be made complete in the love of God and have confidence before him at any time, there's one question we should keep asking ourselves.

Who am I like in this world? How do you speak? How do you entertain yourself?

[16 : 44] Who do you like? Do you like to build your joy on others' pain? Do you enjoy bantering and picking on others?

In how you organize your priority in life? What career are you pursuing? Where are you sending your kids to school? In your interaction with others?

In how you spend your money, time, and energy? It's all those things that you live out, living like Jesus. And particularly, in how you love your brothers and sisters.

In how you deal with conflict and disagreement with others in God's family. How do you react when someone challenges you or hurts you? God knows that it's not easy for us to be Christ-like 24 hours

a day, seven days a week.

And he knows if he leaves us alone and does not violate our freedom to intervene, we will fail and fail badly. So he reminds us twice, from chapter 3, 24 and chapter 4, 12 to 13, that we are not alone.

[18:02] Chapter 3, 24, the one who keeps God's command lives in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us. We know it by the spirit he gives us.

And chapter 4, verse 12 to 13, No one has ever seen God but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us. He has given us his spirit. God has given us his spirit to ensure we remain and live in him, to follow Jesus and to lift out his command in our life. The Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit all work together to ensure we stay within God's love. So the question remaining is, who do you love?

We have been told repeatedly from today's passages that God is love and he has demonstrated his love for us by sending Jesus, his only son, to atone our sins.

[19:15] in response, we should and ought to love one and the other by laying down our life for our brothers and sisters. Chapter 4, verse 20 says, by loving one another, we get to know God and see God.

Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brothers and sisters whom they have seen cannot love God whom they have not seen.

Our relationship with others reflects our experience with God yet to also affect our experience with God. Tony Evans' book, Horizontal Jesus, also used this line as his subtitle, our relationship with others affects our experience with God.

He has written this book to explain the correlation between our relationship with others and our relationship with God. He shares that outside Christ the King Church in San Diego, there is a statue of Jesus with both hands missing.

Friend was broke off in the mid 1980s. Rather have the statue repaired, the pastor chose to put a plaque at the base of it that reads, I have no hands but yours.

[20:42] This plaque declared that because Jesus has ascended to his rightful place in heaven and is not physically present on earth, we, his body, are to be his hands to one another.

We are to be his feet to one another. We are to offer his love and assistance to one another. We are to live out our horizontal relationship with one another in light of our vertical relationship with Christ.

We are to be the manifestation of Jesus to one another. That is our ultimate calling as his disciples.

That is our highest aim and the most authentic reflection of the two greatest commandments identified by Jesus to command to love God and love our neighbors.

The believer's responsibility to show Christ's life sacrificial love to others is not optional. God commands it as a way of displaying his love to the world.

When it comes to love, it's a full-body exercise. It requires our head to decide to love, our heart to be motivated by God's spirit to love.

[22:10] It requires us to open up our eyes and hear to notice others' needs and move our hands and feet to take action to meet those needs, to show God's love to the world.

John reminded us in chapter 3, 16 to 18 that this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

If anyone has material possession and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Be children, lest not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth.

Love is not an abstract concept. It concerns the outworking of the believer's faith in ordinary day-to-day interaction with others.

The love that God wants us to exhibit is not any random act of kindness that make us feel good about ourselves. It's a kind of love that we need to decide whether we put other person's needs above our comfort as we do it to glorify and honor God.

[23:29] God remember Mary and her son at the beginning of this sermon. I'm like Mary when I come to loving God and others.

There are a lot of calculation going on in my mind. Can I do it well? Because I don't want to be seen as someone that starts something that I can't complete. What will I get in return if I make myself

vulnerable in this situation?

What if the other person does not love me back? Will I be short changed? Are they all going end up hating me?

Or what if the other person becomes so attached to me that I lose my freedom and I can't keep up with their demands? All these questions are telling me and us that we love ourselves more.

Instead of God, we listen to ourselves. We have not tapped into the fountain of love, our living God. I know the right answer to the question, who do you love?

[24 : 35] And I know also the real answer to that question is, I love myself and we love ourselves, not God or others.

When I come to the topic of love, what is the initial emotional reaction that whirls up deep in you?

Are you glad that God knows you and has given his spirit our assurance and helper to fulfill his commands and keep us in him?

In this world, are you like Jesus? Or will you be found wanting when it comes to magnifying Jesus to one another?

God knows where we are at. he knows we are like a wounded soldier, handicapped regarding loving him and others. He made the best arrangement for us to heal and learn how to love by sending his son, Jesus.

Jesus said, all things have been committed to me by my father. No one knows a son except the father and no one knows a father except the son and those to whom he chooses to refill him.

[25 : 55] Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your soul, for my yoke is easy, my burden is light.

Today is a day for you to come to Jesus and be united with God, and God will give you rest and his spirit to help you love those you can see, and so that you are genuinely following him.

And as you experience God's love for you, we are called to go and show this world God's love for them with the help of his spirit, to love with action and in truth.

set and let's create—