

OUR ANTHEM

1 JOHN 4:7-21

It was a hot day in the town of Ephesus. The crowds had been gathering for hours - people flocking from all over the countryside filling the theatre in anticipation.

You'd think they were there to see a rock star, or a popular sports figure - *not a wrinkled old preacher, who had to be carried into the arena in the arms of his disciples, and then could barely talk above a whisper...*

Though he'd been the youngest of the original disciples, now this man was known as "[John the aged.](#)"

But he had been there... He'd walked with Jesus from the beginning... from the shores of Galilee to a hill called Calvary... He'd witnessed the miracles... sat at His right hand the night He celebrated Passover in the upper room... was the only one of the twelve disciples to stand before the cross and witness its horrors up-close...

And though he was now almost a hundred, and could no longer walk on his own power - there had been a morning earlier in his life when he'd outrun Peter to the empty tomb... *John had seen it all!*... He'd seen Jesus alive with the nail prints in His hands, and feet, and brow.

He was even there when the Holy Spirit fell like fire on the heads of the disciples, and everyone felt the surge of strength that launched the Gospel around the world...

In fact, this is how a Galilean fisherman had come to Ephesus, the capitol of Asia - how a simple, centenarian Jew was now drawing crowds like *Chance the Rapper*.

John had stories to tell about *the God made flesh* - and enormous crowds were coming to hear them.

Imagine, being there in the crowd. You and everyone around you had read about Jesus, but John saw His exploits with his own eyes - touched Him with his hands.

John knew Jesus personally. They were friends. John even called Himself "*the disciple whom Jesus loved.*"

Now everyone in the stadium is on the edge of their seat - straining to hear what the old man might say...

But when John opens his mouth only six words come out. And they're the same six words that he writes here, to begin verse 7, "**Beloved, let us love one another.**"

And apparently, this didn't just happen that day in Ephesus, but it occurred often. Whenever *the Elder John* was brought before a crowd he would always give the same short speech, "**Beloved, let us love one another.**"

One of the early church fathers, named **Jerome**, in his commentary on Galatians, tells us that one day after John had uttered his single sentence sermon, a disciple asked him, "**Teacher, why do you always say this?**"

To which John replied, "**It is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient.**" John saw love as the heartbeat of his faith - as the anthem of Christianity!

Love was John's watchword. It wasn't Jesus' miracles or wisdom that impressed John most - it was the Lord's love. And

this became John's theme. He saw it as the essence of Christianity. When boiled down to its core, John message was always, *"Let us love one another."*

1 Corinthians 13 is often referred to as *"The Love Chapter."* Here's how it ends, *"Now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*

Paul was the apostle of faith. In the face of Jewish legalism, he was the champion of salvation by faith.

Peter was the apostle of hope. He spoke of Jesus' return, which is indeed the believer's *"blessed hope."*

And if Paul was about faith, and Peter was about hope; then **John was the apostle of love.** God's love for us, and our love for each other, was John's anthem.

There's a Peanuts cartoon strip where Charlie Brown is conversing with Lucy. She says to him, *"You know what I don't understand? I don't understand love!"*

Charlie Brown agrees, *"Who does?"*

Lucy is really worked up over the subject. She vents her frustrations, *"Explain love to me, Charlie Brown..."*

Charlie Brown replies, *"You can't explain love. I can recommend a book, a poem, or a painting, but I can't explain love."* She pleads, *"Try, Charlie Brown, try!"*

So Charlie Brown gives it a feeble attempt, *"Well, let's say I see this beautiful, cute, girl walking by..."*

Lucy interrupts him, *"Why does she have to be cute and beautiful? Huh? Why can't a young man fall in love with a girl"*

who has freckles and a big nose? Explain that, Charlie Brown!” Lucy is now extremely agitated.

Charlie Brown shrugs, “Okay, let’s just say I see this girl walk by with this great big nose...” Again, Lucy jumps in, and interrupts, “*I didn’t say, **great, big nose.***”

Finally, Charlie Brown walks away muttering, “You not only can’t explain love, you can’t even talk about it.”

Well this morning, the Apostle John not only talks about love... **he explains it!** He defines *God’s love for us*, and the importance of *our love for one another*.

As is our custom, let’s read our text in its entirety; then we’ll go back through it verse by verse “**Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we 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 seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is

the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

Again, verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." **Love is the Christian's birthmark!**

Let's say a mom has the same facial features as her daughter - we all marvel, "There's no mistaking that girl's mom." Or a son has the same athletic frame as his dad - we say, "That boy is his dad's spitting image."

When a child shares a parent's distinguishing trait you're confident they were born to that parent.

And this should be true of a Christian. God's most outstanding trait is love. All true love *"is of God."* Thus, you'd expect those born of God to love as God loves.

You've heard the phrase "born again." It's not just religious jargon, or a pollster's category - it's descriptive of what actually happens spiritually when a person becomes a Christian. Like slapping the paddles of a defibrillator on a person's chest, God's Spirit lands on our heart and energizes our spirit. God hits us with His life. He awakens us to His love, and plants within us His nature. It's like getting **woke** to spiritual things.

And if you're born of God and know God, His love will be evident in you. From now on you'll bleed love.

But the reverse is also true. Verse 8 reads, "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

If you see a person in need, and don't feel the slightest twinge of empathy... Or if you dismiss another person on the basis of their color or race without the willingness to get to know them personally...

If you have no love for people Jesus died to save; then it's obvious you don't know God. You're still dead in your sins. You've never been touched by His love.

In verse 8 when John tells us that "God is love," he's not reducing the concept of "God" to a mere emotion or force in the world. The Bible reveals God as a person.

God has a personality that's capable of a full range of emotions: *love, but also anger - joy and grief - wrath, but likewise patience...* Human emotions are nothing but the imperfect reflections of divine emotions.

Yet God's dominant emotion - that which lies closest to the surface of His character - is **love!** It's been said, "Love does not define God, but God defines love."

When you think it through, the observation that "*God is love*" necessitates the Bible's doctrine of the Trinity.

Scripture teaches that God is one God, yet He exists in three distinct persons - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For love to exist it has to have an object. So for an eternal God to have always been characterized by love there had to have always been someone for Him to love. Before *time began* and *creation commenced* - the members of the Godhead dwelt together in a beautiful, harmonious love... Today, for reasons unknown to us, God has amazingly focused His love on you and me!

Verse 9, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us..." "*Manifested*" means "put on display."

Like a grocery store display that sits in the middle of the aisle to grab your attention, God has put His love for us on display... *But where can we see God's love?*

John writes, "That God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him."

Don't look for God's love displayed in a grocery store... look for it *in the womb of a virgin named Mary, or in a Bethlehem manger, or growing up in a town called Nazareth. Look for it on the shores of Lake Galilee - or in Jerusalem streets - or in Temple courts.*

Ultimately, you'll find God's love on display on a hill called Calvary... and just outside a garden tomb, next to a rolled-away stone - mistaken for the gardener.

God's love for us, and the life God offers us, is on display in His Son, Jesus. *God's plan points to Jesus!*

His **empathy** is seen in Jesus' coming as a man...

God's **wisdom** is revealed in Jesus' teachings...

His **power** was on display in Jesus' miracles...

His **grace** was seen in the healings Jesus worked...

His **mercy** was visible in Jesus' dying... And the **new life** God offers us was unveiled in Jesus' resurrection.

And if you're shopping for a better life, look at God's display. He showcases His love in the person of Jesus.

It's sad, but often when you come to church you hear people talking and bragging about their great love for God. *The sacrifices they've made... the gifts they gave... the extremes to which they went... Ah, hush!*

Verse 10 silences any human boasting, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

CS Lewis gave us great advice, when he said, "On the whole, God's love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him." **Indeed!** Our love for God is nothing compared to His love for us... **Our love is a drop from a eyedropper. His love is an ocean!**

It's been said, "Love always flows downward."

Certainly, my love for my parents is not as deep as my parent's love for me. But neither is my children's love for me as great as my love for them. [Love flows downward...](#) And likewise, who among us loves God with a thousandth of the love He has for us? *No one.*

This is real love... not that we love God, but that God loved us enough to send His Son to die in our place.

I love you guys - I love you a bunch - but I don't love any of you enough to sacrifice one of my three sons.

If it were you or one of my boys on the chopping block, I'd be nice. I'd do all I could to pull off for you a good, respectable funeral - *but I'm sorry, I'd never sacrifice one of my own sons.* I'd sooner lay down my own life for you, than offer up one of my sons.

Yet sacrifice His Son is exactly what God did for you.

There's a clip from ["America's Funniest Home Videos"](#) where a boy and his little sister are walking down the street. They come to a crack in the sidewalk.

It's a long step. The crack is a couple of feet deep.

The brother easily jumps over the crack, but the little girl stops and begins to cry. She's afraid to jump.

After several failed attempts to reason with his sister, the little boy acts marvelously Christ-like. **(clip)**

This is what Jesus has done for us. Humankind is like the little sister standing before a chasm called sin.

Sin has created separation between us and God

On our own we're unable to cross over, but Jesus became the human bridge over which we can crawl to safety. Through His sacrifice we can pass from *death to life - darkness to light - bondage to freedom.*

Verse 10 calls Jesus our *"propitiation."* The word means *"place of mercy."* *And in this world mercy is in short supply.* There aren't many places you can go and find mercy. This world is good at meting out justice, and vengeance, and payback. But God offers us mercy in His Son Jesus. If you need and want God's mercy there's only one authorized distributor - *that's Jesus!*

Verse 11, *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."* *God's love for us* is infinitely stronger than *our love for Him* - and when we're exposed to such love, we're lifted on its wings!

When you *receive love* you'll want to *share love.*

Remember the old hymn, *"When nothing else could help, love lifted me."* Love has an elevating power.

A common theme in the old sci-fi films was the space ship traveling too close to a hostile planet, and getting pulled into its orbit. Well, God's love has that same sort of gravitational pull. His love pulls us into its atmosphere. Once your heart is captured in the orbit of His love you'll begin to extend that same love to others.

For *"No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."* God is spirit. God is invisible to the physical eye. The closest this world gets to seeing God is by observing His love

through us. As John puts it, *God's love is "perfected" when we love each other.*

Once the father of a disabled child was addressing his son's school in Brooklyn. He asked, "Where is the perfection in my son Shaya? Everything God does is perfect. But my child can't understand things as other children do. He cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God's perfection?"

The audience was shocked by the father's question.

The dad continued, "I believe, that when God brings a child like mine into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people react to this child."

Then he told a story. One day he and Shaya were walking through Central Park when they came upon some boys playing baseball. Shaya wanted to play. The dad reluctantly asked if his son could join them.

According to one boy it was the eighth inning and his team trailed by six runs. Their chances of catching up were slim. They'd take Shaya - *might even let him bat.*

Well, in that eighth inning their team unexpectedly scored three runs. In the ninth they scored two more.

The bases were loaded when it was Shaya's turn to bat. The dad was shocked when these boys - who were virtually strangers - sent his son to home plate.

The first pitch - Shaya swung, but wasn't even close.

That's when the kids came to his rescue. One boy put his hands on Shaya's hands and helped him swing. The next pitch he hit a slow roller back to the mound.

The boys had to point Shaya to first base and encourage him to run... And rather than toss the ball to the first baseman, the pitcher launched it to right field.

Shaya kept running. The right fielder threw it to third base rather than second baseman - who then threw it to the shortstop - *all the while Shaya kept running*, until he came home with the grand slam that won the game.

And that's when the father telling the story, with tears streaming down his cheeks, said softly, "That day, those 18 boys reached their level of God's perfection."

And this is what John is saying... We reach our peak as human beings - we become all that the Creator intended us to be - *not when we win the game, or close the deal, or pass the test, or launch the business, or make the discovery* - but when we **love** like God loves.

Don't miss what John is telling us - **life as God intended is all about love.** Life is more than making money, or being productive, or having fun - **it's about showing love.** It all boils down to love. As the aged John preached, "*Beloved, let us love one another.*"

Verse 13, "**By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**"

It's God's Spirit in us that motivates us to love. Recall Galatians 5:22, "**the fruit of the Spirit is love...**"

God's love comes to us in three ways - **He speaks it to us... He does it for us... Then He puts it in us...**

He **speaks it** to us through His Word... **does it** for us on the cross... Then **puts it in** us through His Spirit.

The love of God is *proclaimed in the Bible, proven on the cross, and perfected in our hearts.* Here's the big question, *has the love of God been perfected in you?*

“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.” The old man, John, had seen firsthand God's plan unfold. He understood he was still alive after all these years to testify of one truth - *God sent Jesus to save the world.*

And nothing John had seen in the sixty years since had changed his mind. *Even though his peers, the other eleven disciples, had been martyred for their faith... Even though John himself had faced the wrath of the Caesar and survived... Even though everywhere Christianity had been preached it was now being persecuted...* nevertheless John remained unflinching.

He refused to back down. Not the emperor in Rome, or the Greek pantheon of gods, or even the local superstition, **but Jesus** - is the Savior of the world!

And **“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.”** John sounds so **exclusive**. What about a good Hindu, or a Mormon, or a peace-loving Muslim who doesn't believe that Jesus is **THE** Son of God, does God not abide in him?

First, before I talk about Christianity's exclusiveness, let me mention it's **inclusiveness**. *Did you know Jesus is willing to save anybody?* No one is outside His reach! Not just the

good, but the immoral are invited - not just the religious, but secular people can come!

While on earth Jesus courted lepers, prostitutes, tax-collectors. His grace made room for the marginalized and disenfranchised of society. Jesus included people of every background - *who were willing to follow Him.*

On the one hand, Jesus was amazingly **inclusive**.

But on the other hand, He was definitely **exclusive**. Hey, *God put all the eggs of salvation in one basket!*

Modern society loves options. We live in a world of multiple choices. Crest has 27 types of toothpaste. Campbell's soup now comes in 53 varieties. You can purchase Tropicana orange juice in 8 sizes. Even my dietary staple - *Cheerios* - can be had in 13 flavors.

How dare God tell us that there's only one way to heaven! But that's exactly what He's done. In John 14:6, Jesus tells us, "I am the way, the truth, and the life no one comes to the Father, except through Me."

In a clover-leaf world there's still only one exit to heaven. *And the reason God is so exclusive is love!*

God loves His Son - *has before time began* - yet He loves us too, and was willing to sacrifice His only Son for our salvation... And now if He offers salvation any other way, it cheapens the price Jesus paid. Multiple choices would diminish the value of Jesus' sacrifice.

Any other way to God means the cross isn't necessary. That's a scenario His love will never allow.

God's salvation honors His Son. That's why if you honor His Son, God will abide in You and you in God.

Verse 16, **“And we have known and believed the love that God has for us.”** The way God saved us, forever assures us of His love. *When I say God loves me I'm not speculating. I'm not just hoping...* John says **“we have known His love.”** How? Jesus stretched out His arms on the cross, and said, **“I love you this much!”**

We're confident of God's love by looking to Jesus!

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.” God teams up with the person who loves. If you want to dance with God, put on a love song! God is love - *He loves to love!* So when we love other people God sees to it His love flows through us.

For **“He who abides in love abides in God, and God in Him.”** God willingly partners with those who love.

Verse 17, **“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.”**

Jesus was despised and rejected - unappreciated for who He was. And **“as He is, so are we in this world.”**

Only when Jesus returns will God's kids be revealed in their glory to the world around them. Often I hear a person say, **“I just want to be understood.”** Well, for the Christian that won't happen fully until Jesus returns.

In fact, it's on the day of judgment that we'll shine. On Judgment Day people who don't know Jesus will duck for cover. They'll look for a rock to hide behind. Whereas, believers will stand boldly before God!

This world is frightened by the thought of judgment, *but not the believer in Jesus*. On the cross our sin has already been judged. It's penalty has been paid in full.

As Christians we look forward to standing before God. His love has absolved our fears. We're assured of His forgiveness, and stand confident of His love.

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” Verse 18 is one of my favorite verses. It has set me free from so much pain in my life. *Here's a little snippet of my testimony...*

I grew up terrorized by fear. The kids on the school bus picked on me and called me names. I had big, floppy, elephant ears. Kids would flick them until they turned beet red. Eventually my parents paid for cosmetic surgery to have my ears pinned back (*that's why I now have such beautiful ears*) - but for several years I was an easy target. I allowed other kids to pick on me. I lacked the courage to defend myself.

Finally, I decided the pain of being picked on was far worse than the pain I would feel if I got beat up, *so I started fighting back*. If anyone crossed me, I'd do my best to punch them out. I went from *coward* to *hothead*.

But neither approach conquered my fears!

I hope you realize, fighters aren't fearless people. In fact, fear is the primary reason most fighters fight.

Once former heavyweight boxing champion, Floyd Patterson, made a revealing confession. He said, "I am a coward. My fighting has little to do with the fact, though. I mean you can be a fighter - and a winning fighter - and still be a coward." That's what I became.

A fighter can still live his life in bondage to fear.

It wasn't until I embraced the love of Jesus that I overcame my fears. I realized the truth of verse 18, "*There is no fear in love... perfect love casts out fear.*"

Here's how it works... when you're certain that God loves you - *that He'll protect you, that He cares for you, that nothing can happen to you that His love does not allow* - then and only then do you have nothing to fear!

When you can see your enemy as God sees him. *And begin to love him with God's love; then God's love for him drives out your fear of him.* Love conquers fear.

Only the love of God can drive out our fears.

There is no *fear of failure* when you're assured of God's *accepting love*... There is no *fear of people* when you're certain of God's *protecting love*... And there's no *fear of the unknown* when you've tasted of God's *everlasting love*... "*Perfect love casts out fear.*"

The most fearless people on the planet are believers in Jesus who are themselves assured of God's love.

And then verse 19, “**We love Him because He first loved us.**” This is such a vital verse; for it teaches me that *the source of my love for God is His love for me.*

What child would love a parent unless that parent had first loved their child? And we don't really love God until we learn of His love for us! Romans 2:4 drives home this point, “**Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?**”

I grew up on a kind of religion designed to scare you into repentance - *it was hellfire and damnation every week.* You would come home from church on a Sunday morning and have to brush the soot off your clothes.

The wrath and judgment of God may've temporarily kept us in check, but it did little to capture our hearts.

But when I discovered God's love for me, *it drew me in.* God's love for me caused me to love God in return.

Today, when I sense my passion for God growing cold I recall His love for me. It refuels my love. This is why Jude tells us, “**keep yourself in the love of God.**” The key to loving God is to be receptive to His love!

Verses 20-21 end the chapter, “**If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?**” I know it's a scary thought, and one you may've never considered, but when you embraced Jesus as your Savior, and God became your Father, *you got **ME** as your brother.*

As the old saying goes, “you choose your friends, but you’re stuck with your family.” I’m **it** for you and you’re **it** for me. Thus, we need to really love one another.

How can we come on a day like today, sing and talk about the Lord Jesus who rose from the dead to love us infinitely... while we sit here holding a grudge against someone in the fellowship? It just shouldn't be!

John concludes, “**And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.**” Notice the “**must**” - there are no exceptions...

God holds us accountable to love one another!

The other guy's color, his race, his age, his status, his income, his style, his clothes, his hair, his tattoos, his odor, his nose ring, his obnoxious habits, the college football team he cheers for... **are no excuse.**

The command is to love him! Don't run out the door when *THAT fellow* walks your way. The command we have from the risen Lord Jesus is to love our brother!

So I'll close as abruptly as one of John's sermons, with just six words, “**Beloved, let us love one another.**”

It is all about Jesus, and Jesus is all about love.

Here among us at CC may love be our anthem!