

Behold the Love of God! 1 John 3:1-3

Today I want to talk about the love of God. It is no secret that we live in a love-starved world. We read the newspaper or listen to the radio or watch the evening news or browse the internet and we are amazed day after day at how cruel this old world can be. I read just this week of a North Korean man who was arrested in China and sent to prison. And the treatment that he received was so inhumane it was almost unbelievable. But what made it more unbelievable was that the prison was not in China, but in North Korea. This man had fled the horrible oppression of that communist nation, was captured in China and sent back to his homeland, and his own countrymen were determined that if the persecution they meted out to him in prison did not kill him he would never, ever even think about fleeing North Korea again. Well, they were wrong, for he escaped and fled again, and this time made it all the way to America. But one thing is certain. The word “love” might be in the vocabulary of the North Koreans, but they are light years removed from understanding what true love really means.

But we shouldn't bash the Koreans for their ignorance about love. For this is the **touchstone** for all who do not know Jesus Christ – a search for love. You see, beloved, there is a chasm in the soul of every man that only God's love can fill. All but those whose consciences are seared as with a hot iron sense that chasm is there, and they long to fill that chasm and find rest, but they don't know that it is God's love that they're looking for. And the devil is more than happy to provide them with substitutes.

To the North Koreans, the devil substitutes God's love with despotism; raw power. But that would go for the majority of American politicians, too. There's just something intoxicating about lording it over other people. To countless crazed football fans, the substitute is winning. I declare, I'm amazed at how some people go absolutely insane over football. You saw them yesterday if you watched any games at all. Turn on the TV this afternoon and you will see them. Faces painted, long, teased, weird colored hair like circus clowns, and screaming like Banshees. To countless athletes, actors, and musicians, the substitute is a World Series ring or a Super Bowl ring or a Grammy or an Oscar. To countless people of every shape and stripe, the substitute is clothes, cars, and condos, or anything else money will buy. To countless others, the devil's substitute of God's love is human love. “If I can just find the right mate I'll be fulfilled in life”. And countless others care nothing for a mate, because that means a commitment. The devil's substitute for them is purely physical pleasure. But in the stillness of the night, when all of these are all alone with their thoughts, the God-chasm in their soul, God's agape love chasm is still there, larger than ever.

Beloved, the most profound, inscrutable mystery in the universe is the infinite love that God has for you. Ever since Moses first wrote about God's love about 1500 years before Christ, preachers and teachers have been attempting to adequately describe God's heavenly love with earthly thoughts and words. And all who've attempted to do so freely confess it is a hopeless, impossible task. The preacher would do better trying to describe to a blind man the beauty of a rainbow stretched from one horizon to the other, or the glory of a multi-colored sunset. And no one would understand this any more than the apostle John. It was John who gave himself the moniker, "The apostle that Jesus loved". For a long time I when I thought about that I had unkind thoughts of John. My thoughts were, "Is this not pride, that John would elevate himself to a position above the other eleven disciples? And he's wrong, anyway. Jesus loves them just as much as He loves him."

But a number of years ago I heard a teaching that showed me just how wrong I was. It was not that John thought that Jesus loved him more than the rest. He knew better than that. But John was so overwhelmed with the thought that "Jesus loves me", that calling himself the disciple that Jesus loved was the most joyous, thrilling way he could identify himself. He did not want to be known as John, son of Zebedee, or John brother of James, or John, successful fisherman, or by the name that Jesus gave him – John, son of thunder (Mark 3:17). But he said, "Call me John, **the disciple that Jesus loved**". John was consumed with the wonder of Jesus' love, not only for him but for the whole world. And the love of Jesus permeates his gospel and his first epistle.

And John was as frustrated as anyone who ever tried to express to others the love of God. But he gives it his best shot in 1 John 3 and 4. We're going to look at how He begins to describe God's love in a moment. But first I want to propose a question to you. How would you answer if God gave you the task of describing His love by completing this sentence, "Look at the astounding love of God, how He has....." If you had to complete that sentence describing the love of God, what would you say?

Well, let's see how close you would come to John's description. Turn in your Bibles, please, to 1 John 3 (read vs. 1-3). How did you describe God's love? Now, if you gave the John 3:16 answer you were certainly right. "For God so loved the world....." But look how John describes God's love in v. 1. "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God". Beloved, that is the greatest expression of love that God could ever extend to you, that you could be called His child. And the Greek word that John uses when he says, "what manner of love" implies astonishment. It means not so much "what kind" of love is this, but "from what country" is this love. John is saying, "The love of God has never been seen in this country before. It is much greater than our kind of love. It is a foreign kind of love, it is love of another country unknown to us". And John was right. It was love from the country of Heaven, God's country.

But John says that we see the Father's astonishing love in the fact that He has made us children of God. And I want us to explore this exalted position of being a child of God for a few moments. Just what are all the blessings? Well, if we turn back to chapter 2 we will find out. Look at verse 12. The first blessing of being a child of God is sins forgiven! Oh, friend, there is no greater joy than to know that your sins are forgiven and that you are no longer the object of God's wrath.

For just a few moments I want you to assume that you are not sitting in church, but that you are sitting in a consultation room in a medical clinic. And you are a patient and I am a doctor. You have had a battery of tests and the results are clear – you have cancer and at the most you have one year to live. But, the good news is that with surgery you can be guaranteed a 100% recovery. Now, just to keep from upsetting you, would you want me to tell you that you are OK, just keep on exercising and laying off the fried foods and you should live a long, happy life? I think not. You would want to know the truth about your condition, and you would want to know the cure.

Beloved, may I say that all of us, every single one of us here today was born with a disease that is much more fatal than cancer, and it is sin. Cancer will kill your body, but sin will kill your soul. God says in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death". And the Word of God also says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God". And, "As is it written, there is none that is righteous, no, not one". You may look at yourself and perceive yourself to be a good person, but you need to know that God does not grade on a curve. The gates of heaven are not opened to the top 40% of the class, the ones with the least amount of sin. The gates of Heaven are opened to the perfect – those with no sin at all. And get this, that number does not include you without the forgiveness of God. For you were born into sin. David writes in Psalm 58:3, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies". You were born with a sin nature inherited from Adam just as surely as you were born with your mother's brown eyes, and from the day in your childhood that you knew right from wrong you became guilty of your sin.

Paul gives a graphic picture of the spiritual condition of every person who has ever been born in Ephesians 2. Friends, occasionally you will hear some liberal preacher or some self proclaimed spiritualist on TV say, "We are all children of God". Don't believe it for a second. We are all creations of God, but the whole human race is not children of God. Verse 3 says that without forgiveness we are all children of wrath. I am and you are. And "children of wrath" does not mean God's passing anger that turns into kindness at our death. It means being an object of wrath forever, suffering in for our sins in eternal torment. But thank God, that is not the end of the story. The end of the story is forgiveness for all who will receive it. Look at verse 4-9.

In a nutshell, God is saying to all who've placed faith in Christ for salvation, "I have loved you and have saved you from your sins by your faith in Jesus Christ

alone, totally apart from your good works”. So I ask you, what are you trusting at this moment as your hope of Heaven? Is it the fact that Jesus died for you, paying the penalty for your sins on the cross, and that He rose from the grave, and that you know for certain that you’ve placed your faith in Christ alone for your salvation? That’s the only way to receive forgiveness and become a child of God. God says in Galatians 3:26, “For you are all sons of God by faith in Jesus Christ.”

But there is a second blessing of being a child of God. John says in the latter part of verse 13, “I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father”. Beloved, when your sins are forgiven you not only are spared from eternal punishment, but now God is your Heavenly Father! And that means that He is not a God Who is aloof and uncaring, but He is a God Who loves you and cares for you a thousand times more than an earthly parent would ever care for their child.

This concept is so foreign to the natural mind. The natural mind cannot conceive of a personal, loving God. Listen to what Moses wrote to Israel just before they crossed over into the Promised Land: “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for **whatever reason** we may call upon Him?” Beloved, as a child of God, you can know that your Father is near to you. You are never, ever alone, never, ever are you outside of His protection and care.

I read a touching story of the love of a Chinese man named Liu for his wife this week. Liu was only nineteen when he married a twenty-nine year old widow named Xu with three children. But Liu and Xu paid a high price for their love for each other. For the culture of their village considered what Liu did to be an immoral, scandalous thing, marrying an older woman with three children, and they totally rejected both of them. And they were driven out of town and took up residence high up in a mountain cave. The family had no food or electricity, and it was reported that at least at times they ate grass and roots and lived as prehistoric cave dwellers. Their only light was a kerosene lamp. Over the years Liu carved out 6,000 steps from the bottom of the mountain for Xu to walk up and down upon. And they lived this way, with no one but each other and their children, for over 50 years. Can you imagine? Not a single friend in the world. And in 50 years they never spent one day apart. Not one day.

But one day Liu came in from his daily routine, and suddenly collapsed and died. As he died.

Xu – “Why did you leave me? You promised not to”.

As much as he wanted to, Liu’s love could not meet Xu’s every need.

No human love can. But our great God’s love, through Jesus Christ, can!

A third blessing because of the love of God. **Sins forgiven**, and **God is our Father**, and finally, **we have present victory over the enemy of our souls, the devil**. Verse 14 says, “I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one”.

Young men refers to young Christians. Not babes, yet not fully mature. But the promise of the strength that Jesus gives is given to every believer, whether babe in Christ, young, middle-aged, or old.

We have talked much in recent weeks about our adversary, the devil. We are in daily conflict with him and all of the minions of hell. He seeks to steal, kill and destroy.

We have overcome, conquered – **through the Word of God!**

BUT THERE IS A PROCESS!

“Faith comes by hearing....” Rom. 10:17

“For whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes....our faith” 1 John 5:4

Suppose you are the Secretary of Defense of the United States.

Nauru has invaded the US and established a presence on the coast of Northern California.

Nauru – island nation in South Pacific. Smallest population in the world. As of four years ago, 13,770 people. About eight square miles. No capitol city. But they have invaded the US.

President Obama tells you, “Go down and tell them to leave within 24 hours, or **Guantanamo Bay**.”

If you go alone you become their first POW. If you go with 200 tanks and 20,000 soldiers and say, “The President of the US says, “Get out or go to prison”, they’ll listen.

Sound ridiculous? Certainly. But it is no more ridiculous than Satan attempting to invade and conquer a believer in whom the Word of God abides!