
Love in the Light

1. Intro & Context

- The letter of 1 John is a very pastoral and comforting letter
- John's writing to comfort and assure the believers of their faith in the face of any doubt and anxiety created by the false teaching of those who have tried to steer them away from Jesus
- So it is a very comforting letter ... but it is also a very stretching letter
- Because he also writes to remind us that you're a true followers of Jesus if
 - you believe in Jesus
 - take sin seriously; and
 - love one another
- In other words, if you're going to take fellowship with God seriously, then
 - you need to take his truth seriously,
 - you've got to take his love seriously; and
 - you've got to take his holiness seriously
- You can't pick one or two out of the three

- We've discovered as we've been reading 1 John these past 6 weeks that one of the big themes of this letter is love
 - John mentions the word 35 times in just 5 short chapters
- Here in Ch 4 John gives an extended exhortation on to us on this topic of love
- When you study English at high school, you're taught a literary technique to ram home a point is repetition
 - Well John must have got an A+ (not in English obviously, but in Greek) ... because he repeats the word 'love' 21 times in just 12 verses!
 - That's taking this repetition idea to the nth degree!

- And as you read it ... it may have come across as somewhat wishy-washy
- Like a modern day pop song
- You know the song by John Paul Young – Love is in the air
 - You couldn't get a more wishy-washy love song than that
 - It must have been something to do with what they were smoking in the 70's
 - Love is in the air everywhere I look around
 - Love is in the air every sight and every sound
 - Love is in the air, in the whisper of the tree
 - Love is in the air in the thunder of the sea
 - Man! Could that be any more vague and soppy!?!

- And as you read 1 John 4 ... you might think John is the C1st JPY writing sappy words about love
 - God is love > you must love > This is love > Love is from God > love is made complete > whoever lives in love lives in God
- It's the sort of passage you could imagine a couple choosing for their wedding because all it talks about is love and they're in love ... and actually come to think of it ... this is the passage we had at our wedding!

- But it's not sappy at all ...
- It's a wonderful passage of scripture that teaches us the very essence of love

- Now whether you're Christian or not ... this has got to be relevant to you
- Unless your Anthony Hopkins in Silence of the Lambs ... everyone wants to love well
- Everyone wants to experience love and be able to be a person who is able to love
- Love is the greatest virtue we can have as human beings

- It's no wonder our song writers and poets write about love so much
 - Love is powerful, love is wonderful, love transforms people's lives
- And here John shows us what love looks like
 - It's not the fleeting, experiential, sexual love of our modern day pop songs
 - It the real love that seeks to serve others sacrificially
- And John will go on to show us
 - the power of love; and
 - how **you** can love others in the ways you want to and ought to

- So this morning I want us to look at 1 John 4 under three headings
 - The command to love
 - The barriers to love
 - The power to love

2. Command to love

- The recurring idea in these verses is the command to love one another
- We see that in
 - v7 - Dear friends, let us love one another
 - v11 - we also ought to love one another
 - v12 - if we love one another
 - v21 - Whoever loves God must also love his brother

- John's point is that ... an essential part of being a follower of Jesus is that you love others
- In fact, he goes on to say it's more than that
 - He says your love for others is a sign or a mark that you are in fact a Christian
- Check out v7-8
 - *Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God*
 - *Whoever does not love does not know God*
- Also ...
 - v12 - *if we love one another, God lives in us*
 - v16 - *Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him*
- Of course it's not a person's love for others that makes them a Christian
 - Not saying if you love others then you get a fast pass to heaven
- He makes that very clear in v15
 - *If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.*
 - It's a person's trust in Jesus Christ as the resurrected Son of God that makes a person a Christian
- Rather ... John is urging his readers to live a life that's consistent with their faith in a God who is love
 - "If you're a Christian, if you believe in Jesus, if you worship the God who is love ... then live that out by loving one another"
- So the Christian ... and therefore the church community ... ought to be characterised by this reality whereby they love one another
- **Illustration – Candid Camera**
- There's a show I used to watch growing up called Candid Camera
 - They would set up secret cameras then film people in the mall chasing a \$20 note attached to a fishing line that would be pulled away from them just as they bent down to pick it up
 - Or people dressed as statues that would suddenly jump out at them as they walked past
 - You'd be cracking up at these people reacting in frustration or being completely scared out of their wits
- What John's saying is ... if you're a Christian ... and a candid camera was set up on your life or my life or in this building on a Sunday ...

- The footage would show time and time again, over and over, acts of love towards others
- It wouldn't be as entertaining as Candid Camera ... but it would reveal real displays of love for others that would be a reflection and confirmation of your faith in Christ

- **Application**
- Let's explore what it might look like to love one another
- **Care Groups**
- One of the ways will be to love one another in our care groups
 - Not here two weeks ago
 - Encouraging everyone in our growth groups to form pairs or triplets ... and for each of those groups to connect up with someone who's new or not a GG
 - Purpose is so that we can be intentionally loving one another
- How?
 - Check in with them when they've missed church or GG
 - Pray for one another
 - Ask them about and encourage them in their marriage, parenting, their witness to friends, Bible reading
 - Do hospitality together and invite others to join in

- **Family**
- How can we love each other in our family
- So often it's in the little things isn't it?
 - Way you speak to your spouse and kids > tone, words you use
 - How you prioritise time with you family
 - How you seek to encourage one another your walk with Christ
 - How you help out and do your part in the home

- **Church**
- What about at church?
- How you ...
 - Prioritise church and growth group each week
 - Come to church with mindset to serve and encourage others rather than to be served
 - As you open your home and lives to one another
 - Include the outsider
 - You welcome the person who is new to church

• Forgiveness

- You know where loving one another will make the biggest difference in our lives ... it's in our willingness to repent and forgive one another
- When you and I take what John is saying seriously ... we will be people who are willing to repent and forgive
 - If you and I are loving one another ... we're
 - willing to hear to the person we have hurt
 - willing to admit our wrongs
 - willing to move towards the person who has upset, offended or hurt us in a willingness to forgive and be reconciled
- You can't say you're taking this command seriously if
 - you're unwilling to forgive
 - you're unwilling to reconcile
 - you're unwilling to say 'sorry' and listen to and understand how and why you have caused pain and hurt to someone
- Love finds its ultimate expression in repentance and forgiveness

3. Barriers to love

- Now for most people, this is obvious
- Understanding what John is saying is easy – love one another!
- It's the DOING what John is saying is actually the hard bit right?

- Because our modern culture is obsessed with self
 - Self fulfilment
 - Self gratification
 - Self promotion
- See this in advertising
 - L'Oreal – because you're worth it
 - Vodaphone – Power to you
- Much of social media ... is about self promotion
- Promoting
 - what I'm achieving
 - what I'm working on
 - the swanky places I'm holidaying or eating out at

- Our human nature is to look after and promote ourselves
 - Of course this is a generalisation and there are times when you and I will show love to other's
 - But the thing is ... we don't show love to others all the time or as much as we would like to

- We want to ... but we so often fail
- And that's because our human nature ... the inclination of our hearts is to love ourselves

- **Illustration - Survivor**
- We like watching the TV show Survivor
- Don't know Survivor > 20 people get thrown together on an island
 - Have to make do with basic provisions
 - Have regular challenges ... and team who loses challenge has to vote off a member of their tribe ...
 - Until get down to the final three survivors when the jury votes for the winner
- It's not the most intelligent show on TV, but we like the intrigue, strategy and game play of it
- However, Survivor gives a real insight into our selfish human nature
 - In a way it's a microcosm of society
 - Because what it shows is that people are by nature selfish
 - They all want to win!
 - Their motivation is either
 - Greed > I want to win \$1m
 - Reputation > I want to be known as the sole survivor
- And while there are often brilliant moves that contestants pull to further themselves in the game ...
 - Often they resort to lying, backstabbing, deceiving and blindsiding each other as they look to further their own interests and chase the money or the title
- Even though everyone knows it's a game,
 - their desire to fulfil and satisfy themselves and their own desires
 - ends up creating hurt, anger and frustration when other contestants are on the receiving end of that

- I know it's a game, but it really does show how we tend to operate
- Like the contestants in Survivor we will do things to serve our own purposes, interests, goals and desires
 - As a consequence ... we hurt people around us in the process rather than loving them as John urges us to do

- And so
 - we'll retaliate when we think people are criticising us
 - we're unwilling to admit our own failings

- we're passive aggressive towards others when they've slighted us
- we'll do what we want and ignore the impact it has on others around us
- That's our human selfishness rising to the fore every time
- Because our sinful human nature is to satisfy our own desires and interests rather than to love one another around us

- Again ... I'm not saying we're incapable of acts of love
 - I'm talking about what stops us from loving one another more than we should
- Someone might say
 - "Well what about the times when I love my wife and family in the way I do the washing up, ironing or cooking"
- Even our acts of kindness and love can be selfishly motivated
- It is possible for us to love others ... in order for them to love us back
- May not say this consciously ... but we can operate in a way whereby we say ...
 - I will love him or her as long as I am getting out of this relationship what I want ... sex, romance, security, approval

- So we know we ought to love one another
 - That's the easy bit ... knowing what we ought to do
 - The hard bit is actually doing it ... actually loving others like we should
 - Because we have this underlying issue of the heart that wants to satisfy me ... rather than serve and love other people

4. Power to love

- How can we move forward on this?
- How can we overcome and put aside the selfish desires of the heart and love one another the ways we want to and know we ought to?

- Well it starts with God ... and this is what John has been at pains to point out in these verses here in 1 John 4
 - v7 - Dear friends, let us love one another ... why? ... for love comes from God
 - Love originates with God
 - The power to love starts with Him
- As John goes on to say in v8 - because God is love
 - That is ... the very essence of his being is love
 - He's not a capricious deity looking to smite all who dare to defy him
 - He's a God of love

- How do we know this? Verse 9-10
 - ⁹ *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*
- God demonstrated his love for us in giving up his son on the cross
- You see God doesn't offer up the same selfish excuses we do ... not to love us
- He doesn't say ...
 - "I've got have some 'me time' today"
 - "I've got some more galaxies that need creating, maybe next time"
 - "I'm tired from keeping this universe up and running > I need a nap"
- No ... he showed he loved us by sending his *Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*
- Why?
 - So that we might live through him
 - That is ... so that we might have eternal life
 - So that our sin could be atoned for and we could find forgiveness with God
- This is the essence of love!
 - Sacrificial, self-less, other person centred – love
- And so John goes on to say in v11
 - **Since** God so loved us ... we also ought to love one another
 - Since God laid down his life for you
 - Since God was so willing to serve you
 - Since God was so willing to love you ...
 - The only right response is to love one another
- Notice John doesn't say
 - Love one another ... and if you do ... God will love you
 - Love one another ... because if you don't God's going to get you
- No!
 - He says God loved you first!
 - He showed you what love looks like
 - And not just what love looks like ... but that he directed his love towards you!
 - And you get to experience his love

- And you get to benefit from his love
- Therefore, God's love is demonstrated to us and experienced by us ...
 - And that enables and empowers us to love one another
 - We don't love others
 - out of fear of losing God's love
 - nor because of the threat of God's wrath ...
 - but as a result of God's generous love to us
- You know what this teaches us don't you?
- **Love is costly**
- It teaches us love is costly
- If you're going to love others ... it will cost you
- When Jesus was on the cross, he called out to God the Father and basically said "Father, please help me!"
 - And in that moment the Father did not help his son ... so that through the death of his son he might help us ...
 - That **must** have been excruciating to hear the cry of his son ... and leave him
- That must of cost God to love like that
- Therefore we shouldn't be surprised if we're going to love one another, there won't be some cost for us
 - There's bound to be some costs
 - There's going to be some sacrifices
- If you're going to welcome and love people at church ... it will cost you
 - Giving up sitting in your usual seat and going to sit with a newcomer
 - Giving up chatting with your friends after church
 - Giving up some 'me time' on Sunday to welcome ppl over for lunch
 - Giving up time to go and visit and sit with and pray with that person who is going through hard times
- But then what did Jesus do?
 - He was willing to give up his place in heaven and come to you
 - He was willing to give himself up on the cross in order to welcome you into eternity
- If you're going to forgive one another ... that will cost you
 - You're going to have to make the move towards the person who hurt you even when there is a barrier between you

- You're going to have to absorb some of the hurt and pain the other person's inflicted on you in order to forgive
- But then what did Jesus do?
 - He moved towards us to even though there was a barrier of sin between us
 - On the cross he absorbed wrath of God in order that we could be forgiven
 - He didn't stand at a distance and wait for us to admit our failures ... he came to us > died for us > forgave us and loved us
- When you love one another it will cost you
- But then again ... the cross reminds us that God's love for us cost him so much more ... for it cost him his son

- **Love is risky**
- Not only is loving one another costly, but it's also risky
- There is always the risk
 - that you will love others and they won't love you back
 - that others will exploit your love and generosity
- But that's not a reason to not to love one another
- Because Jesus took a bigger risk ... he emptied himself on a cross to love the world ... knowing that many in the world not love him back
- And so friends, we love ... not because we're going to be loved back
 - We love one another because we're **already** loved
 - His love is all you need
 - You don't need the love of others to fuel you and keep you going
 - That will only let us down
- God's love is more than sufficient
 - His love is greater than the love any other person can give you
 - And his love will never let you down
- So yes ... it's risky to love
 - But God risked much more to love you
 - And if others let you down, you know you have one who loves you completely, whole-heartedly, now and for eternity

5. Conclusion

- Friends, if you're here this morning and you'd say you're not yet a Christian ... let me ask you ...
 - Where do you get power to love when it is hard?
 - Where do you get the strength to love others when you don't want to?
 - How do you love your spouse when your will is fighting with you to retaliate and lash out?

- But when you acknowledge Jesus ... God lives in you
- And if God lives in you ... he gives you the power to love in ways you otherwise couldn't do
- How?
 - Because you understand how radically loved you are by God
 - You know what it cost God to love you
 - You get how undeserving you are to experience that love
- And to the extent that the love of God to you in Christ grips your heart
 - It will empower you, and motivate you and it give you the resources to love one another ... just as you have been loved by God
- You can have that power to love others in Christ
 - Come to him, turn to him ... acknowledge him as Lord and Saviour
 - And as you acknowledge him for all that he's done for you on the cross
 - That will equip and empower you to love others in the ways you want to
- And brothers and sisters ... if you find you're struggling to love one another
- Let me ask ...
 - Have you lost touch with God's love for you?
 - Have you failed to grasp it?
 - Have you forgotten it / become immune to it / become blasé about God's love to you?
- If that's you ... then let me urge you to go back to the cross
- Because the good news of God's great love for you ... will help you and I
 - to overcome that barrier of selfishness
 - empower and equip us to love one another as we know we should

PRAY