

Living in God's Love

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[0 : 0 0] 1 John chapter 3 verses 11 to 24 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother and why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Do not be surprised brother that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need yet closes his heart against him how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him. For whenever our heart condemns us God is greater than our heart and he knows everything.

[1 : 1 6] Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us we have confidence before God. And whatever we ask we receive from him because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment that we believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him and he in them.

And by this we know that he abides in us by the spirit whom he has given us. Our first point is about the process of receiving God's love.

So what's the first point? It's about the process of receiving God's love. And I've called our first point, encountering the love of Christ.

So this is the third talk in a series of four from John's first letter. And what's his letter all about?

[2 : 3 2] Well John wrote to counter false teaching within the church and also to reassure his readers of their salvation. I suppose the two things are pretty much the same really.

You might remember chapter 5 verse 13. I'll read it to you. It should warm our hearts this. Just listen to this. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

John's saying you don't need to cross your fingers on your deathbed. So John's bringing truth into an atmosphere of false teaching within the church.

In the second century there was a system of thought called Gnosticism. And Gnosticism, it emphasised special knowledge. And it seems John was sort of confronting an early form of Gnosticism.

Three times he uses the word liars. And he keeps contrasting their false teaching by saying we know, we know, we know. You'll see it right throughout the letter.

[3 : 41] It punctuates the letter. And as we've seen the biggest area of false teaching seems to be about the identity of Jesus. We were thinking about that last week, weren't we?

We were thinking about John. He was warning us about the Antichrist within the church. John, he begins and he ends his letter with Jesus' identity.

I'll just read the penultimate verse of the letter for you. And you just for yourselves whether it speaks into the situation that I've been describing. It's chapter 5, verse 20.

I'll comment on the verse as I read it through. And we know, you see, it's contrasting with what these false teachers think that they know. John says, and we know that the Son of God has come, that's the incarnation, and has given us understanding, you see, so that we may know him who is true, as opposed to the lies of these false teachers.

And we are in him who is true, in his Son, Jesus Christ. And just listen to this last sentence of verse 20 of chapter 5. I don't know what the JW's do with this.

[4 : 49] Listen to this. It's about Christ's deity. He is the true God and eternal life. So John's confronting Antichrist teaching within the church.

And friends, I think the identity of Jesus is the most important thing in the Bible. Get it wrong and the Bible's dead. Am I right? Peter struggles, doesn't he?

Peter struggles all the way along. And then suddenly he looks at Jesus and he says, you are the Christ. He's got his identity right. The Pharisees, on the other hand, in Jesus' time, they don't want to know.

John chapter 8. And Jesus gives them knowledge about who he is. And what's their reaction? Well, they pick up stones, don't they, to throw at him. And these Gnostics that John has in mind, they're not throwing stones at Jesus, but they're throwing lies at his church.

Think about it. Lies about who Jesus is. Like the cults of today. John's saying, listen up, Glasgow. Here's the truth. Just listen to this.

[6 : 00] Chapter 1, verse 2. The life was made manifest, and we have seen it, says John, and testified to it, and proclaimed to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was made manifest to us.

When we've got Jesus' identity right, think about this. Everything else will slot into place, won't it? Am I right? We begin to live lives like him. Get it wrong, on the other hand, and we've lost our harmony with the Creator.

Our lies are shaped not by truth, but by the lies that we follow. And this is the dynamic of John's letter. He wants our lies, listen, shaped to the truth.

You know, we often say, don't we, that we'd like to live Christ-like lives. And I'm sure John would say something like, little children, yes, I want to see Christ in you.

Now, think about the sequence for a moment. You might need to take a deep breath, get some oxygen in your lungs, and into the grey matter. Think about the sequence.

[7 : 08] A, John encountered Jesus at his incarnation, didn't he? He's clear about that. And he calls him the Word of Life. So that's A. B, John proclaims the incarnation to us, so that the Word reaches us.

So you with me? It's sort of in our laps, isn't it? On the pews in St. George's Tron Church in Buchanan Street. So that's B. And then C, we receive life through the same Word.

And we join John and Jesus and God the Father in that fellowship. Do you see? Are you with me, that process? The Word's a bit like electricity, in many ways.

Electricity, it's source, think about the source of electricity in the power stations. It's a nuclear-powered power station, isn't it? Or a cold-powered power station, and it comes through the national grid, and it gets to us, doesn't it?

We can turn on the oven and cut the Sunday lunch. Heat again, this end. So do you see? The system is heat at both ends. Are you with me? Are you following with that?

[8 : 19] Or it's like a wind bomb on Lewis. They've just received planning permission, haven't they, for a lot of wind turbines. The electricity, it arrives at our office, along the lead to the desk, and the fan is blowing wind back at us.

Just like the wind on Lewis, there's wind at both ends. Now think about this. Listen, think about this. John's encountered Jesus. He wrote about him, and through the Word, we also encounter Jesus.

He gets at us, do you see? He comes to live in us, says John, chapter 1, verse 3. That which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us.

And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. Now if that process is going on, think about this. The goal in our life, the goal in our life, must be to conform with what Christ is doing, to be Christ-like.

And John's letter is bringing that process. It's bringing and testing that process. The false teachers, on the other hand, they can't live like Christ because they don't have him.

[9 : 30] They're thinking, you know, they're thinking and lives are all gummed up with false doctrine. The conduit of God's Word is broken somewhere along the line with lies.

It's like a JCB digging on a building site. You know, you often hear about this, don't you, in the papers. There's a JCB digging and suddenly the whole electricity of the whole estate is shorted out.

The vacuum cleaner stops, the fridge stops working, and no matter how many times you flick the light switch on and off, the lights will not come on. And this is the lies of the false teaching.

They've distorted God's Word and they've lost his Son. So, friends, the Word comes flowing through the ages.

God lifts it from the pages of Scripture. And, friends, like with Jesus, there should be an incarnation going on. But this time it's in our lives.

[10 : 30] And we interact with the world as Jesus interacted with the world. Love sort of gets fleshed out in our lives. Are you with me? You know, it's not just head knowledge.

It's incarnated in us, in us lot as Christians. The false teaching, on the other hand, they deny the incarnation so they don't look like incarnated love.

They're not kosher. You know, they might present themselves to the Apostle John and he'd look at them and he'd say, this doesn't sound, feel, or look like Jesus, do you see.

So, we've thought about how we encounter Jesus Christ and his love, how it gets to us. And now we're just going to see, from this letter here, we're going to see the hate of Cain.

John now shows us what hate looks like in our second point. And his case study is Cain and Abel. And he's showing us hate. He's incarnating it for us.

[11 : 34] So, Cain and Abel, they're brothers. And John is talking about brothers within the church. That's what John's got in mind. Look at verse, look at verse 12.

Have a look at verse 12 there. We should not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Cain's deeds were evil and his brothers were righteous, says John. So, Cain murders his brother, doesn't he, for showing up his sin.

And think about the Pharisees back in the time of Jesus. They did the same, didn't they? Righteousness visited them and they have him nailed up on the cross, don't they?

They shout, if you are the son of God, come down from the cross. Do you see? It's the same issue that John's writing into. And we might, us, we might not have blood on our hands, but we can be in the same moral pool as murder.

[12 : 35] Look at chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Do you see what John's saying? He's saying hate equals murder.

And Jesus says, doesn't he, he says, you have heard it said do not murder. Do you remember the Sermon on the Mount? And then he looks at our heart, at our motivations and he's getting quite close to home, isn't he, quite often.

Anger, for example. Or Jesus tells a parable about the sheep and the goats. And it's, it's about how we're to love other people within the church.

Will our love be incarnated like Jesus or will it just be head knowledge? Just listen to this. Then he will say to those on his left, depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

[13 : 37] For I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger and you did not welcome me. Naked and you did not clothe me. Sick and in prison and you did not visit me.

Then they also will answer saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not minister to you? Then he will answer them saying, Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.

You see, it's just a drink, isn't it? That's the deciding factor, says Jesus. And it was as if he was snubbed. And so on judgment day, he crystallizes our attitude for all of eternity.

If we reject him, he rejects us. Depart from me, says Jesus. They're his words here. And so we each need to think here, don't we, about our love.

How real our love is. How incarnated it is. You know, what about welcoming people within the church, for example? Just think about that, welcoming people.

[14 : 40] What about our local churches? I know we're not all here from St. George's Tron. We're not all members here. What about our local churches as well? Do people go home lonely? You know, nobody's chatted to them.

Nobody's invited them into their homes. We watch them sneak out of the door, slipping away. They came to the family of God and love wasn't at home.

Jesus said, by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another. You know, I think about our 21st century evangelical churches.

You know, we pride ourselves, don't we, on good teaching. But we're particularly at danger here. We can so easily be sort of comfortable, middle class, head knowledge sort of people.

Remember, John's writing into a church where knowledge is the issue. You know, sometimes the world, it sort of gums up our thinking and our love isn't incarnated.

[15 : 42] We look more like Cain than Jesus, more like goats than sheep, more like the world than citizens of heaven, superficial Christians.

And John says this, look at verse 17 and 18, look what John says there. He says, but if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth. And so friends, we need help, don't we? You and me.

Cain's just a little close to home and our third brief point is living in God's love. Just look there at verse 16. Just read verse 16 with me.

By this we know, love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. Do you see the harmony? Lay down your whole life, says Jesus.

[16 : 42] Become who you are. And he's directing us to the cross, isn't he, in verse 16. By this we know, love, that he laid down his life for us.

And all the cane in us, listen, all the cane in us is taken away by Jesus. All the hell we deserve is absorbed by him. all those ploys of evasion that we play, he takes them as his own.

And then he rises from the dead, doesn't he, Jesus? He rises from the dead as the empty tomb. And Peter, who'd rejected him, well, Jesus says to him, do you love me?

And what does Peter say? Peter says, yes, Lord, doesn't he? And all of Peter's shortcomings are no more. He's caught up in his Lord's love.

It's like, listen to this, it's like the word that created Adam is doing his work again. Peter, you know, Peter said something that Adam never said, didn't he?

[17 : 47] He said, Lord, you know that I love you. And as we read the Bible, the same word is reaching us. Jesus speaks and he's invading our being, recreating us from Adam's image into his own.

And friends, it's the interface of the ages in which we live. And we need to be living out God's love. And he's with us, isn't he, as well?

And behold, I am with you always to the very end of the age. So here it is. this is love. Shall we pray?

John says, this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation of our sins.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you once again that you came to this earth and you died for us on that cross. You took all our rebellion, all our sin, all those times when we don't love people as we ought to.

[19 : 08] And we pray, Father, that you'd reform us into the image of your son, Jesus Christ, so that we look like him and we live like him in this world. And Father, that's a work of your word and your spirit and we pray that you'd be doing that in our very lives.

And so we lift this prayer to you and we pray, Father, that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and your love and the fellowship of your spirit would be with us now and forevermore.

And we ask in Christ's name. Amen.