

Love

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[0 : 00] Welcome to the next in our Advent series. As you know, we've been looking, Advent is the time leading up to Christmas. We're looking at Advent words that everyone, or Christmas words that everyone talks about.

Hope, peace, today is love, and then on Christmas Day, joy. So today we're looking at love. And, you know, love has got such a wide variety of meanings, doesn't it?

You love your mom, you love your wife, but you also love pizza. And, you know, is that the same kind of love? The English word love has got such a wide range of usage, doesn't it?

And, of course, the world defines love in certain ways. And so we need to look at what love is all about. How does the Bible define love? So if you think about it, a man meets up with a girl from an online dating app.

They're both looking for love. They meet up somewhere. Sparks fly. She goes home with him and spends the night. Is that love? A woman, unhappy in her marriage, feels held back by her children and her husband.

[1 : 09] She loves her job and can really help the company reach new heights. She leaves her family, neglects them, maybe moves in with the boss.

They'll say it's love. Is that love? What about the songs that we hear online? I want to love you.

I mean, if you take the top ten songs, they're all saying the same thing. And they sometimes use the word love they used to. I will love you tonight.

I want to give you my love tonight. All those songs all mean one thing, don't they? We know what they mean. Is that love?

Love. So many different versions of love these days. It's a cacophony of voices. Each one claiming to be an authority on what love is or should be. We've got the LGBTQ movement trying to, in a sense, redefine love.

[2 : 13] And saying that there are totally no boundaries to what people can do and who they can love. But they keep on shifting that boundary bigger and bigger and further and further away from what we're used to.

Attacking what they consider traditional forms of love. In fact, calling traditional forms of love hate. Isn't that interesting? And so we want to look at what love is all about.

Why is love especially associated with Christmas? With the coming of Christ into the world? With Jesus? And with Christianity? What is different about the love that is defined in the Bible compared to how the world defines love?

And of course we want to go to the source of that information, which is the Scriptures. So the first question we're going to ask ourselves today is, how do we know what love is?

What about the love of God? What does it mean that God loves us? How do we know that? How do we experience it? And sadly many Christians are confused about love just like the rest of the world.

[3 : 23] But, you know, we shouldn't be. Like all truth, we need to have the Word of God define what that means. And what it means that God loves us. And so, if you've got your Bibles open, just look at 1 John 4 again.

And we'll look really at verse 9 and 10 and 11. I'm reading the NIV version.

It says this. 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. The ESV says, In this, the love of God was made manifest among us.

That God sent His Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In the Greek, this, or in this, or in this way, this is how God shows love, is emphatic.

Like, this is the way that God shows His love, by sending Jesus into the world. And that's why we celebrate love, especially at Christmastime, the coming of Christ into the world.

[4 : 32] This is how we can know that God is love. What does He do to show us that He loves us? God makes His love manifest. He shows it by Jesus coming into the world.

Now, to manifest something is to make something appear or to show it. To make it visible, to make it clear. The Greek word behind, our English word manifest, is fanero.

We have a version of that in English. Photons, you know, the thing that come from the sun, that make light. That's the equivalent Greek word.

It's to make manifest, to shine some light into the world. Thankfully, we've got a little bit of light left over still. And so, when ESCOM is working, we know what that means.

To bring light so that you can see it. Figuratively, of course, it means to make something plain. To make it known.

[5 : 35] To make it understandable. So, that's how we operate, don't we? If you want to understand something, you've got to look at it closely to see what's happening. It's difficult to understand what's going on if you close your eyes and when there's darkness around you.

Something must be plain so it can be grasped, so it can be understood. So, what John is saying is, if you want to understand, if you want to take hold of the love that God has shown you to the world, you've got to go to Jesus.

You've got to see what He's about. If you really want to understand what love is all about. God's love is made most clearly, is most clearly seen in the person of Jesus Christ.

He manifests God's love in a real, visible, physical way. He's the rock-solid physical act. The rock-solid physical act of incarnation is the thing that solidifies God's love for the world.

And while we celebrate Jesus and love at Christmastime. But we don't see Jesus in front of us. But John did. So, what we've got to do, if we want to grab hold of that love, yes, you've got to come to Christ and have faith in Him.

[6 : 48] But we can know what love looks and sounds like and acts like if we read about it in the Bible. The beginning of John's letter, 1 John 1, he says this.

That which was from the beginning. If you can turn back there, 1 John 1, verse 1. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard. That's an objective fact.

Which we have seen with our eyes. Another objective fact. Which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands. A very objective fact. Concerning the word of life. The life was made manifest.

Was made known. Was shown. Was shone. And we have seen it. And testified to it. And proclaimed to you the eternal life. Which was with the Father. And was made manifest to us.

All of this is to say that Jesus embodies the very definition of what it means that God loves the world. So many people want to experience God's love without experiencing Jesus.

[7 : 57] But you can't do that. Because Jesus is the one that shines God's love. Or focuses God's love. If you think of a prism. Not a prism. A lens.

Thank you very much. The scientists among us. And you shine it. And it focuses something. So you can see it clearly. Jesus does that for God's love. If you take Jesus out of the equation.

You just get this vague. It's just vagueness. How can you really tell that God loves you. If you're not experiencing it through Christ. Jesus is the clearest and best expression of God's love.

Jesus makes God's love easy to understand. Able to be grasped. Meaning experienced. You can only really experience God's love through coming to Christ.

So we don't have to grope around in the dark. Looking for love. In all the wrong places. The problem is people prefer the dark. Even though the light of God has shone into the world through Christ.

[9 : 02] It's a bit like when ESCOM. When the lights go out. You know. At first. But as you scramble to get to the matches. Or your torch thankfully. Or your phone. You bump into a few things.

Boom, boom, boom. Okay. And then you find it. And you've got it in light. And you can see what you're doing again. But imagine the lights come on. So you can see properly. But then one of your family members is still groping around in the dark.

Going. I can't. You know. I don't know. You would think to yourself. The light is on. Just open your eyes. And you can see properly.

And you can. The things that are blocking you. The things that are causing you to stumble. Or you could hurt yourself. Seriously hurt yourself. Just open your eyes. The light is here. You can see it. What you need. So if the lights come on.

But someone is stumbling around in the dark. You're going to say to yourself. No, but this person. There's something wrong with that person. Why would you rather do. Why would you do that. Rather than have the lights on. Friends.

[10:01] That's what. People in the world live like without Christ. He's come into the world. He's shown us what God. Is like. What love is like. It's useless to live your life without that. Because you're going to be bumping around in the dark.

When the lights are actually on. What that means for us. Is we don't have to go after things. That we're not sure about. Or looking for love.

As I say. In all the wrong places. Or just have this vague. Wishful thinking. Hope. That somehow. The universe. Is going to be okay. That everything is going to be okay. Sort of operate in this twilight.

Zone of hoping. But not really knowing. And being worried and anxious. If you haven't come to Christ. And received him. As he is. The definition of love. Do that this Christmas time.

So that you don't. Wonder around the world. Knowing. Wondering. Does God really love me? You can. Fully experience the love of God. By coming to Christ. I knew this lady.

[11:02] She's European. Doesn't matter where she's from really. But. She believed in love. The modern version of love. Without God. God. And she also.

Believed in the universe. As the person. As the thing. Really. That could most. Tell her what love is all about. When I asked her about this. She literally believes. In rocks.

And stars. And in crystals. She thinks they will guide. And heal. She honestly. Thinks that rocks. And stars. And crystals.

Will guide and heal. And if. Everyone just accepts. What. The message they give out. Then the world would be a better place. There'd be peace. There'd be love. But when I pushed her. On how she can really know.

That they do this. And I asked her. I mean. I was like. Do you really just believe. In the universe. You know. There's. Literally the sun. And Mars. And she says. Yeah. They. Because.

[11:58] For her. There's no God. So that's the next best thing. That you can see. Is this world. So I said. Well how can you. I mean like. How can you really know. How do you know. That they're telling you these things.

And eventually. She said. She couldn't really know. But she hoped it was true. Because how can. How can you know. It's not. It's not talking to you. It's not saying anything to you.

But. When we've got electricity. We've got. Things written down in black and white. By people who were there. That's the point of what. This. Part of the Bible.

This book. This letter. One John. Was written by a guy called John. Who was there. And saw Jesus. So it's an eyewitness account. Of an actual thing that actually happened.

But no. I don't want to know about that. I'm going to believe in crystals. Were you making the biggest mistake of your life. That's just.

[12:55] Well we all know what that is. Friends. We have hope. Not like this lady. Who hoped it was true.

But kind of was. It was more about wishful thinking. We have real hope. Not because we hope it's true. But because we. We know it's true. Christmas is a celebration. Of the coming into the world. Of a real. Flesh and blood. Human being. Sent from God. Jesus Christ. It's not a fable. Or a story tale. It's a real actual account.

People saw him. And interacted with him. We don't have to wonder. Or guess. Or second guess. We can know. And experience. And understand. And in fact.

Investigate. And grow deeper. And closer. In our love. With God. And our love. From God. Because he's a real person. And because. We are people.

[13:50] So that. That love. Like any other normal human relationship. Grows and deepens over time. Just like. If you're married. And hopefully. That love grows and deepens.

And of course it does. We all know it grows and deepens over time. Yeah. It goes through ups and downs. God loves you. If you find that love.

In Christ. You can know that God loves you. But if you look for it anywhere else. You're going to come up empty handed. So be careful of looking for love. Outside.

Of what God has provided. It's the clearest expression of. What love is all about. If you look for it anywhere else. You're going to be disappointed. It's going to not work out for you.

All right. So how do we know that God loves us? We know that God loves us. Because of Jesus Christ. Because of. Christmas. Really. But what does Jesus do.

[14:46] That shows us God's love. How does. How do we. How do we know what that love looks like? Yes. He sent Jesus into the world. That. He says that's love. What's. What does he do?

What exactly is it that Jesus has done. That. Has brought God's love to light. And for many. At Christmas time. It's a. We just have to look at Jesus.

Gentle Jesus. Meek and mild. All things. Cute. And small. And innocent. And. Feelings. But that is Christmas postcard sentimentality.

Babies don't change the world. Not. In the long term. People who've had babies know that they change your world dramatically.

I'm sure you've all been there. When you first see that child. And you have that. That just that. Huge rush of love. And emotion. And then the child turns.

[15:48] A couple of months old. And. You've got to get up at night. And there's feeding. And there's. Stuff that comes after the feeding. And the child grows to be two.

Three. Four. Six. Seven. Eight. Then you hit the teen years. Love. Gets hard at that point. It's not just a feeling. Is it? Babies don't really change the world.

They change it for a short time. As we love them. But then. The hard. Yards of. Life. Come along. Come along. But this little baby. That we celebrate at Christmas time.

Isn't going to stay a baby. He's going to grow up to be a man. He's going to grow up to be a king. And he's going to speak and act. With the authority of God himself. But the crowning achievement of his reign.

Is to die. As a sacrifice for his people. People who don't deserve it. So that they can have the life. That he has. Let's have a look at verse 10.

[16:51] In chapter 4 again. Two times John. Defines what love is. This is. How God showed his love among us.

Verse 9. He sent his one only son into the world. That we might live through him. And then verse 10. This is love. Not that we have loved God.

God first. But that he loved us. And sent his son. To be the propitiation for our sins. Or atoning sacrifice for our sins.

This is love. Not that we love God first. But that God first loves us. And there's some important things. We've got to pick up. About how that works for us as well.

Now that word propitiation. Depending on your translation. My NIV in my Bible. Has got an atoning sacrifice. The ESV I've printed out. Is a propitiation for our sins.

[17:47] That word propitiation. Is a technical word. That refers to the sacrifices. That were made. To appease. The anger or wrath. Of God. And that's what's unique.

About understanding. The love of God. In Christianity. That no other religion. Or system has at all. Everyone wants the love of God. But they stumble over this one point.

How can God be angry with us? I don't like that side of God's love. But it's the very thing that John says. Is the most important thing that Jesus came to do. In fact.

He defines it. This is love. Again. It's an emphatic in the Greek. If you want to know what love is. Well. This is it. Not this. Not that. Not. This thing here. The thing that Jesus did.

To show us. Most clearly God's love. Is to die as a sacrifice. To make sure that God isn't angry with you. And people go. No. But I. I can't handle that. Why is it important that God does this?

[18:47] Why is it important that Jesus does this? Well. What happens when you. Sacrifice in the Old Testament. Or in any system. You're restoring relationship with God.

God. And unfortunately. That's the way it is. We've broken faith. We've done something wrong. We've. Messed it up.

And God says. Look. I need a payment. I need. Some payment needs to be made here. Something must happen. He's not just a God of love. He's a God of judgment.

A God of holiness. A God of justice. God cannot overlook the rebellion of the world. All the mess that we've made of it. It has to be reckoned with. And Jesus is the only person given authority by

God.

To make that payment on your behalf. In this is love. Not that we loved God. But that he loved us. And sent his son to be the propitiation.

[19 : 48] The payment. For our sins. So it's this total giving. Of Jesus over to other people. To us. People who don't deserve it. And that total cost of his life.

That defines what love is. That's the important thing for us to grasp. Jesus personifies the highest way. Anyone can show love to anyone else. He put our good.

Not just above his good. But above his life. So coming into the world. God knew what would happen to his son when he sent him.

In fact God sends. The most precious. The most important. The most glorious thing that he's got. That whole point about. Calling Jesus his one and only son.

Knowing that he's got to die. To reconcile. The rest of humanity back to himself. He loved you. So that you can experience the love of God.

[20 : 54] And so that you can show to others. Friends. This is the only love that I know of. That is strong enough to change a man's life. To change something.

To change really anything. Putting your life on the line to save another person. Jesus did that for you. If you don't have this kind of love in your life.

Christmas time is the time for you to have it. Because it's. It's the only love. That can change who you are. And can change. Everything about your world.

It's Christmas time. You're going to be meeting with your families. I think it's important.

That you let them know. That Christmas time is about this kind of love. Don't lose the opportunity at Christmas time. Especially if you're hosting. To remind us. What Christmas is all about. I'm not saying give a whole sermon.

[21 : 50] But start in 1 John. Or start somewhere from the scriptures. Read a scripture. Say something about. What Christmas is about. Why Christ had to come into the world. And what he came to do.

So that your friends and family can know for certain. What love is all about. So how does God love the world? How does Jesus show us God's love?

How are we then to show this love to others? Well John ties it in for us. In verse 11. Dear friends. Since God so loved us.

We also ought to love one another. Since God so loved us. We ought to love one another. Now. That so word is important.

Since God so loved us. Now. If you think of John 3.16. The famous verse. For God so loved the world. That he gave us his only son. Whoever believes in him won't perish.

[22 : 49] But have eternal life. Now. Everyone says. That means God. For God so loved the world so much. God loved the world so much. That he sent Jesus. Now yes. God's love is a lot.

Obviously. To send Jesus into the world. But. That's not what it means. It's. It means. In this way. You know. In English. We don't use it a lot anymore.

But. More or less in the olden days. But we sometimes still use it. So if you need to do something technical. You need to do some DIY at home. And you're teaching your boy. Or. You're learning. And someone tells you.

Okay. And they say. Okay. You must turn it like this. You tighten it like this. And you're not doing it right. And they say. Well. How are you. How must I do it? You must do it. We say. You must do it like this. Or. You must do it in this way.

In olden English. They would say. Do it like so. Okay. So John 3.16. Isn't. For God loved the world so much. It's. This. Is how God loves the world. By sending Christ.

[23 : 43] That's how you know what love is. It's. In verse 11. Dear friends. Since God loved us in this way. We also ought to love one another. In fact.

That little English word. Ought. Isn't in the Greek. It just says. Because God loved us in this way.

We to love one another. We to love one another. It doesn't sound good in English. So we say. We ought to love one another.

It just says. God loved like this. So love like it. That's what Christians are meant to be doing. But we've seen how God loves. So. How do we get a grip on this?

What are we. How are we supposed to live like this? Okay. So. I mean. The two main things. Is that it's a proactive love. And it's a sacrificial love. There's many other aspects to it. But. For our

purposes now. It's a proactive love.

And a sacrificial love. What do I mean by proactive? Well. We've seen in verse 10. God first loved us. It's a love that reaches out. From heaven. To the mess of this world.

[24 : 41] And says. You know what. I need to go after the people down there. Because they. If I don't do something. They're going to completely mess this whole thing up. It's like when you see your kids. Fighting.

And if you leave them. You know it's just going to. It's just going to end in disaster. So you've got to step in and do something. And you do it because you love them. God does the same thing. It's proactive. He starts the process of love.

Did you notice a reading from Deuteronomy 7? About love. I chose you guys. Not because you're big. Not because you're famous. Not because you're strong.

But because you're weak. Because you're poor. Because you're useless. Let me come and help you. Because you can't do this thing without me. It's the same for us.

God loves us first. He didn't wait for us to respond. He saw the problem. He did something to fix it. That's essentially what Christmas is about. The sending into the world of the one thing that can fix it.

[25 : 43] Just a note about why he says he sent Jesus into the world. So just have a look back at verse 9 again. This is how God showed us his love among us. He sent his one and only son into the world that we might live through him.

Okay. He sent him to the world. Okay. Yeah. What? To planet Earth? Not to Mars? Well, thanks for a little bit of information. No, no. The world in John is this world that's messed up.

That's broken. That needs help. It's the world that God created that doesn't work anymore.

That needs to be fixed. So again, salvation and love isn't saving us out of the problems of the world and saying, hey, the world is so messed up, I'm just going to take you away from it.

That's the traditional understanding of what salvation is. That's not the biblical understanding of what salvation is. Salvation is, ooh, the world is messed up. I need to fix it. Jesus, you're the only one.

[26 : 51] Can you, will you just, yeah. It's going to cost you your life though. Don't worry about it. You sure? Why would you do that? You see those people down there?

Yeah, well, I love them. They need me. Will you go? Sure. They're not looking for you. They're happy with the darkness. But they need us.

He didn't wait for us to do the fixing. Because he could see that our fixing only makes matters worse. Like at home, when your kid messes up. I don't know if you must have come across where they took the toothpaste.

Toothpaste over the whole house. Makeup. They took your makeup one day. Makeup everywhere. They tried to do some cooking. The first time you teach them how to cook. The flour. What a mess. You can't leave them to do it by themselves. You've got to step in and do it. And God is the same with us. Alright, so. If God's love is proactive. And our love must be like God's love. Then our love must be proactive.

[27 : 52] Does that make sense? We too must be proactive in our world to show God's love. To show his kindness. To show his forgiveness. To help fix the problems of the world.

In fact, we're the only ones that have that ability. If you think about it. The love the world offers only compounds the problems. Because it's a love that's not from God.

It's a selfish kind of love. And so it's a love that can't heal or save. It doesn't have that ability. It can only break down if it's done without understanding how God works.

It's only Christians that have saving, healing, life-changing love at their disposal. Which makes us, which makes you, indispensable in this world. If you think about it.

Okay, so. Our love must be proactive. We've got to look for stuff around us. And take action first. And not wait for people to come and say, hey, please help us. We can say, listen, looks like you need some help there. Let me help you.

[28 : 57] And then it's got to be sacrificial. God sent Jesus his most prized and precious possession to the world, knowing it will cost him his life. So get our sins out the way, so he can have this, well, I call it a working relationship, but it's not like work.

I just mean a relationship that works. And he can pull out his love into our hearts and minds, and we can experience goodness and forgiveness and a new start.

A new way of living. Not just a new beginning, but a new continuing as well. And then a new hope. It will come one day. And we are to be as forgiving towards others as God is towards us.

Let's just think about that for a minute or two. So right now, at this moment, how many people are you holding a grudge against? It's coming up to Christmas time.

We all get frayed around the edges. Friends, family, work colleagues. Who have you got a bad heart towards? Or maybe you just had a bruised, sort of unsettled relationship.

[30 : 14] Someone has done or said something that you didn't like or didn't appreciate. Or maybe they made a decision that impacted on your time. We're not talking about big things. Stealing or robbing or murdering.

We're talking about just normal, everyday things. But they can get in the way. We can begin to hold a grudge. We can begin to have bad feelings. Why haven't you forgiven them yet? Well, because you want them to feel the pain.

You want to make them pay in some way. Well, imagine God acted towards you in the myriad small things that you do wrong, the way you're acting towards others in not forgiving them.

You would never be forgiven. God would keep on demanding justice. The one thing you don't want from God is him demanding justice from you because it's a payment you can't make and live.

Rather, forgive. Spend some time before Christmas. Oh, there's a couple of people I need to let know. Well, maybe you don't need to let them know. Just forgive them.

[31 : 21] God, you forgave me. I'm just going to forgive them. Help me to do that. And then there's practical love as well. Sacrificial love and also practical love.

But this kind of love that God gives us is anyway practical and helpful. Because where does it point to? If you're wondering about God's love, what does it tell you to do?

So verse 11, dear friends, since God loved us in this way, we also ought to love one another. So that the best way to know if God loves you is just by going to love other people in the way that God has loved you.

Then you'll know. Western Christianity tends to follow the modern world when it thinks of love as a feeling. It tends to look inside me for how do I know that God loves me?

Well, I only know it if I really feel it inside. But biblical Christianity is different. It doesn't look inside. It looks somewhere else. It looks outside, both to God and to Christ, but then to others.

[32 : 28] To see how you treat them. You may not have to page back, but 1 John chapter 3 defines it again.

John says it again and again. The same thing over and over, really. 1 John chapter 3, verse 16.

Again, this. An emphatic, hey, you want to know something?

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.

Amen. John wouldn't have been speaking figuratively. By the time he wrote this, he was probably the last surviving apostle.

Late into the 90s, 1st century AD. Probably, not sure, but probably. He had seen all the other apostles go down. They had all given their life for people they had never known.

[33 : 32] Okay. It's too big a call. What about this, verse 17? If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions. And in truth. So this is Christmas time.

Perfect time. To think about others, family, friends. I don't know, acquaintances in the community. People in need. Take that extra food.

The stuff that you can't eat. The extra cake. I don't know, whatever it is. Make a little basket. Just go down to the person in the street. Knock on the door. Hey, just want to drop off something for Christmas. Happy Christmas.

We've got lots of people in our congregation sick at the moment. We've done well in visiting and supporting them. Let's continue doing that. It's not a small thing.

[34 : 31] It is a small thing, but it's a meaningful thing to go and visit, to let them know you're praying, or to go and pray and to take something. Does that make sense? What is your life characterized by?

Is it characterized by this outward looking thing? Are you characterized as a loving person? By loving I mean kind, caring, gentle, forgiving, humble, patient, encouraging?

Or are you known as an angry person? What are you known as? Are you characterized by joy or grumpiness? By someone who's got hope or someone filled with anxiety and depression and worry?

As someone who obeys God or someone who lives like the rest of the world? Especially think about that at Christmas time. Drinking too much. Eating too much. And just making sure your comforts are met before you even think of someone else.

Are you patient or easily upset? Are you known as someone who's irritable? Or are you humble and relatable or arrogant or bossy? Well, take whatever your character flaws are.

[35 : 48] Take them to Christ. Sacrifice them to Him. This Christmas, don't be more like you. Be more like Jesus. So that others can know Him too. Friends, the world is looking for this kind of love.

It is looking for this kind of love. It doesn't know it is. But we're the only ones that can give it.

The world needs this kind of love. The world can't see God, but it can see us. And through us, it will reach out to God. Or rather, through us, God reaches out to the world. So just have a look at verse 12 and we'll end with this.

Back in chapter 4, no one has ever seen God. But if we love one another, God lives in us.

And His love is made complete in us or complete through us. By showing the love that God showed us in Christ to others, we literally show what God is like in real flesh and blood terms.

[36 : 53] Just like Jesus did. Yes, it's going to cost us. But having others experience God's love is a price worth paying. Jesus did it for you.

Won't you go and do it for others this Christmas time? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, such a wonderful reminder from your word of your love for us in Christ and such an encouragement to know that we can be this, the same thing that Jesus has done for us, we can be for others.

Lord, help us to focus on love at this Advent time, at this Christmas time, and all the hustle, all the bustle, all the busyness, all the chaos.

Help us to be people that show the love of God, the love of Christ, by being proactive, being sacrificial, and being practical.

In Jesus' name, Amen.