

January 24, 2010

1 John Series – 1 John 4:9-16

Alright good morning. Welcome back. Grab your bibles and lets go back to where we were almost a month ago in our study of 1 John. Because we didn't get to have our Christmas Eve service nor the Sunday following, we didn't get to finish the last two chapters of 1 John. And now that it has been several weeks and at least 3 sermons since then, before we jump into chapter 4 today, I want to take a few minutes and bring us up to speed. So if you missed those sermons, this is your lucky day because you'll get them in a nutshell version this morning. But if you were here for them, hopefully this will be like watching a TV show on DVD that you haven't seen in a couple of decades. As you begin to watch it, you begin thinking oh yeah this is the one where he does this or where this happens or when that took place, I remember this and that feeling of familiarity floods back in. That's what I want us to feel before we tackle chapter 4 so that we don't lose the continuity of the letter or what God is saying because 1st John more than many other books very much is interwoven within itself.

Remember when the apostle John writes this letter, he is the only apostle still living – the only one who really had that intimate communion with Jesus – so his words carry enormous weight. He is writing to a church – most likely in Ephesus – and the purpose of his letter is summed up best in **chapter 5 verse 13** which says: *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."* **John is writing to rebuild the ASSURANCE of salvation back into his readers.**

The believers in the church at Ephesus were struggling with the issue of the assurance of their salvation for a couple of reasons, first of all because a group of people from within the church had left the church – created a church split so to speak – over a wrong view of Jesus. So that's where John starts his letter. Let's go back to **1 John 1:1-4**. TEXT

John is teaching the truth of the incarnation: that the eternal Christ who was with the Father in the beginning and indeed was himself God, this Christ appeared in the flesh, he became a man. That doctrine of the incarnation has always been and will always be at the heart of truth and spiritual authenticity. So here John gives them and us **the first of the tests of the assurance of salvation** throughout the letter: **the DOCTRINAL test of believing in the historical Christ - the Jesus of the Word**. The only grounds for Christian fellowship is a common belief **that Jesus is who HE says He is**. The whole of Christianity stands or falls on that truth.

If Jesus is not who he claimed to be – who the Word reveals him to be, then his teachings mean nothing, his miracles point to nothing, his death was not for sinners, his blood was worthless, his resurrection did not happen, he is never coming back. Everything in Christianity rests on the person of Christ and who he claimed to be. If we don't have him, we don't have anything.

So let me be as clear as John was being in 1 John 1 because this is where it gets exciting. We do have him. Jesus is who He says He is. The Word that became flesh is the life that appeared is the baby in the manger is the child in the temple is the teacher on the mountain is the healer in the streets is the savior on the cross is the victor over the tomb is the king coming in the clouds and his name is Jesus Christ and he is God. And on that rock God will build and we will be his church. And on that rock we have the assurance of our salvation. And that's what John gives them in chapter 1.

But a wrong view of Jesus was just the first reason the believers at Ephesus needed John to write this letter to build the assurance of their salvation. Before they left the church, these false teachers – these people who called themselves Christians but were not – also taught in ways that caused serious confusion on what gave assurance of salvation. In chapter 2, John combats those false teachings with two other tests to build assurance in the true believers at Ephesus: the moral test and the social test. The false teachers basically had taught that you can be confident in your salvation – sure that you stand sinless before God - even if you disobey what God commands and hate your brother. So that's what John addresses next in **chapter 2 verses 3-11** come in. Let's look at that again. TEXT

In a nutshell here, John says in the first 4 verses that **the moral test** by which you can build the assurance of your salvation **is that you keep his WORD. You live in his will. You may fail from time to time of course – but generally speaking you have a seriously dominating desire in your heart to PLEASE the Lord.** Not only is there an outward observance of the law, but an inward cherishing of what God says.

And then in the last 5 verses he says **the SOCIAL test** by which you build that assurance of your salvation **is that you LOVE your brother. There is no way to have understood the love of God expressed in Jesus on the cross and to have experienced that love in salvation and still to continue to HATE your brother.**

So John tells the believers at Ephesus here's how you can find assurance of your salvation. Look at your heart – look at your doctrine – what do you really believe about Jesus? If you really believe that Jesus is who he says he is, then know that is only possible by the presence of God in you. But that isn't enough. If that belief is right – if that doctrine is there, it will show up. What you do is a test of who you are. So look as well at your life. Do you keep God's commands – do you seek to live according to his will? In that, do you love your brother in how you treat him?

And having established that purpose and those themes, what we find in 1 John is that as John writes this he keeps circling back to the same purpose and the same few themes – assurance of salvation through truth, righteousness, and love. And each time he circles back to one of those themes, he gives us more, he deepens our understanding of it. And that's what we saw in chapter 3. John circles back to the moral test – the keeping of God's Word and comes at from another angle so we understand it better. Let's look back at **chapter 3 verses 4-10** again. TEXT

Be real clear here - again John is not saying that our works – the things we do that are good or bad in the flesh determine or decide whether we will be saved – that's not the point at all – that's a works based salvation that will never work. What he is teaching is that our works are one of the displaying factors that show whether or not we have been saved. And so John takes that and comes at that moral test from the perspective of sin.

Obviously we know that none of us are perfect. And John knows that too. Each time he talks about sin here, he is speaking of a habitual practice of sin. And that is what will not be a part of the life a Christian. Chapter 3 develops what we have already seen by explaining that **the moral test means that Christians don't GO ON sinning without conflict over it and confession of it. Christians see sin in their lives – they hate it, they confess it, and they FIGHT it and they do so more and more as they grow in Christ.**

Why? Because sin comes from the inside – it is not just an outward act, it is an inward attitude – it is rebellion against the God who should be trusted and obeyed. So what we saw in chapter 3 was an explanation that a sign of a Christian is a surrendered will to God's will. A sinful lifestyle is the very opposite of that – and in verse 5 John explains why where he says *“But you know that [Jesus] appeared so that he might take away our sins. And in him is no sin,”* he explains two things there – that a sinful lifestyle is a denial of Christ's character and a denial of Christ's cross. So we find assurance of our salvation when those facts are not the general realities of our lives.

So – that brings us up to chapter 4 today. And again, in this chapter John is weaving back to the themes of the book. In chapter 1 he gave us the doctrinal test, in chapter two the moral and social tests. Then in chapter 3 he developed the moral test of keeping God's Word, and in **chapter 4 John develops the SOCIAL test of loving your brother and connects it to the DOCTRINAL test of a right belief in the real Jesus.** That's what chapter 4 is all about. Let me just hit the bulls eye of the chapter that connects all of this to where we've been.

1 John chapter 4. We'll start in **verse 9** together.

“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.”

Now there have been lots of ways and things that have shown the love of God, of course. But **the preeminent display of the love of God is the GIFT of his one and only Son** into the world.

That phrase **‘one and only’** or ‘only begotten’ if you are used to the King James version is **actually pretty important. It comes from a Greek wording that means ‘of the same ESSENCE’ or ‘of the same substance.’ It means Jesus is just as much GOD as God is God.** Again – there’s a reminder of the importance of the doctrinal test – of knowing that Jesus is who he says he is.

And when we know that, we understand what John is saying - that there is no greater gift – this is the unbelievable gift – come into the world in the incarnation – meaning the putting on of humanity – becoming human – so that we might live through Him – so that we might be the recipients of eternal life. That is how verse 9 says God showed his love. The method of showing his love was Jesus coming, but it goes beyond that. Look at **verse 10.**

“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us (we’ll come back to that) and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

In other words John is saying that God’s love is manifested – is shown – is displayed – through God sending His Son into the world, but it is defined by God’s Son dying the death of the cross on behalf of all those who will trust in Him.

Verse 10 says He is the **atoning sacrifice for our sins.** That’s what **Jesus came** to do in His death – **to turn away the DESERVED wrath of God against us and to cover or take away our sins – the sins that SEPARATE us from a relationship of love with God so that we could get that back.**

And that is salvation. Fellowship with the living Creator God – for God to be our God and for us to be His people. And John is saying that God’s love is shown in that God gave the blood – the life – of His own Son that we might have fellowship with Him forever.

Now let’s pause here and remember that we started this study of 1 John in December to tie all of this into Christmas. And what we realize here is that lots of people celebrate Christmas. In fact most people do. And many of them even acknowledge the reason for the season – that it is about the birth of Jesus. A smaller number of that group even get the significance of the birth of Jesus – that He is God coming to earth. But most stop there. Most of the world that celebrates Christmas doesn’t celebrate Easter – doesn’t understand Easter.

But that is what John is connecting here – the cradle and the cross. If Jesus had not gone to the cross and died and come back to life from the dead, then there would be nothing to celebrate at Christmas. That’s what John is showing us here.

God SHOWED us love by sending Jesus. And what MADE it love was the death and resurrection of Jesus. If Jesus doesn’t die on the cross and come back to life, then his coming is not love.

So the reason Jesus came in the flesh was because God loved us – to show us that love – so we could experience that love. And when that happens, when we experience that love in salvation, it doesn’t just stop there as if that’s the end of the deal, as if all that mattered was that we – that I got it. Keep reading in **verse 11.**

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

When John writes that we **“ought to”** there, it **doesn’t mean to express that it is an OPTION.** That’s like telling a fish that it ought to swim in water or a bird that it ought to fly in the sky. He’s saying that **when you understand and experience the love of God that John just described, you WILL love in turn.** It goes back to why John is writing 1 John – to encourage the assurance of their salvation. This verse is saying “If you are going to call yourself a Christian, if you are going to say you are God’s and you belong to Him, then you will conduct yourself as He would – with and in love.”

And here's where the first half of verse 10 comes back for us. **The love he's talking about is not the love of emotion. It's not physical love. It's not friendship love. It is the love of the WILL.** The highest and noblest kind. And it is habitual. This level – this kind of love – is the love of self-sacrificing service. **It's a love basically that is granted and given to someone who NEEDS to be loved – not to someone who somehow is attracting that love** – because they deserve it or it will be easy to love them or because they can repay it. No, it is a love that chooses to love because there is a need to be loved no matter how unattractive, so to speak, the person might be. That's what verse 10 displays – a love given to us not because we loved – not because we deserved it or attracted it or repaid it - but because God chose to love us and we needed a Savior so God sent a Son to die for our sins.

Now going back to verse 11. Why? Why would God through John say you need to – you ought to – you must love one another?

Look at **verse 12.**

“No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.”

He says no one has ever really beheld God at any time. Why is John bringing that up right now? He is simply pointing out the fact that nobody can see God.

So how are people going to know of His power and His glory? He says God lives in us and through us is putting Himself on display. That's the point. If we love one another, God is on display. John is explaining that **God's love is made visible when we love one another the way God calls us to in the Bible.** And *because* God's love is made visible when we love one another the way we are called to in the Bible, then **we are to do that** – to love each other – not only as an encouragement to one another – but **as a witness to the world that God's love is TRUE.**

Do you see that? Here's the logic. The unseen God who showed himself in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ, is also revealed when you love each other. And folks – that is astounding. That your love – your commitment, your selfless, self-giving to each other – is a standing witness to the world of the love of God is an amazing truth and privilege and responsibility.

See God is still all about people seeing His love. That's not just what Christmas is about all about – the so-called season of love - that's what now is all about. Most of you have probably been to a candle light Christmas eve service at some point in your lives. The way we have done it here is to turn out all or most of the lights and then from the center candle of the advent wreath which is the Christ candle, we light one other candle and then another and we pass that light from person to person, from candle to candle, and that light grows as it spreads and it becomes more and more visible – more and more un-missable in the midst of the darkness we are in.

But what does it take for that to be the picture of the love of God being completed in us? Keep reading. **Verses 13-16.**

“We know that we live 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 his Son to be the Savior of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.”

See it's not just that Jesus came or that He came as a human like you and me. It's not just that when He came as a man He was still God. But that Jesus who came and Jesus who is God is Jesus who is Savior who redeems us – he is the sacrifice that forgives our sin so that we can know and rely on the love of God. And that love - **God's love is COMPLETED in us when we love one another and when we share that truth – that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world – with everyone we can.**

Hopefully we are beginning to notice the wisdom and heart of God in this. God wants the believers at Ephesus – and God wants the believers at Fairway – to know the assurance of our salvation. So through John he tells them and us how we can find it – he gives us tests by which we can evaluate our own hearts and lives.

And yet the heart of God is not just for us who already believe, but for those around us who do not. **Each of the tests God through John gives us to know that we are saved is designed to DRAW others to Jesus as well.** As we live in those tests, our lives draw others to Jesus.

Here we have another example of what life in Christ looks like – that one of the steps of doing life in Christ one step at a time together is to reach your world. How? By taking the love God has shown you and loving each other so that you can testify every chance you get that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

The question from chapter 4 is pretty simple for us today. Let me make it practical before giving it to you in simplicity.

Would an outsider look at the way you talk about and respond to and treat those you call your brothers and sisters in Christ and see a love that cannot be explained? Or would they see the same kind of relational issues they see in everyone else they look at?

Would those same outsiders listen to what you talk about and hear you tell them how the Father sent the Son to be their Savior as well as yours?

Is the love of God being COMPLETED in you more and more? If not, why would you think you are SAVED?