

You're Going to Love This...
January 1, 2017

Pastor Justin
1 John 4:7-12

Good morning and happy New Year!

I'm glad you're here this morning. Some of you are probably exhausted from all your partying last night and staying up late. While I'm sure others of you enjoyed a full night of sleep! But no matter how you rang in the new year, here we are in 2017! It's a bit weird thinking 2017 is already here and as I'm planning for youth into 2017 and 2018, it makes me see again how quickly each year goes by.

And for me I'm getting near the end of my bonus year. After I turned 34, I'm not sure what happened, but somewhere in that year I started to think that I was 35. So for most of the year, I thought I was going to turn 36 on my next birthday. And as I was getting closer to my birthday, I started to take stock of my life and think about who I was and where I was at, and ask myself was I the man I wanted to be at 35 and so on. Then one day it came up with Andrea, and she corrected me and said I was only 34. I disagreed, and said "Andrea I know how old I am". But then she told me to do the math, and I realized that she was of course right and I was an idiot, but it changed my perspective. It was almost as if I got to relive my year of being 35 to try and catch up to where I assessed I wanted to be. It's been a really neat year that way.

And New Year's is kind of that way. I'm not a big New Year's resolution guy, but New years is a great opportunity/reminder for us to take stock of where we are at and what some goals or changes might be that we want to make in our lives to be better followers of Jesus in every area of our lives. And today I want to talk about God's love, and where I want to get to is to encourage you that if you could change or improve just one thing this year, that it would be to spend more time with God's word.

Last time I preached, I talked about God's purpose for our lives, and the time before that, I touched on how we belong to God's family. And the last piece of that triangle is our need to be loved. We were created in a way that we all desperately need to be loved. And that statement is complicated. Love is complex. We know that there are different ways we love, through friendships, through romantic love, and of course God's perfect love, but all of those aspects are important to us because we have been created in God's image. Of course the problem is that we seek love in the wrong ways – especially when we are not walking with God. We try to get validation from others; we post on social media hoping that a bunch of people will like our status or picture – and we get some sort of fulfillment from that, but the bad part of it is when none of our friends like our status and there's a wave of wondering what's wrong with it, was it a bad picture? Don't people agree? We don't lose sleep over it or anything, but it's how we feel; some people try to get fulfillment from romantic relationships; and ultimately so much of these things fail because love is complex. We were created to love in many ways, and yet apart from or out of the context of God's perfect love for us, it's a struggle to be content. You see the love between us and God and love between us and

others is actually connected. And although you hear the statement 'God loves you' all the time (Years ago my mom bought me a great shirt that said Jesus loves you – but I'm his favorite), realistically, after hearing it so much it begins to mean nothing. In fact, if you had heard in advance that today's message is that God loves you, many of you would probably be like, "Oh boy, thanks pastor for that deep deep message" And I totally get that. But hear me out. But unfortunately, the worst thing is that many many people don't know or believe that God loves them. That he actually loves them. Sometimes it's because they have never been told. And they have never even had the opportunity presented to them to experience God's love. Other times, in church contexts like this, many people hear that God loves them, but they don't believe it. They feel they have never experienced God's love. Instead they believe that God is just some ambivalent being who doesn't care enough to stop the hurting in the world. The common argument is that either God loves us, but is powerless to take away our pain, or he has the power to help us, but doesn't love us enough to intervene. Many who hear the message over and over -to the point that they are tired of hearing that God loves them- when they are faced with difficulties in life, and God doesn't make it all disappear, they see it as proof that God doesn't love them. It's not that they are hostile to God, but they just feel that yay a, God loves me, but they don't actually believe it. Sadly, statistically, that's probably a lot of people in this room. And worse yet, there are some, who feel that they have done so much wrong that God can't possibly love them, let alone forgive them. They feel they need to get their sins sorted out first so that God will be pleased with them enough to accept them and love them, but they feel they are too far lost in sin to even be able to make that change.

God loves you. It's a simple statement. It's not complicated, but it's deeply complex. The theological depth of a simple truth like that has been studied and contemplated and argued and tears have been shed over that simple statement: 'God loves you'. But brothers and sisters, you will only know and experience the truth about God's love through His word. So we are going to read from 1 John chapter 4 (From the NIV) – you can flip there now, on your device, in the bulletin, the bibles in front of you or on the screen. 1 John 4:7-21.

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 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.

13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are

like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

When I started this message, I wrote down so many questions. There are so many rabbit holes you could do go down. Given that in the timeframe of a Sunday morning, we can't answer all the questions about love or get into every detail, I wanted to talk about three aspects to this passage. **God is love** and what that means, **God so loved** [so loved the world that he gave his only son], and **God knows love** – that when we live in love, we live in God, and God in us.

So first is this idea that God is love. What does that mean? Is love somehow tangible? Is it part of what God is? Is it a force that comes from God? I used to have a professor who would hold up a plastic test tube and say "You can't measure love in a test tube!" And he's right. We can measure the body's physical and chemical reaction to love, we can't actually measure love. And John's not using a metaphor here – he's not saying God is like love, he says that he IS love. It's not his physical being or a measurable attribute, but it's his nature and character. The verses in the passage describe that his love manifests through action – he has a heart towards us that is expressed through sending his Son. You cannot love without expressing it through action. And it would not be right for me to say that I am love just because I'm capable of loving, or because I was created to express love. In order to love someone you need someone to demonstrate that love to. The unique thing about God is that he is a triune God, meaning that he is three distinct persons, yet one being: Father, Spirit, Son. He exists in relationship with himself and constantly can express love within who he is. If you lock me in a room alone for the rest of my life, I cannot express my love to anyone. I can feel, but I cannot take action on that feeling. If someone says that they love you, but their actions show the opposite, and they never show that love to you in any way, then they aren't actually loving you, they are all talk. Unfortunately this happens all the time. On the upcoming Mental health conference about social media, the speaker Wade, talks about Facebook friends aren't actually all really true friends, he jokingly says, if you want to see who your real friends are, post that you are moving and see who shows up to help. He's being facetious but the idea is that to love there needs be a demonstration of that love, and to love is God's nature. It's who he is. And he created you, and he created me, and he loves us. Which leads us to the second part that God so loved that he gave.

Verse 9 says: **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.** God took action. He expressed his great love for us. He gave. And I mentioned earlier that many times people don't see or experience God's love in their lives. And they see trials and hard times as God not doing anything. But it's quite the opposite. God's love is also manifest through his church. Verse 7 says **Dear friends, let us love one another, for love**

comes from God. So God loves us, and we love others, these are expressions of God's love for us. The fact that he chooses to dwell with us, the gift of the Holy Spirit living with us, is an expression of God's love. The fact that he gives us peace, strength, comfort, understanding, are all ways God shows us love. God will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear; he protects us. Now he's not our genie. He doesn't poof all our troubles away. But he loves us enough to let us learn and grow through difficult situations. This is not different than a parent who tells their son or daughter to brush their teeth, do chores, stop playing video games, get a job, or move out. Sometimes you would think by the child's reaction that their world was ending. But those hard things are best for them. And even in great tragedy, God doesn't hide those things from us, but he is with us, he is our comfort, he carries us through, and he uses them to shape us to His likeness, and to help us see our need to depend fully on him. Yet we like naive children, claim that God has forgotten us or forsaken us because he does not remove us from all difficulty. So we must open our eyes and look for the ways that God cares for you. How has he sustained you through difficulty? How has he blessed you? How has he spoken to you? Convicted you of your sin? Stopped you from making worse decisions? How has he guided you? How has he used other people in your life? Only he knows how he has worked to protect you and lead you. How does the Bible show his love for you?

Through the whole context of scripture, we see God's love and faithfulness. Over and over. Some try to say that the God of the Old Testament is fickle and wrathful, but it's simply because they haven't read it. God has always been a God of love. The whole Bible is his love letter to us – the story of how God is redeeming mankind. God protected his people. He led them, guided them, disciplined them, shaped them, prepared them, saved them, and calls them. He has a crazy deep love for his people despite their flaws – despite our flaws. All through the Old Testament, people were constantly rejecting God, doing their own thing, and turning their back on him. We do the same today. He wants to be in relationship with us, yet we are too busy watching TV, playing video games, or on our phones. We aren't that different from those in the Old Testament, yet though we are sinners Christ died for us. There is grace – God loves us even though we don't deserve it. There is forgiveness, and heaps of patience as we try to get better. And once we truly believe that simple statement that 'God loves us', we cannot help but love others.

The third piece is that God knows love. His love is made complete in us only when we love others. We were not just created to receive love but to give love. And John makes it clear that if we hate our brother or sister who we can see, then we cannot possibly know God's love whom we cannot see. Because God's love is so perfect, and he loves us even though we don't deserve it, that if we've experienced that love, then we have no other response but to love our enemies. It's the only thing that makes any sense because while we were enemies with God, he still loved us. Verse 10 says, **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us.** You see, for us to love God, who first loved us is not true love. It's easy and natural to express affection towards someone who is kind to you. But true love is having a heart toward and taking action to love someone who has not loved you. That is the most beautiful kind of love. It's the kind of love that is demonstrated when a parent

loves a child, or between a husband and wife when they demonstrate faithfulness, grace, foreignness and reconciliation. Or even how we love the least among us, or the poor, the broke hearted, and so on. And as God's followers, we must strive/learn to love like God loves us (And how that plays out is a bigger discussion!).

God is love, he so loved, and he knows love. If you don't love like this then you need to take stock, and ask yourself do I really understand, do I really believe what it means to say 'God loves you', and the only way to know more is to explore God's word. I hope that today you maybe caught how interesting and deep God's word can be. The more I learn, the more I realize I need to learn. And we are all doing this together. Even for those who really know and have experienced God's love, none of us are perfect – but we walk and journey together.

So if I could leave you with one encouragement. It would be to spend more time this year in God's word. The year after I graduated I worked with my dad for that summer, we were doing roofing, and between countless pounding of nails, I would sneak over to the other side of the roof, and I would pull out this piece of paper and just stare at it. I would sneak glimpse at it, on my breaks or any time I could, I would pull this out. It's a picture of Andrea. I know that it may sound cheesy, but it was the closest thing I had to spending time with her. Other times when we were dating, she had written me letters, the odd phone call, when I was on tour, she hand made me a devotional for while I was away, and any chance I had, I would try to find a moment to do those things. If the Bible is God's love letter to us, and he uses it to speak to us, and reveal himself more and more, then we should find any chance we can to spend a bit more time reading it. So this year, no matter if you read the Bible regularly, occasionally, or even if you don't really read it at all. This year, make it a goal to spend a bit more time. God's word is so interesting and profound and there are ton of different tools and resources to help keep you accountable, or to help you make sense of it. And for those who want to read through the Bible this year, and are dreading getting stuck in Leviticus and Numbers, one resource I have personally found really valuable is a free series of YouTube videos called the Bible Project. I want to show you one quickly to hopefully encourage you. These are also on right now media, but they just provide an overview on each book of the Bible and on different themes to help you have a larger context and perspective of the book. And it can be so helpful, so here is the video on Leviticus.

I hope you found that interesting and insightful. As we go into this new year together, let's remember to pray for each other, care for one another, encourage each other, love one another, and get to know God through his word a bit more this year.

Let's pray.