**Overflowing Love**

1 John 4

***Can we be sure that God loves us*** - that He is for us? In dark moments, when pain and sadness and fear seem all around, can we still be confident in God’s love for us?

***The clear and resounding answer of Scripture is YES.*** We can and we should have confidence that God loves us, no matter what is going on in our lives. This is the message of the Bible from beginning to end and it is the testimony of Christians throughout history. Suffering and evil do not give evidence against God’s love, they provide a dark backdrop against which His unending love shines even more brightly.

* **The widow** who so desperately misses the love of her life finds in God the true husband she has always longed for.
* **The parents** who lost a child find in God the love and affection they miss so much from their son or daughter.
* The person with a **terminal illness** battles pain and despair every day but finds in God the daily encouragement and loving presence He needs more than any medication or treatment.
* The emotional pain of **divorce** can threaten to shatter a person’s identity, value, and hope for the future, but through a divorce you can find in God the love, affirmation, acceptance and joy that no other human could ever provide.

The fact is that **our greatest hardships are our greatest opportunities** to draw CLOSER to God and find in His love the thing we most desperately need. And deep suffering is when ***we can also experience the best of the local church*** - as God’s people become His hands and feet and tangible love for us when we feel paralyzed by the pain.

In this beautiful section of 1 John, the beloved apostle connects these two realities, for they are inseparable. ***God’s love should always overflow in love for people.*** Since God has poured His love into our hearts and lives, the only appropriate response is to pour that love out to those around us. The summary is so clear and simple in verse 19:

“We love because he first loved us.” 1 John 4:19

What we’ll see today are three gifts from God that prove His love for us. God’s abundant, amazing, overflowing grace is irrefutable CONFIRMATION that He is love. And this love from God is also the supreme MOTIVATION for us to love one another. So that’s our plan for the morning: to feel the confirmation of God’s love in His grace to us, and then to apply that motivation to our relationships. “We love because he first loved us.” Let’s follow John’s reasoning here, going back to verse 14.

**Gifts from God that prove His love for us**

1. God’s **Grace** in His Son, His **Sacrifice**, His Spirit

“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.” 1 John 4:14

John is saying here that he and the other ***11 apostles, as eyewitnesses*** of the entire 3-year ministry of Jesus and of his death and resurrection stand by their testimony that Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of the world. ***Our faith is not based on wishful thinking or invented mythology***. The Christian faith is based on the FACTS of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. The fact that all 12 apostles, plus Paul the apostle to the Gentiles - all 13 of these Christian leaders suffered and died for their testimony EXCEPT for John, who was writing this, and he was sent into exile on an island - literally cast away for the end of his life.

In spite of all of that opposition, ***persecution and suffering*** not one of those apostles denied their testimony or backed off of their assertion that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior, the King of Israel, the Son of God!

**The best evidence for God’s love is the gospel.** First, that God the Father sent His only begotten Son into the world - **the Incarnation**. It was no small thing that Jesus came to earth at all. And the way He came was also a stunning act of love! He could have simply appeared on earth in human form as he had in the Old Testament numerous times. But Jesus wanted to FULLY ENTER our experience - to feel everything we feel firsthand, to know what it is like to be human.

***The incarnation*** is hard to understand theologically - how the eternally divine Son of God through whom all things were made was able to be a microscopic embryo and developing fetus within Mary all while upholding the universe with the word of His power; how Jesus, the eternal wisdom of God who inspired every page of Scripture had to learn the Bible as a child, just as he had to learn his ABC’s and 123’s; how could the all-powerful Son of God - the King of Kings and Lord of Lords - hang on a Roman cross and die?

The answer is, ***He took on flesh***. The fully divine Son of God became fully human - maintaining his 100% divine nature while adding 100% genuine humanity to it. It’s like the Trinity - 1 God, 3 persons. The math is tricky but the theology is right.

The incarnation proves God’s love for us. Seeing the ***failure, sin and rebellion of Israel for 2,000 years***, from Abraham through John the Baptist, God could have written the whole thing off as a lost cause. He would have been well within His rights to say, “I sent dozens of prophets and performed hundreds of miracles - and for what? For this ungrateful nation of ungrateful, idolatrous sinners? No thanks. I’m done.”

But instead, God sent His Son directly to this ungrateful, idolatrous, short-sighted, hard-hearted nation, knowing they would kill him. The proof of God’s love is not only the incarnation but also and ultimately the crucifixion. How did Jesus become the “Savior of the world”? By dying on the cross. Look back at verse 10.

1. God’s **Grace** in His Son, His **Sacrifice**, His Spirit

“In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 4:10

***Sin must be punished.*** God is just and cannot simply look the other way when it comes to sin. That would violate His nature as the all-knowing, all-good God of the universe. He must give justice in the end.

Sin must be punished and it must be punished **proportional to the crime**. “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life.” If you steal your neighbor’s sheep, the Law of Moses required that you return that sheep and in restitution give four additional sheep. It wasn’t just a slap on the wrist and “bring the sheep back over there, Johnny.” There was a cost to justice. If your ox kills your neighbor’s ox you give him your living ox and you get the dead ox. Fair’s fair. If two men are fighting and they knock over a pregnant woman so she has a miscarriage the offending man - according to the Law of Moses - that man must be killed. Life for life. The Bible is pro-life from start to finish, by the way. Unapologetically, clearly and emphatically. God is a God of justice. If you take a life, you lose your life. Period.

***Do you see the progression of justice?*** Steel a sheep, repay it with multiple sheep. Kill a baby, you die. Your life in payment for the baby’s life. Higher crime, higher punishment. The higher the life form you sin against, the greater the proportional punishment must be.

***What is the consequence for sin against GOD?*** Because God has infinite worth, sin against Him has eternal consequences. It cannot be any other way. God has offered a means of salvation. If you refuse that offer, you die in your sin and must pay for it, forever. If you refuse to accept the terms of surrender offered by the King, then you must accept the terms of His final military conquest. There is no other choice. That final outcome is called JUSTICE. ***The just penalty for sin against God is death*** - not just the physical death of your body but the eternal death of your soul. Sin must be and will be punished. If you remain in your sin then God’s wrath will fall on that sin and you will suffer forever.

**UNLESS you have a PROPITIATION**. Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross is the only thing that can protect you from the coming wrath of God. His sacrifice fully satisfied the wrath of God against sin. ***The cross is like a super absorbent SPONGE*** that soaks up all the judgment and condemnation to the point that not a single drop of that flaming acid is left to fall on you and me. He took every single drop of it into his human body as he hung there on the cross. ***Propitiation is WRATH ABSORPTION.***

***The Old Testament sacrifice system was like cheap paper towels.*** A sheep or bull could soak up a little judgment but never all of it and never for very long. Jesus’ single sacrifice took it all!

But there’s even more good news in the gospel! Not only did God send His Son, and not only did the Son of God die as the once for all sacrifice for our sins, but then, having forgiven and changed us - God sent His Spirit to live IN US forever! God’s grace to us is shown in the giving of His Son, His sacrifice and His Spirit! Verse 13.

1. God’s **Grace** in His Son, His **Sacrifice**, His Spirit

“By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.” 1 John 4:13

***John loves this idea of ABIDING*** - of dwelling. Chapter one of his gospel says that Jesus - the eternal Word of God - became flesh and came to DWELL among us. The word here in 1 John 4 is the same word in John 15 - to remain. Stay. Dwell. Abide.

And notice how it works both ways - ***we remain in Him and He remains in us.*** What a beautiful mystery! At the moment of saving faith the believer is united with God in Christ. Your dwelling is in God and will be forever! God Himself becomes your HOME, your dwelling place. You are connected to Him like a branch to a vine.

But at the same time that your soul is united with God and secured in Christ, ***your heart is transformed and becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit***. You move in with God as your dwelling and the Spirit of God moves in to your heart as His dwelling place.

**How can you know** that you abide in God and that He abides in you? The answer: the Holy Spirit. We saw this a few weeks ago in Romans 8 - ***“The Spirit of God testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.”*** You feel the **comfort** and assurance of the Spirit that He is with you, that you are forgiven and beloved. And you feel the **conviction** of the Spirit in those moments that you stray from the path.

That is the first line of evidence that God loves us: His amazing, infinite grace! God has given us EVERYTHING! His Son, His sacrifice, His Spirit, His salvation, His home, His everything!

**Gifts from God that prove His love for us:**

1. God’s **Presence**: His love flows **Through** us

“Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” 1 John 4:15

***Believing and professing the gospel CHANGES YOU.*** Romans 10:9-10 - “with the heart you believe and are justified but with the MOUTH you confess and are saved.” Verbally expressing your faith in Jesus COMPLETES the faith. Faith unexpressed is not yet faith - it’s just thoughts. But thoughts articulated become saving faith.

I had a wild encounter in a **nursing home** once. Nursing homes are kind of wild places, but this experience was unusual even for a nursing home. One of the ladies I worked with in the hospitality ministry at the church asked if I would visit her mom in the nursing home. Linda was a devoted follower of Jesus and loved to welcome people to our church and help them feel at home. But her mother had never trusted in Jesus and it was clear that her time on earth was limited. So we went to see her.

We chatted for a while and the wiry old bird was as sassy and difficult as Linda warned me she would be. Plus she had dementia so we weren’t sure how much of our conversation was getting through. But I shared the gospel, walked her through the Romans road and ended, as I always do, with Romans 10:9-10. ***“It is with the heart that you believe and are justified and with the mouth that you confess and are saved.”***

Linda and I expressed that to her Mom - it’s not enough to just believe in Jesus in your heart, you have to SAY IT. She nodded, seeming to process that truth. Then she started saying it - louder and louder, over and over - ***“You have to say it. You have to say it! YOU HAVE TO SAY IT!”*** Eventually we let it go and just tried to get her to settle down.

To this day I don’t know if that encounter was dementia or demonic or just a sassy old lady giving a pastor a hard time. All three very possible scenarios. She didn’t come around that day to profess that Jesus is the Son of God, and as far as I know she never did make that profession, but Linda’s mom was right: ***YOU HAVE TO SAY IT***.

Of course, the other side of Romans 10:10 is also true - ***you have to really believe it.*** But if you truly believe in Jesus and if you express that faith out loud, you become the dwelling place of God! His Spirit moves into your heart forever. And look at the result in verse 16.

1. God’s **Presence**: His love flows **Through** us

“God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” 1 John 4:16

This is the **Trinitarian truth** we focused on last week: God’s nature is love; His love is our life and His glory is revealed in our love for one another. GOD IS LOVE. Love is central to God’s nature and character. The best single word summary of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit is LOVE. Our best relationships here give us a tiny glimpse of what real love looks and feels like. A healthy marriage; a loving parent; a dear friend; a close sibling; a Christian friend. You may not be able to define love but you know it when you see it; or better, when you feel it.

This is an enormous sign of God’s great love for us - that ***He uses US as channels for His love!*** The primary way God reaches out to non-believers is through US. The primary way God cares for His children here on earth is through US. The primary way God ministers to the hurting and broken is through US. We are His hands, His feet, His voice, His empathy, His LOVE.

This is evidence of God’s love for the whole world but it is also proof that ***He loves us enough to involve us in His work!***

**When you abide in love** - when that is where you live, where you spend a day - you are dwelling with God, because that is where God lives all the time from eternity past to eternity future. God is love. He exists in unending, overflowing, self-giving love. ***Whenever we love another person we experience God’s love in a special way*** because the actual love of God is flowing through us!

* I hope you’ve experienced this in a **Community Group**. When people love you by welcoming you and listening to you and praying for you and giving you food and LOVING YOU - you feel God’s own love through them.
* And it works the other way too - ***when you lovingly serve another person***; supporting them through a loss, helping them with a practical need, listening to their struggles, praying for them - you experience God’s love to another degree because He is working through you in that moment - you become a channel of His love.

***What a privilege we have in the church!*** What greater joy could there be than to have God work in and through you! Look at how John describes this in verse 17 as we move to the third piece of evidence of God’s love for us.

**Gifts from God that prove His love for us:**

1. God’s **Assurance**: His comfort replaces our **Fears**

“Whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us…” 1 John 4:16-17

What an amazing statement! ***It is possible for God’s love to be PERFECTED with us!***

When we abide in love and experience His love flowing through us to others - in that **miraculous moment of human connection God’s love is PERFECTED.** Obviously we are not adding to the quality of God’s love, as if it was deficient in some way and we needed to add to it. God’s love is of infinite value and nothing we do can increase that value. But as wonderful and holy and amazing as God’s love is, it is not PERFECT until someone FEELS IT. ***When you or I enable someone to FEEL the love of God, that is when it is perfected!***

And the result of being used in this way is comfort - the powerful reassurance of the Holy Spirit that we really do belong to the Lord.

1. God’s **Assurance**: His comfort replaces our **Fears**

“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment.” 1 John 4:17

Being used by God to share His love with someone else is a powerful sign of genuine faith in the Lord Jesus. As we saw earlier, faith must be expressed out loud - YOU HAVE TO SAY IT. But just saying that you believe in Jesus and love Jesus is not definitive proof of saving faith, since ***hypocrisy is not only possible, it’s common.*** Lots of people throughout history and still today claim to know and love and follow Jesus but in truth their hearts are far from him and on the day of judgment He will say to them, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

What is a sign you can look for that you really do belong to Jesus by faith? LOVE.

**Love is the definitive FRUIT of the Spirit.**

* **Faith** to move mountains and work miracles may be impressive but without love it’s just a noisy gong.
* **Hope** is inspiring and can move the heart to hold on a little longer, but without love it comes across empty.
* Prophecy and **Biblical preaching** may convey deep theological truth, but if words are not spoken in love they actually HARM the cause of Christ and undermine the message they claim to declare.

How are we to know the true followers of Jesus? By their LOVE. When you learn to walk closely with God day by day, experiencing the fullness of His love for you, you become a channel of His love to others and this daily reality provides a deep and profound ASSURANCE of salvation. Look at verse 18.

1. God’s **Assurance**: His comfort replaces our **Fears**

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment.” 1 John 4:18

***The fear of the LORD is the BEGINNING of wisdom.*** Falling on your face before the holiness and just wrath of God is the necessary starting point of saving faith. But it is not the end point - the end point is LOVE. And the more you personally experience how “wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,” the more you are filled up with the fullness of God, the more His love flows through you to others, the more you KNOW that you belong to Jesus and nothing can separate you from His love.

You know that you are in Christ and Christ is in you - and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. “Whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” John is not saying we can become PERFECT in this life, but we can experience love being perfected in us when we simply and humbly love another person.

So here is our obvious application for today:

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God has given us ***evidence on top of evidence***, proof upon proof that He loves us! His abounding grace for us in His Son, His Sacrifice and His Spirit inside us! His glorious presence working in us and through us as we love other people. And His comforting assurance that drives out our fears and fills us with a peace that passes understanding.

The motivation to love is the simple fact that we are loved. Did you notice that in 1 John 4 the beloved apostle addresses his readers with **the term BELOVED** in verse 1, 7, 11, plus one more time in chapter 3? His other term of address for his audience is “little children,” which also conveys the security, comfort and love of our Father in heaven. God wants us to feel today, through John’s writings, that we are BELOVED. Until you rest in this love you will struggle to really love others. But once you know and experience the fullness of God’s love for you, it will UNLEASH you to overflow with love and patience and compassion for others.

**Amy Carmichael** embodies this virtue of loving compassion better than anyone.

Raised in Ireland in the late 1800s, Amy was familiar with hardship and suffering. Plagued with neuralgia, she struggled her entire life with chronic and often debilitating PAIN. After serving in and then leading a ministry to young girls working in factories in Ireland, Amy felt called to missions and set out to go to China, having been inspired by the work and message of Hudson Taylor.

"I cannot be mistaken, for I knew He spoke. He says 'Go,' I cannot stay.” Amy Carmichael, 1892

After some setbacks, she eventually ended up in India and stayed there for 55 years without a furlough, until the end of her life.

<https://www.bu.edu/missiology/missionary-biography/c-d/carmichael-amy-beatrice-1867-1951/>

See *A Chance to Die* by Elisabeth Elliot.

Carmichael began as ***a traveling evangelist*** in the villages of India, and once she became proficient with the Tamil language she was entrusted with all of the female converts. As she got to know the culture and the people she learned of the troubling custom of dedicating children to the many gods of India, forcing them into service in the temples, often involving various forms of child slavery and prostitution. Amy exposed these horrific realities as a call to action for the Christian west:

“We shall have all eternity to celebrate the victories, but we have only the few hours before sunset to win them.” Amy Carmichael, 1905 *Things As They Are*

The first young girl brought to her was named Preena, a seven-year-old who had been serving in a local temple. From that first child in 1901, every year more young girls were brought so that in 1904 there were 17 in her “family.” In 1918 they began to include boys in the orphan family and from then on it was a co-ed ministry. By the time she died at the age of 83, having lived and served in India for 55 years, the work at Dohnavur had loved and cared for over 1,000 children.

When asked **why so many young girls came** to this small Irish missionary, one of them answered:

“It was love. Amma loved us.”

* Why Indian slave girls were drawn to Amy Carmichael
* Amma means Mother in Tamil

Let’s pray for hearts to be filled and overflowing with love like this!