

Advent 2020: Love - 1 John 4:7-12

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[0 : 00] Good morning. If you will turn with me to 1 John chapter 4.

! I'll be reading from 1 John 4, 7 through 12.! I know this is not a typical Advent passage, but I know this is not a typical Advent passage, but I'm sure you'll see that it does apply.

I'm going to be focusing on verse 9 and 10, but I'd like to read it in its context because it really all goes together. So 1 John 4, beginning with verse 7.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. And whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.

Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him.

[1 : 28] In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we will love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

Father, thank you for your word that it is meat to our souls, that it is life, that it is light. And we pray today that you, by your spirit, would take this word, write it on our hearts, and make us people that truly glorify you in love for one another.

In Jesus' name. While like hope and peace and joy, love is at the very heart of the Advent season and the gospel.

This passage in 1 John makes an important connection between our love for one another and God's Advent love for us as observed in the gift of life and the sending of his son, Jesus, into the world.

[3 : 06] Now, I know the words gift and Advent are not mentioned in this text, but as I hope you will see, the gift of Advent is exactly what is being described here.

The connection between Advent love and God's gift has a special significance for us with regard to our traditions at Christmastime.

Although the idea of giving gifts during the winter holidays predates the Christian celebration of the birth of Christ, giving fits in well with the narrative.

On the one hand, some very appropriate gifts were given to the newborn Messiah and his family.

We are told that Magi from the East came to worship the newborn king and they presented him with gifts of gold and myrrh and frankincense.

But even more importantly, we understand that that newborn baby, that innocent child, was and is the most important gift that has ever been given in the history of the world.

[4 : 23] Now, gift giving is at its peak level during the season. How many of you are expecting gifts in a few days? How many of you are giving gifts in a few days?

I didn't see very many hats. What? Yeah. I know.

I guess the excitement comes from the younger ones. It's been calculated that Americans will spend over a trillion dollars in seasonal purchases this year.

only slightly less than last year because of COVID. And the majority of that giving, an average of about \$500 per person, will be for gifts.

Giving gifts is big business. Giving is big business. Organizations and companies want to know how to glean more of your generosity. And as a result, hundreds of studies in the last 20 years on the psychology of giving have been conducted.

[5 : 35] And those studies have focused on things like biological connections to giving, the results of giving, interpersonal, intrapersonal factors, and social and cultural drivers to giving.

I won't bore you with all the details, but here's some highlights. There's evidence that links giving to better overall health, to the delay of severe health problems and mortality in older volunteers, to a greater sense of well-being, to better relationships, and even to better chances of finding a mate. I hope that isn't the only thing some of you will take away from this sermon. Some studies have found that giving, even more than receiving, produces similar neural impulses that bring pleasure in the same way that food and drugs and, well, you can imagine.

Researchers have surmised that in spite of a human propensity for self-interest, giving appears to be hardwired into the human brain.

Now, much of our giving simply shows affection or gratitude, but not all of it is altruistic. We often give to gain or keep someone's affection.

[7 : 14] Sometimes our giving is motivated by a sense of guilt or obligation. Other types of giving like bribery and grooming are simply evil.

But the kind of giving that flows from Advent love transcends all human giving. Its source is God Himself.

It's the heritage of those who belong to Him. In 1 John 4, 7 through 12, it's the apostle's intent to encourage increased love among believers.

And when he writes, Beloved, love one another in verse 7, we might assume that we know what he's talking about because we know so much about love already. Right? But it's possible that we really don't.

In fact, it appears that the reason God inspired these verses is to help clarify for us what Christian love in the church is supposed to look like. Verses 9 and 10 reveal the heart of Advent love.

[8 : 19] It's from the Father's act of giving that we understand love. simply, these verses teach us that the gift of Advent love reveals the reason why and the measure how we should love one another.

What I believe we'll see this morning is that there's a vital connection between love and giving and that the Christian life of sacrificial giving for the benefit of others is the intent of Advent love.

Now, the first part of John's description of love in verse 9 focuses on the reason the Father sent the Son. In short, we should love one another because Advent love has given us a new life that is characterized by love.

Look at verse 9 again. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent His only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

Verse 9 is a first part of a two-part argument that supports the exhortation to love in the previous two verses.

[9 : 48] That exhortation by John is simply that the Christians should love each other because we are intimately related to God who is the source of love and love itself. That amazing statement at the end of verse 8, God is love, is one of those one of the most profound statements in Scripture.

A modern theologian might seek to explain it by defining the word, looking at its etymology and so on, or by providing some kind of philosophical defense supporting the statement.

That's not what the apostle does here. He simply assumes that it's true and proceeds to show how this wonderful love has been manifested among us.

God is love and what follows is how God has shown us this love and that is Advent. He begins with Advent.

God sending his son into the world. Now, the way the apostle refers to the manifestation of this love is significant.

[11 : 02] Literally, he writes that his only son, that his only son sent God into the world. That's how it reads in the Greek.

It begins with his only son. Now, by using this word order for emphasis, he draws our attention to the uniqueness of Jesus.

Jesus. The person that God sent into the world was none other than the unique son of God, the only begotten son of God.

According to John's gospel, this person, our Lord Jesus, has been the object of the Father's love, sharing his glory from eternity.

see that in his high priestly prayer in John 17. This beloved son, John tells us, a Father sent into the world, into our world, a world for the most part has rejected God's rule and his will, a world that is hostile and harsh, a world that out of envy would inflict on him the worst kind of death.

[12:19] and even his entrance into the world was far from worthy of his status and desert. He was born in a cave where animals were kept.

He had a feeding trough for his bed. He had to flee from a murderous king and he lived in exile and obscurity for many years.

others. But John tells us that his being sent to us was God's manifestation of love for us.

The last part of verse 9 continues by stating the specific reason why the Father sent the Son into the world. He sent his Son entirely for your benefit.

He writes God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Notice that word there might that verb might live.

[13:33] God sent his Son to give you the gift of life. Now perhaps you notice how similar this verse is to John 3 16 more famous verse for God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

both of these verses are from the same writer approximately the same time and they both communicate the same truth.

The Father's love is somehow revealed in the sending of his Son so that you might live. life. In the gospel John adds the word eternal to describe life.

Now when we think of eternal we typically think of length of time. It's normal it's natural and it's part of it. After the disobedience of man in the garden of Eden the tree of life was guarded specifically so that humanity would not eat of it and live forever.

Genesis 3. And at the other end of the scriptures in the new Jerusalem the tree of life reemerges providing healing fruit all year round enabling God's servants to reign forever.

[15:13] Revelation 22 1-5 The word eternal is helpful here to describe life but it still can be misunderstood if all we mean by it is length of time.

It's also a specific kind of life. Jesus himself defines eternal life this way in his last prayer.

He says and this is eternal life that they may know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. God I think there's a connection here between knowing God and what we've read in 1 John 4.

John further refers to this life in chapter 3 of his epistle where he speaks of it as having already begun and as having effect on the way we live right now.

he writes in 1 John 3 14 we know that we have passed from death into life because we love the brothers or something about the gift of life that's connected to love life for the Christian is much more than mere existence existence John refers to mere existence here in 1 John 3 14 and he calls it death it doesn't matter how good your life is here on earth if it isn't the gift of eternal life that the father sent the son to give it's not life at all eternal life is a different kind of life it's a life born from the divine nature of God and it's your heritage as a child of

[17:13] God it's who you are the evidence that one has eternal life is that he or she loves the children of God life then is the gift of advent love love and advent love is our measure of why we should love one another so to summarize the first point verse nine we should love one another because advent love has given us a new life that is characterized by love but advent love is not only seen in the birth of Christ the incarnation involves his whole life he is Emmanuel he wasn't just born to us he lived for us and he died for us the next verse verse 10 teaches us that we should love one another because advent love has demonstrated what

God's love really is and how we benefited from it this is the measure of love let's look at verse 10 again and this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins so verse 10 continues John's argument by elaborating on the demonstration of God's love toward us while in verse 9 he highlights the purpose of God sending his son into the world and verse 10 he reveals the method his plan was to accomplish in this is love that's how he begins the sense of that simple phrase is that

John is now going to show us love in its highest form in this is love this is what love is the definition begins in the form of contrast not that we love God if you want to understand what love is don't look to yourself don't do that don't look to the entertainment world around you don't look to Whitney Houston don't look to your feelings towards one another but most of all don't look to your love for God because your love does not demonstrate what we're talking about here whether it's love for God universally all of mankind or individually and even the most zealous religious sacrifice and devotion that has been seen human love is not the measure of love it's always inadequate and

therefore misleading the verse continues but that he loved us so a correct definition of love begins with the source of love himself that contrast is instructive and think of it this way it's to defiant arrogant powerless poor and needy people who really don't love God that he demonstrated his love to love by itself is amazing love to someone who's worthy of love is one of the best feelings you can imagine but love to the unworthy love to the unlovely this shows love in its highest splendor the last part of the verse describes that splendor he loved us and he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins it's what

God has done in order to make it possible for us to have life that defines what love really is he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins I know in this church you're familiar with that word that's a good thing let's look at it just a little bit more here we should all be familiar with this word because it's really the heart of the gospel the word translated propitiation here comes from the Greek word! [22 : 45] some lexicons translated generally as the means of forgiveness that's true but it's more specific than that in the Greek world at the time of the New Testament the word was used to signify an offering a gift that was given to appease the gods one would present a gift to gain favor to pacify anger or to gain some kind of merit a better definition of propitiation than would include the putting away of wrath the wrath of God as the means of forgiveness but in amazing contrast to the pagan practice of seeking to gain the favor or appease the wrath of a capricious arbitrary bad tempered conceited deity our good holy and loving

God sends his only son into the world to provide the necessary propitiation for the benefit of sinful rebellious self-centered men and women if that doesn't blow your mind wake up this was done not to change God's mind but to satisfy his justice as J.I.

Packer so succinctly describes I want to give you his quote because it's right on the mark he says in paganism man propitiates his gods and religion becomes a form of commercialism and indeed of bribery in Christianity however God propitiates his wrath by his own action he sent forth Jesus Christ says Paul to be a propitiation he sent his son says John to be the propitiation for our sins it was not man to whom God was hostile who took the initiative to make God friendly nor was it Jesus Christ the eternal son who took the initiative to turn his father's wrath away from us in love but it was God himself who took the initiative in quenching his own wrath against those who despite their ill desert he loved and had chosen to save beloved love this love this is advent love we understand that

God had to do it this way it was the only way because God is good he is righteous and just as well as loving because he is good he hates sin because he is good he must judge sin because he is good he cannot just overlook it look it and allow us to live in it forever!

good he is love as well and because he is good he acted mercifully and graciously and lovingly to make a way to satisfy his own justice and forgive us I like how John Piper put it the wisdom of God devised a way for the love of God to deliver sinners from the wrath of God while not compromising the righteousness of God now I know that some people have suggested there's really no connection between Advent and the death of Christ and every year they get a little bit louder and they want to push those apart so called progressive Christians say that the incarnation is not about death it's about life it's not about death it's about liberation and justice not propitiation

[26 : 58] I've come to expect such teaching from those from more liberal mainline denominations who have forsaken the authority of scripture but what has surprised me a little bit is the similar perspective coming from self proclaimed devout Bible believing Christians not far from here a neighborhood homeowners association gave notice to a home owner to remove the cross from their Christmas decorations under the threat of a hundred dollar a day fine when the home owner questioned!

the violation the board members many claiming to be Christian board members of the HOE asked for scripture to connect the cross to Christmas they wrote this is what the board wrote the board believes that the Bible is very clear on the distinction between these two major events in Christ's life on earth the cross is appropriate for display during the Easter season but not as a decoration during the Christmas season well I haven't been able to find where the Bible says anything about decorations but they are dead wrong about the connection it's right here in first John church if you want to truly understand Advent you have to see it in its full expression God's love for you God sent his only son into the world so that you might live through him this is this is where we see Advent love God sent his only son to be the propitiation for your sins this is what defines Advent love you cannot do it yourself life and forgiveness is yours because God loves you we're going to be

singing about it in just a moment so come though you have nothing come he is the offering come see what your God has done verse 11 brings us back to the beginning beloved if God so that word means in this way if God so loved us we also ought to love one another that's who we are I mentioned earlier that the gift of Advent love reveals the reason why and the measure how we should love one another first we ought to love one another because we possess a life that is that is love bought and that is characterized by love and second we should love one another because Advent love has demonstrated to us what God's love really is and we benefited from that our love for one another ought to reflect the love that we have received now there's two practical factors that can be gleaned here from God's love for us one is self sacrifice and the other is action done for the benefit of others especially those who are unworthy love love one of the difficulties in preparing a message like this is that you become very aware how little you really love but that's the reason for this exhortation it's like God saying to a butterfly fly that's what he's made to do don't stay there hook to the cocoon get up flap those wings and go he's saying to

Christians born again with a new life that loves love one another we all need to take a good look at ourselves and truly live the life we were given in light of this season I think we can see this in the form of gift giving I'm not talking about cool items wrapped in colorful paper and a big red ribbon I'm talking about a lifestyle of giving that reflects what we've received like extending forgiveness someone who's offended you like reaching out to someone that you haven't seen or heard from in a while reestablishing a relationship breaking an estrangement giving the benefit of the doubt to someone spending time with someone meeting urgent needs being hospitable praying for others visiting the sick safely connecting with the persecuted church giving practical care disciple and so on free freely costly regularly as

[32 : 50] Amy Carmichael once said you can always give without loving but you can never love without giving according to the bible this is who you are and may this guide your consideration of your future and your decision making and service and mission occupation one final thought before i close almost every year at this time since i've become a christian i've seen or heard the saying put christ back into christmas have you heard or seen that just about every year and that's it's a good reminder because it's so easy to get caught up isn't it to forget or to have him there but to still be focused on the commercialism around us i just saw a bumper sticker while i was at costco that said put christ back in christmas it's a natural response for christians but i would suggest something further than putting christ back in christmas i suggest we put the father back in christmas because you think of it why do so many people feel okay with the christmas story because it's an innocent child that's that's born there there's no action involved in the child we we already know that christ loves us in fact in the previous chapter of first john he does say very specifically in similar words in this is love that christ laid down his life for us so therefore we ought to love one another he's already covered that but but when we're considering the christmas story when we're considering advent the point isn't christ doing anything or loving us the point is father sent the son and so really we're going to put christ back into christmas we have to put the father back into christmas and while we're at it we might as well put the holy spirit back into christmas as well huh i mean didn't he bring it to pass isn't wasn't he promised by christ to be with us right here with us right now and doesn't paul tell us that the love of god is shed abroad in our hearts by the spirit of god romans chapter five so let me conclude with a prayer and this prayer is from an italian itinerant preacher about 13th century whose name was francis and i i like this prayer because i think it really characterized what we're talking about a life of giving that's who we are and he's praying that it would be true of him and i just say let's let's make it our prayer as well says lord make me an instrument of your peace where there is hatred let me so love where there is injury pardon where there is doubt faith where there is despair hope where there is darkness light where there is sadness joy oh divine master grant that i might not so much seek to be consoled as to console to be understood

as to understand to be loved as to love for it is in giving that we receive it is in pardoning that we are pardoned and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life ending Thank you.