

## Knowing Love by This...

Rev. Taek Kim

Scripture: 1 John 3:1-3, 16-24

<sup>1</sup> See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. <sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

<sup>16</sup> We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. <sup>17</sup> How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

<sup>18</sup> Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. <sup>19</sup> And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him <sup>20</sup> whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup> Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; <sup>22</sup> and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

<sup>23</sup> And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. <sup>24</sup> All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

I read about a young man who was determined to win the affection of a lady who refused to even talk to him anymore. He decided that the way to her heart was through the mail, so he began writing her love letters. He wrote a love letter every day to this lady. Six, seven times a week she got a love letter from him. When she didn't respond, he increased his output to three notes every twenty-four hours. IN all, he wrote her more than seven hundred letters. And she wound up marrying the postman. (source unknown)

Obviously, he didn't get to know the lady well enough since she didn't care so much about the letters, but rather someone who'd deliver them.

Denis Waitley wrote in his book, *Seeds of Greatness*:

- L—listening when another is speaking,
- O—overlooking petty faults and forgiving all failures;
- V—valuing other people for who they are;
- E—expressing love in a practical way.

That was pretty good. Yet it is God's Word that not only tells us, but reminds us of how God shows us his love. From today's scripture reading we hear that:

- God loves us and calls us his children!
- We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for others.
- That God's love abide in us who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and helps.
- As children of God, we are to love in truth and action, not only with words and speeches
- And we receive from God whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him...And his commandment? That we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us.

As we have prepared to celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, the Alpha and Omega, the King of Kings, Prince of Peace, God the Son, we have journeyed the past Sundays learning that Jesus is our Hope, our Peace, our Joy, and our Love.

God the Father has always loved us and always will. Even when we turned away from him, God's love remained steadfast and true. Even when we have looked at our world and the troubles in the past and before us today and wondered if God really cares, God has not stopped loving us, even when our love has decreased or strayed.

And when we have faced trials in our life, when we feel as though God's face is not shining upon us and his grace is not upon us, his great love for us does not change.

Sometimes it is very difficult to describe the love of God. At other times, it seems too simple to believe. Illustrations help us get a better idea and feeling of God's love. Experiences are even better. But ultimately, it takes a combination of faith, knowledge, experience, and the presence of God's Holy Spirit in each of us to feel God's amazing love for us.

Into a world that was broken, and still is, Christ entered as one of us. Fully God and fully human, he was born of the Virgin Mary by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

We all still experience and know of the pain and suffering the world and each of us face because of the brokenness and sin that began with the two first humans created by God.

When people cried out to God in various times, circumstances, and trials, God did not only hear and respond to their situations, but God had a plan to fully redeem his creation.

There are many lessons we can learn from in today's Scripture reading. The one that I want to focus on is how we know what love is. We are told that "Jesus Christ laid down his life for us."

Though we know that the way Christ laid his life down for us was on the cross, dying for the sins of the world, we also know that Christ came into the world as a human himself, laying his life down in that way too. What life? The life he had in heaven without the experiences we have as humans. In order to save us, he became one of us, laying down all he was and had as God the Son in heaven.

In Hebrews chapter 5, verses 5-10, it is written:

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

"Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,  
but a body you prepared for me;  
with burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you were not pleased.

Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.' "

First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). Then he said, "Here

I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

On Thursday we'll not have our normal Candlelight Service. We will still celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. However, we will continue our online recorded services. Though this is a big change, it does not change that we worship Jesus Christ and will have carols, as well as the lighting of candles or turning on LED candles, to symbolize that Christ has come as the Light of the World, putting his light of love and salvation into our hearts so that we will joyfully shine them forth to others through our lives.

God made his love known to us by becoming one of us. When we, his creation could know only so much of God's love in nature, through words of teachers and prophets, and heavenly messengers including angels, and even a talking donkey, God the Father sent his Son so that we would know without a doubt his love for us.

There are various stages of experiencing love. Some of them include:

- the realization that you are loveable and indeed loved
- the need to be loved
- the desire to love others
- the knowledge that others want to be loved by you
- the understanding of love as obedience
- the experience of love as being sacrificial
- the pains of love that involve distance, separation, and even loss
- the feeling of love as a child, as a friend, as a spouse, as a parent, as a grandparent, and even as a complete stranger; like in the parable Jesus taught of the Good Samaritan
- the conditional and unconditional love of family and friends
- and the unconditional love of God.

Unconditional love is one that in spite of all that you have done, you are not deemed unlovable, and loved just the same. God made his love known to us by loving those who we may see as worthy or easy to love as well as those we may judge as not lovable or not worth loving.

There are times when I wish that Jesus never went up to heaven after he came back to life three days after he was crucified. I wish that Jesus stuck around and started to make things right, one by one. I wish I could say to someone, "Come meet Jesus over here and you'll know what love really is, I mean God's love."

Instead, we try to describe God's love in so many ways, sometimes using Jesus' parables, such as "The Prodigal Son." However, Jesus did more than teach lessons through parables, he taught us of his love for us by what he did in his birth, life, death, and resurrection. And today, God's love is made known to us and to others by the very same means of stories and lives touched and changed by Jesus Christ.

How is it that after Jesus ascended into to heaven that others continued to come to faith in him and follow Christ as his disciple without even seeing him? How is it that from a few disciples

that millions have come to know and millions will continue to come to know God's love through Christ?

It is passed on through each faithful servant of Christ, including you and me. I am not a witness of Christ and his love only because I am a minister. We are not witnesses of Christ only because we go to church. We are disciples of Christ because we have come to know God's love for ourselves. And we know that others can experience such love through the Holy Spirit working through us.

The words right after the verse "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" are "And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

St. Augustine asked and responded to what love looks like with saying, "What does it look like? It has hands to help others, feet to hasten to the poor and needy, eyes to see misery and want, ears to hear the sighs and sorrows of men. That is what love looks like."

God's love was made known to us through the way others have loved us in the leading up to our spiritual birth and to our growth as Christians. God's love was made known to the first disciples when Christ entered the world and entered their lives.

This continues today because we and millions of followers, Christ's disciples, have continued to make disciples of all nations. We are the recipients of God's love lavished upon us. And now we are to make God's love known to others through our lives of love. Not just any love or our own love, but of God's love through Jesus Christ.

So we celebrate the birth of Christ because in him all can have new birth in spirit with the promise of new life on earth and in heaven. As we celebrate the birth of Christ Tuesday night and Christmas morning, as we open presents, eat delicious meals, and share the warmth and love of family and friends, give thanks; for God's love has been made known to us and we are able to make God's love known to those who are strangers to God's love and salvation through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This week there is one update to share with you. Please pray for Jerry Sweeney and her family as they grieve the loss of her husband, Jim, who died today (Dec. 15) after battling pneumonia and COVID-19. Let us pray for God's Spirit, comforting peace and love to surround and support them all. Your prayers are much appreciated.

Pastor Taek