

**“Real Love That Pursues”**

**March 11, 2018**

John 4:13-5:5

Dr Clay Smith

Last week we considered one of the classic passages on the love of God. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. That love has an effect on us. If it takes us residence in our souls, it changes us. How?

<sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup>So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.

<sup>17</sup>By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup>And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

I once read, “Love at first sight is easy to understand. It’s when two people have been looking at each other for years that it becomes a miracle.” Love that endures goes beyond mere feelings, and indeed may be challenged as the years go by if this love rests upon a foundation of something that fades. It is true in the church, too. What does the bible teach us about love—the kind of love that pursues, if the luster, the shine, has worn off? Because it happens doesn’t it? A people or a place or a church may not feel quite so attractive or engaging? Or things get hard. Or as so often happens we grow fearful of something. Fear can come out sideways as anger and destroy love. At least in my life, that happens. Ask Missy. I can get scared, it often comes out as anger. Where have you been? With kids does not the same thing happen?

What about a love that endures not ruled by fear. A love for a people that is durable, that lasts? I think, and John bears this out, it depends on the kind of love we start with. What we see here, building off of Andrew’s message last week, is that we have received a love that pursued us. God made the first move toward us, v. 10. *Not that we loved God but he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation, the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* Or as v. 19 says, we love because he first loved us!

That God who made the first move of a pursuing love has given us the *gift of His Spirit, v. 13.* That Spirit enables our fellowship with God, a real and alive fellowship, of abiding in him and he in us. It makes it possible for that love that pursued us to be lived out by pursuing others in love, too. As I mentioned a few weeks ago, we are not orphans, but have a Father who came after us, adopted us into his family, and by his indwelling and abiding Spirit forms us to have a family resemblance. Here that family trait is love, A pursuing love.

We could spend weeks on this section of 1 John, but today we will look at two quick points about this pursuing love.

**1. Pursuing love drives out fear.**

As we saw last week in v. 12, *if we love one another, God’s love is perfected in us.* Andrew reminded us perfection here does not mean without flaw. Rather, the word is for maturation, for completion, for growth. What he means is that God’s love for us indwells and takes up residence in us, abides in us and by the Spirit of God it grows.

That love of God was birthed in us, v. 13, by God’s Spirit. We who believe in Jesus’s work for us do so because God opened our eyes, birthed in us a new heart to believe that God sent his son Jesus into the world to be the Savior of the world—to be OUR savior.

Now we have talked week after week about what this means. We believe Jesus is Christ, the long promised anointed One, sent from God to take on flesh to bear our sin and guilt in being punished in our place on the cross. This is our faith, as John labels it in 5:4, believing that Jesus knows the darkness of our sin and our hearts and has pursued us, chased us down, in love anyway. He died to take our punishment. We believe that this Jesus took the judgment we deserve for our deeds of rebellion. He has loved us to life, and that love now grows within us.

This is where John’s point begins to drive deeply our hearts. That love, he says, drives out fear, v. 18. *Perfect love casts out fear.* This is not an absolute statement about fear, for fear of God is commanded numerous times in the Bible. Fear

of what then? Judgment and punishment. Perfect (growing, completing, maturing love, casts out fear of punishment and judgment. That is what John is saying.

Maybe you are here and think all this talk about judgment is primitive. In our modern world, Judgment Day seems like a hangover from when we had a less enlightened view of God. There is no judgment to fear, our world tells us. But it is a real day on the calendar. God has a timetable when we will be called to account. May I suggest every one of us in this room immensely knows what it feels like to be terrified of judgment?

Here's how: in the modern world we no longer fear One judge in God, but we fear MILLIONS of judges. Think about Social media. How quickly does the social media world pounce in judgment on the person who says the "wrong" thing, or uses a phrase not considered the proper one? Do you fear saying the wrong thing and shamed for it? Or even the firestorm on the news of one actress who placed a temporary tattoo of the "Time's Up" theme on her arm for the Oscars. What got the most attention? Not what she called attention to—how women have been used sexually by men in power. Instead, the media storm was because this ivy league educated actress neglected to include the apostrophe on her tattoo. Quick judgment. Or I know college professors who are concerned about what they say in the classroom. Will it foment a protest among the students if she or he says something to trigger the judgment of students? Even faculty with tenure? We as a society have become professionals at judgment. And it drives us toward fearful and timid living.

And of course, to some degree that is right. There are things, broken things, predatory things, harmful things in this world that deserve to be judged and removed. The Bible talks again and again calls for judgment because the world as God designed it is marred by sin and brokenness. Something needs to be done to rid it and purify it. But there is a problem. That which calls for judgment is not merely out there...the need for judgment begins with me and my sin and my heart. And with yours. Things about OUR lives deserve judgment and purging. That's a scary thought. How do we deal with that fear? Not by relying on our faithfulness; I'll tell you that! You'll never be good enough that there is no longer anything worth judging. You will never find peace with God by working hard enough to be good enough for God. Being good enough will only drive us to become more insecure and proud and pretending hypocrites. Instead our fear is driven out by his love that pursued us at the cost of his own death so that we might live.

That which draws judgment upon us has already been judged in Christ. The shame and the scorn the world throws our way has been borne by Jesus on the cross. He knew all these accusations and pursued us in love anyway. There is no new thing that you have done or said or thought that will surprise Jesus. What's more, not only does he already know it, has paid for it on the cross, but also loves you perfectly anyway. If God already knows us, is present with us **now** in love, then what should we fear about the future! There is no alienation, or loneliness or estrangement from God to fear; there is no longer any power of shame to make us shrink back from his if we are discovered. His love for us, the love that knows us and pursued us anyway drives out the fear of judgment.

So rather than going through life hiding and hoping never to be seen for who you have been, live according to the truth that Jesus knows and calls us his children, his dearly loved children.

Rather than fretting over the million judges we have, let us hear the voice of the One Judge who really matters. And he has said: Forgiven, cleansed, atoned for, paid in full. It is finished. Pursuing love drives out our fear.

The love that has pursued us matures within us is the same love that drives us out to love and serve one another.

## 2. Pursuing love drives us out toward others.

In v. 19, John's attention turns. We have been pursued in love by God, so therefore we pursue others in love. **We love because he first loved us.** But we must realize that HIS love for us is what drives our love for others. Let me put it differently. **If God is small and unimportant to us, then his image bearers will be, too.** Or, if we are really struggling to love other people, it could be that the root is that we fail to see how deep and costly has been God's love of us. God's love enflames our hearts and drives us out to extend that love to others.

Also, we have confidence by seeing love perfected in our love for one another. Yet John's evidence may be a bit backward from what we suspect. See v. 20 **If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.** Our love for God is proven by our love for people, otherwise we are liars.

His point is rather simple, yet smacks us in the mouth, that is, those of us who like to play church. Do you know what I mean by playing church? There is a way to proclaim to the world, and to the church, by the way, that "I love God. Of course, I love God." But God is invisible. How would we know? Maybe it is by duties, and activity, and ministries and

attendance and giving, and the rest. I love God and you can tell by how busy I am for him. THAT is playing church. Look at how much I love God by how much do for him. But perhaps that is all a show, full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

Or as the Apostle Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians 13, we can utilize any number of public gifts that dazzle: speaking like an angel, or amazing powers to proclaim God's truth and make it understandable, understanding mysteries, incredible faith, even delivering my body up to death. Amazing things for God. It is quite possible to say I love God, but who is to know my heart. Playing church.

Except for one thing that the Apostle Paul and the Apostle John agree upon here: except for love. Maybe we can't see into a heart to see whether there is a love for the invisible God there. But we can take a look to see if the life of that invisible God comes out of us. That indication, that measure of God in us, is his love coming out, love for one another. I can preach the best sermon in the world, but if I don't love you, Paul says it is all for nothing.

Let's turn this around. One of the best ways for the people around us to know what this pursuing love of God is like is by what they experience from us, who live as his body in this world today, his hands and feet. The world can taste of the love of God by experiencing his life in us and coming out of us.

On the one hand that is terrifying. My kids, my neighbors have a picture of what God is like by seeing me. What do they know of God from my life, from your life?

BUT, let's remember the whole story here. He abides in us, his life, his power abides in us. When we screw up, the Spirit helps us repent and demonstrate the love of God toward sinners who continually mess up. You aren't demonstrating a perfect person to show people God. You are called on to show the LOVE OF A GOD WHO PURSUES IMPERFECT PEOPLE AND MAKES US HIS CHILDREN!

Your kids will know of the love of God as deeply as you let them see how badly you need his love and forgiving grace. Your neighbors will know of the God who is a pursuing loving Savior as widely as you are willing to admit you need a Savior. Because he keeps on loving us when we don't deserve it, he empowers us to keep on loving others, too. Especially when it is hard to love.

One of my favorite and most active evangelists is my son, Isaiah. He is 10. This week he took the opportunity to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus with a neighborhood kid, and it did not go as well as he would have liked. This other child was asking him questions about Jesus and did not like what she heard. It was hard, and it hurt my tender-hearted evangelist.

But as we talked about this interchange, we talked about this passage. What this neighbor child knows of Jesus comes not only from the words heard from my little evangelist's lips. But also, maybe more, from his willingness to keep on loving and being tender, even when that love and tenderness isn't always returned. We have a LOT to learn from our little evangelists in this church. His love can drive out our fear, our shame. And his love can drive us toward one another. The question comes: is our heart captured by that pursuing love.

I'll close with this quote I read from a commentator this week citing Bede, one of the great 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century scholars of the faith. He said this: "Only someone who is on fire with the love of his Maker can be said to love his fellow humans in the right way."<sup>1</sup> May the fire of the Spirit of God rage in this place and into the world.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), p. 273.