

GLENKIRK CHURCH



WEEKLY DEVOTIONS

The DEVO

MARCH 4 - 8, 2024

THE GREATNESS OF THE

CROSS

2/18 - 3/17

LENTEN SERMON SERIES

MONDAY

Read 1 John 4:7-12; John 13:34-35

Appreciating God's Amazing Love

In his first letter to an unspecified Christian community, John makes several profound statements about the nature of God's love: love (biblically, "unconditionally wanting nothing but the best for another") comes from God (1 John 4:7); God is love (v. 8); God demonstrated His love through Jesus (v. 9); love is defined by God's actions toward us, not vice versa (v. 10); we ought to love one another (v. 11); and love for one another is evidence God lives in us (v. 12). These verses express a view of Jesus' death on the cross that focuses not so much on a payment for sin, but on the incredible example of love His death represents and how His example motivates His followers. Elsewhere in this letter John expresses the idea that Jesus' death deals with human sinfulness (see 1 John 2:1-2). In this text, his focus is on God's amazing love.

The starting point for this love-focused understanding of Jesus' death is the fact that God is the source of love and, in fact, *is* love. Love is not secondary to who God is. Rather, love is the essence of God's being. In his book, *Knowing God*, Reformed theologian J. I. Packer reminded us that while this is a true statement, it is not the complete truth about God. Rather, we must recognize that "God's

love is a holy love” (p. 110). That is why John says in this text that God “*loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins*” (v. 11).

However, the primary focus of John’s remarks in this text is the motivating power of Jesus’ death. As we experience the love of God through Jesus’ death for us, we are empowered to love others. “*Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another*” (v. 11). God’s wondrous love is not simply something in which we bask, soaking up the positive and healthy way it makes us feel about ourselves. It is given to us to share with others, loving them as God has loved us. According to John, loving others is concrete evidence that God lives within us. This statement likely recalls Jesus’ teaching to His disciples that by their love for one another others would know that they were His disciples (John 13:35).

QUESTIONS

How can you deepen your appreciation of God’s love demonstrated through His Son’s death on the cross? Whom is God motivating you to love?

PRAYER

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray that God’s protection covers every detail of the AE mission trip. May all enjoy good health, be strengthened and have wisdom to be of great blessing.

“*For your ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all your paths.*” (Proverbs 5:21)

TUESDAY

Read 1 John 4:16-21

Loving Like Jesus

John continues developing the theme started in the text we examined yesterday by restating his fundamental premise: “*God is love*” (1 John 4:16). In verse 12, John had stated, “... *if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.*” He also repeats the idea of God living in us (v. 16), but then he explains how love is made complete in us: “*In this world we are like Jesus*” (v. 17). Because Jesus demonstrated God’s love for us by giving His very life for us, we are charged with loving like Jesus.

I recall an experience of going to summer church camp as a primary school student. After our parents joined us for the weekend, one of my fellow campers asked one day, “Is that your dad?” When I confirmed that the man to whom he was pointing was, indeed, my father, he replied, “I thought so. You walk just like him.” We all have had the experience of looking at someone and remarking on their likeness to a parent or sibling in appearance, speech, or behavior. In the same way, we as Christians are expected to be like our Savior, Jesus, whose love for us should be evident in our love for others. Jesus’ death on the cross not only canceled our sin (Colossians 2:13-15), but provided the example, motivation, and power to love as He loved.

In the final paragraph of today's text, John makes this point explicit: "We love because He first loved us" (John 4:19). Our love for God and our love for others derives from God's love for us. John makes this practical by explaining that true love for God must be demonstrated through love for others: "For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen" (v. 20). John's logic is simple: God is love. God demonstrated His love through Jesus' death for us. We love because God loved. Experiencing God's love demands a response of love to Him and others. If we refuse to love others, we have not truly loved God.

If we believe others are unlovable, we have failed to grasp how sinful and unworthy we are of God's gracious love.

QUESTIONS

Is there a brother or sister whom you struggle to love? How can God's demonstration of love through Jesus help you love others?

PRAYER

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray that the AE staff will rejoice and celebrate with the church in Rwanda, giving thanks for the shared faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and for His gospel.

"But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread protection over them, that those who love Your name may rejoice in You." (Psalm 5:11)

WEDNESDAY

Read 1 John 3:16-18

Love in Action and Truth

Today's text begins with a profound statement: *"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us"* (1 John 3:16). John argues that Jesus' death on the cross is the defining example of love. This event demonstrates the epitome of love in several ways. Firstly, Jesus freely laid down His life for us. He was not forced to die for us, but freely surrendered His life to pay for our sins. Secondly, we—the recipients of this act of love—are totally underserving. In our sinful rebellion against God, we are like *"whitewashed tombs,"* full of dead and unclean things (Jesus' charge against the Pharisees in Matthew 23:27). Thirdly, Jesus' love is unconditional. Whether people accept or reject His death on the cross for them, His love is steadfast.

As in yesterday's text, John again identifies the implication of Jesus' tremendous act of love: *"And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters"* (1 John 3:16). John explains that he does not expect us to die physically for others, as Jesus died for us. Rather, we are to lay down our lives by putting others' needs before our own. He gives a very practical example: *"If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?"* (v. 17). God saw us in need and

took pity on us by sending Jesus to die for our sins and restore us to a right relationship with God. Given that truth, how can we refuse to help a brother or sister in need when we have the means to do so?

Sometimes we struggle with sharing our wealth with those in need. How do I know they will use it for good rather than evil? Will my generosity simply enable them to continue making poor choices? Ultimately, we are asking the question, “Are they worthy of my generosity?” John urges us to make love more than mere words: “*Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth*” (v. 18). Love in action is love in truth. It is love that acknowledges our own unworthiness of God’s love and takes concrete actions to share that love with others.

QUESTIONS

What loving action(s) is God calling you to do as you imitate Him?

PRAYER

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray that the visit from the AE team may bear much fruit for both the AE group and the saints who make up the body of Christ in Rwanda.

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15:8)

THURSDAY

Read **Romans 5:6-11**

Love and Reconciliation

In today's text, Paul makes a similar point to the one John made: *"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). Christ's death on the cross is a powerful demonstration of God's love; and in the preceding and following verses, Paul explains why.

Firstly, we were powerless to save ourselves (v. 6). In fact, Paul states bluntly, *"Christ died for the ungodly."* That description of humanity makes many people feel uncomfortable. Those of us who have been Christians for many years sometimes struggle to think of ourselves as fundamentally *ungodly*. Yet, that is what we were and, in many respects, still are. We still strive to control our own lives, rebel against God's commandments, and struggle at times to acknowledge our own sinfulness. But the fact of our ungodliness is what makes God's love so amazing.

Secondly, Paul asserts that rarely someone might die for a good person, but Christ died for us while we were sinners. If we ask ourselves, "What am I willing to do for an ungodly person?" dying is not likely our first response. Yet that is the nature of God's love and what makes Jesus' death on our behalf so compelling. Since Jesus died for us as

a supreme demonstration of God’s love, should we not also be willing to love the “unlovable”?

Thirdly, in the following verses, Paul highlights that Jesus’ death on the cross has resulted in our reconciliation with God and salvation from God’s wrath (5:9-11). Given all that God has done to reconcile us—the ungodly, while we were still sinners—to Himself, it is perplexing when we who claim to be Christians make no effort to be reconciled with others. Should not our love for others be patterned after God’s love for us? How can we accept brokenness in relationships—especially between Christian brothers and sisters—after all God has done to reconcile us and others to Himself? Surely God’s love should compel us to join Paul in his ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-21), urging others to be reconciled to God and promoting reconciliation among God’s people.

QUESTIONS

Ponder all God has done to reconcile you to Himself. Whom do you know who needs to be reconciled to God? What would God have you do in this process? With whom do you need to be reconciled?

PRAYER

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray for the AE staff to be faithful and share with every person whom they encounter the love that they have received for each other through God’s Holy Spirit.

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.” (John 15:8)



FRIDAY

Read **Romans 8:31-39**

Unbreakable Love

Paul's meditation on the wondrous love of God begins with the question, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31). What is the evidence that God is for us? Paul continues, *"He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"* (v. 32). Paul's argument is convincing. Since God gave us the ultimate gift of His Son, who died for us, we can have confidence that God will not withhold any good thing from us.

Paul then considers several possible counterpoints to his argument. Could somebody else charge us with wrongdoing? No, God is the ultimate judge. Could someone condemn us? No, Christ Jesus who died for us continues to intercede for us. Is there not anything that can separate us from the love of Christ? No, *"nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (v. 39).

Paul's deep confidence in the certainty and steadfastness of God's love for us is inspiring. Since nothing can ever separate us from God's love, we have the freedom to love unconditionally as God loves us. We did nothing to earn or deserve God's love. Likewise, we should give our love to others without any conditions attached. We do not

love others because they are good or righteous or lovable or deserving. As John and Paul have shown us, we must love others because God loves us. God's love for us compels us to love Him and others. How could we possibly do any less? The only excuse someone can have for not loving others in meaningful and practical ways is that they have not truly grasped the depth of God's love for them and/or how utterly undeserving they are of God's gracious love.

Over the course of this week, we have seen that God's love is steadfast, selfless, and meets us at our point of need. His love is the basis for our love for Him and others. If we take seriously the charge to live as Jesus did, we are obliged and empowered to love others in practical, selfless, and relentless ways. We are to reflect God to the world.

QUESTIONS

Which aspect of God's love for you is most difficult for you to imitate in your love for others?

PRAYER

For African Enterprise (AE)

Pray for our group and the church in Rwanda.

*"[May God fill you] with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that we may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."
(Colossians 1:9, 10)*



Sources

- J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

These devotionals are written by a team of Glenkirk volunteers who represent a range of beliefs within the evangelical spectrum. As such, some of the expressed views may not necessarily represent those of pastoral leadership. If you find yourself challenged by a devo, explore why that might be and, should you have questions or concerns, please reach out to Pastor Kate Wallace Nunneley at KNunneley@GlenkirkChurch.org. If you are interested in joining those who pen Glenkirk devotionals, please contact Pastor Kate.

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