

Activate Advent
Activate Love
1 John 3:1-3, 16-18; 4:7-21

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Text Introduction: This year at Christmas we have been on a journey to Activate Advent. I hope that God has used the devotional readings, the prayer activities, the guided activities, the worship gatherings, and the participation in community outreach activities to activate advent in your life.

We have considered so far the themes of hope, peace, and joy. Today, we consider love. But, not just any kind of love. God's love. Christmas is a message of God's love for us. A verse that most everyone knows expresses the Christmas message of love. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life.

Our text today comes from another of John's writings—1 John. Though not a traditional Christmas text, it expresses well the love of God displayed in Christmas.

Text:

1 John 3:1-3, 16-18

¹ Look at how great a love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children. And we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it didn't know Him. ² Dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him because we will see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure.

¹⁶ This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has this world's goods and sees his brother in need but closes his eyes to his need—how can God's love reside in him?

¹⁸ Little children, we must not love with word or speech, but with truth and action.

1 John 4:7-21

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and His love is perfected in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given assurance to us from His Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent His Son as the world's Savior. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

¹⁷ In this, love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, for we are as He is in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love because He first loved ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen. ²¹ And we have this command from Him: The one who loves God must also love his brother.

Introduction: In 1936, King Edward VIII shocked the world, when he gave up the throne of England to marry Ms. Wallis Simpson. Because she had been divorced, the American woman was not accepted by the British government. So, this once very popular king, gave up the throne to marry the woman he loved.

King Edward was not nearly the first king to abdicate a throne because of love. More than 2,000 years ago, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, humbled Himself by taking on flesh of a human, a baby, so as to provide salvation for the ones He loved. This is the Christmas story.

Though a relatively small book, 1 John is a most important book because this letter helps us to understand so much about salvation. The key verse of 1 John is 5:13. Every believer ought to realize that God wants us to know for certain that we have eternal life.

Most Christians go through a stage (or sometimes stages) in their spiritual journey that they begin to question whether they are truly saved. Many reasons can cause us to doubt our salvation. Sin, comparing ourselves to others, or simply a bad day are all reasons why a person may have a period of doubt in their lives. The book of 1 John helps us to understand or confirm our salvation. This book gives us several questions that we can prayerfully and objectively work through in order to help confirm our commitment to Christ.

- Am I sensitive to sin? (1:7-8)
- Do I keep His commandments? (2:3)
- Do I genuinely love other people? (3:14 and 4:7-21)
- Am I filled with the Spirit of God? (3:24) A person can know that he is filled with the Spirit if he can answer yes to the first three questions. We cannot genuinely and consistently do these three things without the Spirit directing our lives.
- Do I believe God's Word? (5:13)—That is, I must believe what God has said about eternal life.

God desires that we come to a point in our lives where we know for certain that we have eternal life. Doubt will come, but we can use these questions from 1 John to help us to evaluate our standing with the Lord.

Our text today helps us to "zero" in on this question of love. In the texts before us today, John is simultaneously presenting the love that God has for us and commanding that we love with that same kind of love. John's premise in these texts is that loving others will be the basis by which we evaluate our

love for God and therefore our relationship to God. But John's foundation is God's love for us evidenced in the coming of Christ (the Advent of Christ) into our world.

His love for us is central to Christmas. Christmas call us to . . .

Behold His Love

"Look at how great a love the Father has given us." We are to look at His love for us. Christmas is the perfect opportunity to look at that love.

- The Manger

Consider 1 John 4:9. We see His love in a manger. The manger reminds us that He humbled Himself to become as one of us. Max Lucado put it this way: "The God of the universe was born into the poverty of a peasant and spent his first night in the cow's feed trough. The God of the universe left the glory of heaven and moved into our neighborhood." (Lucado, *In the Manger*, p. 9.)

- The Measure

"Look at how great a love." Love is sometimes hard to describe, isn't it? But Here is the love of God for you and me.

who, existing in the form of God,
did not consider equality with God
as something to be used for His own advantage.

⁷ Instead He emptied Himself
by assuming the form of a slave,
taking on the likeness of men.

And when He had come as a man
in His external form,

⁸ He humbled Himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death—
even to death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)

- The Manner

- He laid down His life for us. (3:16)
- He is the propitiation for our sins. (4:10)

This word is used only twice, both by John. (Here and 1 John 2:2) Volumes have been written about this one word. It is a word that carries the meaning of God's atoning sacrifice for our sin.

- The Meaning

- Called God's children (3:1)
- We shall be like Him (3:3)

- We will purify ourselves (3:3)
- The Devil's work is destroyed (3:8)
- We might live through Him (4:9)
- We have confidence in the day of judgment (4:17)

Whatever else you might question about God, don't question His love for you. Just look at the manger. Look at the measure—how great a love. Look at the manner of His love. Look at the meaning or significance of that love.

Believe in His Love

Here is the wonderful good news of Christmas. God does not just love; He is love. But, we must come to a place to believe in His love. (See 4:16) Here is a Christmas prayer—that all might come to believe in His love. I pray as did the Apostle Paul in writing to the Ephesians:

¹⁶I pray that He may grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power in the inner man through His Spirit, ¹⁷and that the Messiah may dwell in your hearts through faith. I pray that you, being rooted and firmly established in love, ¹⁸may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God's love, ¹⁹and to know the Messiah's love that surpasses knowledge, so you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Martin Luther said, "The sin underneath all our sins is to trust the lie of the Serpent that we cannot trust the love and grace of Christ."

Bless others with His Love

Would you do what Jesus did? He exchanged the worship of angels for the company of killers. If you were God, would you? I wouldn't, but Christ did! Jesus humbled Himself. He went from commanding angels to sleeping in the straw. Why? Because that is what love does. It puts the loved before itself. Your place in heaven was more important to Him than His place in heaven, so He gave up His so you could have yours.

It's time to let His love cover all things in your life. Every promise broken, every cross word, and harsh word. His love covers all things. Let it! Do it for His sake. For the peace of your heart. And do it for their sake. For the people in your life. Let His love fall on you so yours can fall on them. (Lucado, *In the Manger*)

Listen to how author Jim Denison puts it:

When you consider what Jesus gave up to come at Christmas for you, please never wonder again if God loves you. Never wonder again if he knows your problems or feels your pain. Never wonder again if you are worthy of being loved, because you are loved by the God of the entire universe.

And when you consider what Jesus gave up for you at Christmas, never wonder how you can repay him. You can do what he did. You can love those he loves. You can serve those he serves. You can prove he loves them by the way you love them.