

Amazing Love, Part 4

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[0 : 00] I'll read John 3.16 through to verse 21.

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. And this is the judgment.

The light has come into the world, and people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

[1 : 13] May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? Human beings pattern themselves after people who they want to be like.

They don't do this, well, not all the time, but a lot of time, younger siblings are desperate to pattern their clothing, their musical tastes, and even their mannerisms after their older siblings.

They internalize their style, even their attitudes, because they judge that their older sibling is cool, and they want to be cool too.

But this internalization of styles and attitudes isn't limited to just siblings. We all do it. People who have a favorite team will adorn themselves in the apparel of that team.

Kids will look to their favorite athlete, and they'll emulate that player, whether they're on the playground or on the field. Back in the 90s, if you remember, a very popular television show was the show Friends on NBC, and just about every other woman had a haircut like Jennifer Aniston, because people desperately want to internalize and emulate those things that they look up to or that they like.

[2 : 35] This is how culture works. We love something, and then we mimic it, who we are, or how we want to be known. It's shaped by the things that we love, and these things come with a set of laws, codes, and principles that we internalize.

And we both internalize them and also advertise them, not just with our words, but the way that we live. Many of you know I'm a big Chiefs fan, and being a Chiefs fan comes with laws.

One of those laws is that you hate the Raiders. I love you, Isaac. You hate the Raiders, you hate the Broncos. You cheer only for the Chiefs.

When it's the first home game of the year at Arrowhead Stadium, you wear red on Friday. When you go to the stadium, there are a certain chants that you do at certain times. One of the things that if you ever were to go there, when we sing the national anthem as Chiefs fans, when we get to the final part where you say, in the home of the brave, instead you say, in the home of the Chiefs.

And everybody roars it intimidatingly, right? And when you do that, you're accepted by the whole.

You become a part. People who are strangers who you've never met before, they become close to you during those few hours whenever the game is going on.

[3 : 55] People also do this with political parties. They also do this with politicians. This is what we do in our society. We emulate the things that we love, and by extension, we then internalize their laws, their codes, and their principles, allowing them to shape who we are or how we want to be perceived.

Jesus did the same thing, but in a very different way. John 14, 31. Jesus said, But I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

Jesus Christ, the God-man, completely, totally, exhaustively internalized God's law, which was an expression of God's character.

He did this because He loved the Father more than anything else. And He wanted the world to know the Father as He had known the Father.

And so the codes and culture and character of heaven indwelt Jesus entirely, making Him a purveyor of heaven's principles, displaying them with His words and through His life.

[5 : 08] Loving God, then, means internalizing God's law. 1 John 5, 3. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.

However, we must understand that apart from the Holy Spirit, it's not possible for God's law to change us. Case in point, you look at the Pharisees.

They knew the law well. They had internalized it at least mentally, but definitely not spiritually. It's the Spirit of God whom believers have been sealed with that makes us love God's law and want to express God's character.

Not out of a sense of duty, but desire. A desire to be like Him. A desire to be like Christ. To emulate Him and agree with His judgments.

A desire to be like Christ. These verses speak of the relationship between love and judgment.

Verses 17-21. Now, a lot of people would disagree with that statement.

[6 : 15] Believing that love and judgment are opposed to one another. Because they're of the mind that to love means not to judge. And that those who judge are unloving.

But is that true? So, here's the main idea for this morning's message. Every form of love makes judgments and forms distinctions.

God's love for us and our love for Him has both a unifying and separating effect. Those who love God are unified to Him.

They come to the light and they agree with His judgments. Those who hate God hate His judgments and are separated from Him because they love the darkness instead.

God's love is holy in both what it gives and why it gives it. The Father doesn't give us His love because He is attracted to something lovely in us.

[7 : 18] For everything that we have is ultimately from God. And He loves for the sake of His own Son. He wants the world to delight in the Son as He does.

To share the same desire expressed by David in Psalm 27. One thing have I asked of the Lord that I will seek after. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord. So, my purpose this morning is that you will hopefully exalt over the love and the judgment of God. And seeing how they work in relation to one another.

And how ultimately they culminated in the cross of Jesus Christ. So, first of all, we see that God's love unifies believers to Christ. And also separates them from sin.

Verses 16 through 17. Let me read those again. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. That whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world.

[8 : 19] But in order that the world might be saved through Him. So, we see that God's love creates distinctions. And it sets boundaries.

Because it unites and separates simultaneously. In Ephesians chapter 5 verses 22 through 29. The Apostle Paul explains how marriage symbolizes the relationship between Christ and His church.

Wives submit to husbands in a way that symbolizes the church's submission to Jesus Christ. And the husband is to love their wife in a way that symbolizes Christ's love for the church.

Well, how did Christ love the church? Well, He made the ultimate sacrifice Himself for the church. So, husbands then are to love their wives like Christ has loved the church.

Which means they love them sacrificially. And if a husband loves his wife in such a way, they will be willing to submit to them. Because they know that whatever judgments that husband is making, He's ultimately making it for the benefit of others, not primarily for himself.

[9 : 31] He's the one willing to sacrifice. He's the one willing to give. He's the one willing to do what it takes to preserve the unity of the marriage and the family.

In verse 31, then, Paul describes how this love also creates a separation. Ephesians 5, 31 through 32. He says, Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. So here we see that the husband separates from his parents, from the family that he grew up with.

And he is then united with his wife in the formation of a new relationship, of a new family. Now, this separation does not mean in any way that his love for his wife creates a hatred towards his parents. It's a reflection of the magnificent and beautiful mystery of the union between Christ and His church. Marriage, like our union with Christ, is supposed to be intimate and permanent, like Christ's love for His church.

[10 : 46] It's intimate. It's permanent. Not a contract written in ink, but a covenant sealed with blood, with His blood. This love is a love that discriminates.

It includes and it excludes simultaneously. It makes distinctions, I should say, between that which is loved and that which is not. In the case of marriage, that means that the husband's love for his wife makes a distinction between her and every other woman in his life.

Other women are not his wife. Therefore, he should not love them as he loves her. She makes, she's making a judgment, or he's making a judgment, I should say.

But the judgment isn't truly based upon his not loving her, but on his loving the wrong thing. Let me go back. So, when we see a marriage where the husband or the wife says that I don't love you anymore, really what's happening there is it's not that they're unloving, but they're loving the wrong thing.

And so, when a husband says that, the wife is making a judgment to realize that, no, it's not that he's not loving her, it's that he's loving the wrong thing, that he should be loving her instead of whoever else he is directing that love to, because he made that covenant with her.

[12 : 20] In the same way, God's love for us, as a result of his grace, unifies us to his Son, and also then separates us from our sin.

This results with us seeing God's commands not as punishments, but as blessings that preserve this unity. We internalize then his commands because we know that they are loving, that they are unifying, that they are life-giving, they separate us from sin, and sin hurts the people whom God loves.

Ultimately, sin separates us from him eternally if we reject Jesus Christ, his Son. Parents reflect this kind of love and judgment with their children.

Because a parent loves their child, they will give them commands, right? Look both ways before you cross the street. Not because I'm trying to make your life miserable or take away fun, but because if you don't, chances are you could get hit by a car, and then we would be separated. Correct? Or you see somebody that they're hanging out with, and you are concerned. They're hanging out with a guy or a girl that you know is not good for them, and so as a loving parent, you ask them to create a separation in that relationship, because you know that that person and their influence ultimately could separate them from you and result in bad things, maybe even tragic things.

[13 : 57] Thankfully for believers, as we saw in last week's sermon, God's love preserves and protects us, keeping us from separating from him.

So having understood this, let's recap verses 16 through 17. We see in verse 16, God so loved the world. The act of his love was giving his only son as a sacrificial substitute to absorb the wrath of God for the sins that we've committed by lifting up his son on the cross.

There God's love and judgment of sin meet in his son. That believing in him is what saves us, not in our performance. That this love of God results in the salvation of sinners, but came at a great cost to him as a result, though, of his grace.

Verse 17, the son didn't come to condemn the world because it already is condemned. Genesis 3, the curse of sin, we see there. God's love for sinners saves them through Jesus, who was judged for the sins that they've committed, setting them free from sin's price, which is eternal death, giving us instead eternal life, so that we, the church, may be presented to Jesus as a worthy bride, clothed in his righteousness, having been cleansed by his blood, united to him in an everlasting covenant, which is a covenant of grace that is not dependent upon our works or our performance.

This unity is one that preserves, he preserves it, causing us to persevere, because we've been sealed with his spirit, having internalized his judgments and his standards, loving then and living for him instead of loving and living for this world.

[15 : 44] Next, we see that God's love separates believers from the world. Verses 18 through 21. Again, whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned

already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And this is the judgment. The light has come into the world, and the people love the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

But whoever does what is true comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God. So let's take another example from Scripture to see the relationship between love and justice that has both a unifying and separating effect.

1 John 2, verses 15 through 17. There the apostle writes, Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life, is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires.

[16:56] But whoever does the will of God abides forever. Now, we've read John 3, verse 16. We've just read this Scripture. And it could sound confusing.

On the one hand, we read, For God so loved the world. But then we read this verse in 1 John and we think, but we're not supposed to? Well, if you're a student of the Bible, if you're a student of Scripture, which I hope you are, you understand that it's Scripture that interprets Scripture. We know that we are to love our neighbors. The Bible tells us to, right? We're to love them as ourselves. We're to love even our enemies and we are to pray also for those who would persecute us.

So no doubt, there are unbelievers that would belong into those two groups. Enemies, three groups. Neighbors, those who persecute us. But this isn't referring to people but to the system of the world ruled by Satan.

We are not to love the things that the fallen systems of the world love. We are to make loving judgments that distinguish us from the rest of the world.

[18:05] We are to be in this world as Christ's ambassadors but not of this world. We don't love the same things that they love. We put a different value on things that they've diminished.

When we think of judgment, we typically have punishment in mind but that is only one possible outcome of judgment.

Judging at its root truly defines how we assess and evaluate things. It serves like a ruler, like a measuring stick by which we make measurements.

We all judge in this way. We measure what we see by a certain standard. We judge a cheating spouse based upon the standard of marriage that we see in Scripture or how they should be.

And we understand that a cheating spouse doesn't measure up because of the standard of marriage, of the vows that they had made to their wife or their husband that were established by Scripture.

[19:06] They're not meeting the standard so we make a correct judgment. As previously pointed out, love is a judging activity in that it makes distinctions between that which is loved and that which is not.

Those who have been born again understand that Christ is our standard. He is the standard. That God's Word, not our opinions or our feelings, serve as the measuring stick of what is truly good, of what is truly noble, of what is truly true.

It sets up boundaries that establish an inside and an outside. Adam and Eve were inside the Garden of Eden until they sinned and then they were forced outside.

Those inside Noah's ark were spared from the flood of God's wrath endured by those who were on the outside. Those who took shelter inside their homes, whose doors were covered with the blood of the Lamb, were passed over by the angel of death while those on the outside were stricken.

God has called a people and He has separated them from this world, sparing them from His wrath as a result of His grace. They are on the inside, the inside of His bright and glorious kingdom who listen to His Word and who love His laws while those who are on the outside are in utter darkness and they listen to their own voices and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie.

[20:41] The love of God creates a separation that has boundaries that makes distinctions.

Augustine, one of the all-time great Christian theologians and philosophers, wrote a famous work entitled, The City of God.

In it, he writes about two cities. One is the city of God, the other is the city of man. The inhabitants of the city of one must love God and the inhabitants of the city of the other must love themselves.

Ruling these two cities are two different judgments. One based upon God and His judgments, the other based upon self and its judgments. Each judge has his own system, his own standard of measurements that determine what is right and what is wrong, what is good, what is evil, what is considered lovely and what is considered vile.

Augustine's story obviously comes from his understanding of Scripture. Jesus was always making these kinds of distinctions. He said, there's two paths, there's two gates, there's two destinations, there's two builders, there's two foundations, there's two different outcomes.

On the day of judgment that He spoke of, there will be two groups. one on His right, the other on His left. One raised to eternal life, the other raised to eternal punishment.

[22 : 09] Not surprisingly, people often hate this separation and the truth that God's love and judgment aren't things that they can separate from His character.

They hate it. They don't want to come to the light. They don't want their deeds to be exposed. They don't want to live by God's judgments.

Saying instead things like, a loving God doesn't send anyone to hell. That that's not fair. That I can't believe in a God who is like that. So instead what they do is they create a God in their own image.

A God whom they are comfortable with. Not someone who exposes their sin, but someone who approves of their sins and their valuation of things.

I've been reading a book recently called The Rule of Love written by Jonathan Lehman. He's one of the guys with Mark Dever in our Sunday night series that we've been going through. He wrote this book and in it he told a great, or he gave a great illustration that I want to share with you that I think speaks very well and accurately to this relationship between the church and the world.

[23 : 19] Christians and the world. He says it's as if humanity was hired as a store manager and entered into God's store called creation.

In all of God's price tags, he went instead stamping on every item with a price sticker that was out of sync of the value that had originally been assigned to it by God at the store's grand opening.

The cheap then becomes costly. The costly becomes cheap. God therefore sent His apostles and prophets to walk around the store of creation, quill in hand, and record in their little book the original price of everything.

What does sex outside of marriage really cost? What about neglecting my children for the sake of my career? Or looking after my elderly parents? Or caring for the downtrodden? Check the book. It will tell you the real prices. The foolishness of God, it says, is wiser than the wisdom of men. And the weakness of God is stronger than the strength of men. Scripture is filled with corrected price tags.

[24 : 24] The person without the Spirit spends his entire life seeking to buy this world, but Scripture warns that it profits a man nothing to gain the whole world yet forfeit his soul. The fallen woman spends her days running around asking what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear.

But Scripture teaches us to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Jesus gave this job to His church to open the book and to declare the true value and worth of things.

But if we are like the world, we lose that distinction. We lose that separation. Our light is hidden and our salt loses its taste. Why listen to a church that judges the way the world judges and loves the way that the world loves?

What use is there for a church like that? If there is indeed a final and great chasm which none may cross between the hoarding rich man and the poor man Lazarus that Jesus talked about in His parable who laid begging at His gates, why would we not foreshadow that divide now by identifying as the church of Christ here on this earth?

There must be a separation. There must be a distinction. There are boundaries called God's judgment. But understand this. It's like living in a fortress with a lot of windows.

[25 : 53] Great big windows and a great big glass door. Why? Because though there is a separation and though there is a distinction, we desperately want the world to be able to look inside.

We desperately want them to look inside the church and see God's people living like Jesus Christ. we don't hide away. We don't cover ourselves with a building that has no windows or doors. No, we want people to see because it's our hope that they would receive these glimpses and understand what it means to be saved by grace.

That they too would have eternal life. That they too would be God's possession under His protection. We want them to see the kind of love and unity that the gospel creates and ultimately, we hope that they will come in as a result of being born again like we have been.

To be united to Christ. To be separated from sin. To be united to His church and be separated from this world. To see that we agree with God's judgments not because we are smarter or better than them but because we've been the recipients of God's amazing love and grace.

[27 : 13] Not based upon our performance but based purely and solely upon His. His dying on the cross. His rising from the dead. His leaving behind an empty tomb.

The Apostle Paul saw no conflict between characterizing the Corinthian church as both being ambassadors of reconciliation for Christ while also calling them to separate as a people from the world.

2 Corinthians 5.20 He calls them, Therefore, we are ambassadors of Christ. God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ. Be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 6.17 though, Therefore, go out from their midst. Speaking of the world and be separate from them says the Lord and touch no unclean thing. Then I will welcome you.

When unbelievers look at the church, they should see something that they don't have but want. A communion.

[28 : 16] A community. A fellowship based on unity that reflects the beauty of Christ as we emulate His character having internalized His judgments.

However, others see a church as being something that they know that God has called it to be but they don't like it.

They view it with disdain. And in these verses, Jesus explains why that is. Verses 18-20 He describes the judgment that happens when light comes into the world.

And it turns out that those who are condemned in this judgment are condemned by what they love and what they hate. And those who are rescued from this judgment are those who have been rescued by His grace.

Of course, the light that Jesus speaks here refers to is referring to Himself in verse 19. This means that He is the very presence of God who John describes in 1 John 1.15 like this.

[29 : 26] He says, God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all. And the Word was God. So when the Word became flesh, light came into the world for God is light.

And in the Bible, light is synonymous with truth. So this means that Jesus is the sum of all truth. In fact, He said in John 14.6 I am the way and the truth and the life.

To know anything truly is then to know Jesus. Colossians 1.16 says of Him, all things were created through Him and for Him. So not only is He the light and the truth, but the purpose of everything and the origin of all things.

And the meanings of everything are ultimately found in Him. When we come to the light, we come to truth.

When Jesus comes, He brings light. He brings truth. He reveals things as they truly are. And as a result of that, darkness is exposed.

[30 : 30] The truth about our sinfulness. The truth about the way of salvation. The truth about what is right and what is good. The truth about what is wrong and what is evil.

The truth about how we should live. All right thinking, right doing, and right feelings is divined and measured by Jesus Christ who is the standard setter. His judgments are true.

They provide life and they provide light. They give life. We internalize them and then we cherish them as those who have been born again. But there is a judgment made on those who do not come to the light but remain in darkness because they love the darkness and abhor God's judgment and ultimately His salvation.

They don't see God's love because they refuse to experience it. Knowing that coming to the light means being exposed to the truth. It means letting go of the world and they don't want that kind of a separation.

When Christ, the light of the Lord, begins to shine on a person's life, it either breaks them and leads them to repentance and faith or it drives them further into the darkness.

[31 : 43] This response reveals that the guilt of not coming to Jesus lies within the human heart. Not coming because they don't want to.

They wish to remain in bondage but these chains are forged in the fires of their own desires. What they love and what they hate. Unbelief is man's fault but belief is God's gift.

Look at verse 21 again. The one who comes to the light as Jesus had told Nicodemus is the one who has been born again. Born from above. Born of the Spirit. By God's power we come.

By God's grace we are saved. By God's preservation we persevere in this life. Our works are clearly seen because we've experienced the amazing love of God that saves sinners, that separates them from their sin having had it placed on Jesus Christ who is their great substitute God's great sacrifice.

We magnify God's grace because we've received it and we've understood it. And so right now the world needs the church to be the church that God has commanded it to be. We must be the salt and the light that the world is in desperate need of seeing and tasting.

[33 : 02] So either you resemble Christ or you resemble the world. It's one or the other. Which is it? Whose judgments have you internalized?

Christ's or your own? Whose commands are orienting your course? Christ's or your own? Do you come to the light or do you abhor it?

Are you hearing these words with gladness or hatred? Do you live in the city of God or do you live in the city of man? Verse 21 concludes Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus.

And if you recall at the beginning when we talked about Nicodemus' coming to Jesus that John, the human author inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this gospel, liked to contrast light and darkness with the spiritual condition of people.

He mentions that Nicodemus came to Jesus at night. It's very likely that he came to him at night because he was afraid of being seen with Jesus in the day, knowing what that might cost him personally and professionally.

[34 : 16] But I believe that John includes that detail to also tell us about the spiritual condition of Nicodemus, this Pharisee who came to Jesus at night. Certainly, the dialogue he has with Jesus reveals to us that he came to him as an unbeliever.

And unfortunately, from what we have here, he must have left that conversation in the same condition. Imagine that. He's speaking with Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, and it's Jesus who's preaching the gospel to him.

And he even still leaves that conversation in unbelief. But John provides us with some interesting clues about Nicodemus throughout the rest of this gospel.

The next time we encounter Nicodemus is with him functioning in his official capacity as a member of the Sanhedrin as they considered what to do with Jesus.

In John 7, some Pharisees and priests, presumably with authority to do so, sent some of the temple guards to arrest Jesus. But those guards returned unable to bring themselves to do it.

[35 : 29] And so the guards are reprimanded by the Pharisees. But Nicodemus presents the opinion that Jesus should not be dismissed or condemned until they have heard him, heard from him personally.

And he says in John 7, 51, does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and a learning what he does? However, the rest of the council rudely dismiss Nicodemus' suggestion out of hand and they appear to have already made up their minds.

Then finally, Nicodemus is referred to in John 19 after Jesus' crucifixion.

We find him there assisting Joseph of Arimathea in Jesus' burial while the light of the sun was still up before the sun had set.

And John tells us that Nicodemus brought with him 75 pounds of spices to use in preparation of Jesus' body. That was a high price.

[36 : 37] Those were very costly and in fact only really used for people of great notoriety or wealthy or kings. And Nicodemus provided this for Jesus' body in preparation for burial.

And there he and Joseph of Arimathea wrapped up the body of Jesus Christ and placed it in the tomb. The sheer amount of burial spices would seem to indicate at the very least that Nicodemus was rich and also that he had a great respect for Jesus at the very least.

Does this indicate that Nicodemus was a believer? I think so. But nobody can say that with certainty. It would appear that he like Joseph of Arimathea were disciples of Christ from a distance. But I think that this final recorded act of this man who came in darkness to Jesus but now was willing to be seen preparing his body for burial in the light indicates that salvation had taken place.

No doubt as Jesus was hanging on the cross Nicodemus saw it and he recalled this conversation in John 3 where Jesus says the son of man must be lifted up.

[38 : 05] He must become the curse of sin that takes the curse of sin away. Unfortunately it's a mystery. We're not sure.

How about you? Have you experienced the amazing love of God that unites you to himself and also then separates you from sin? have you internalized his judgments?

Have you beheld that they are good? Or are you a disciple from a distance like Nicodemus probably was? Like Joseph of Arimathea most likely was?

You see the world doesn't need Christians who act like that. in our society we don't need Christians who worship in secret but who exhibit Christ's likeness wherever they go.

Those who do this do what is true they come to the light and so our encouragement here from our Lord for us as his people is to come to the light to live in it to bask in it to see that his judgments aren't burdensome but that they give life.

[39 : 29] Maybe you've heard the gospel before like Nicodemus had but still walk away in the darkness but maybe you've heard it again and the light has shed once again on your darkened heart come to the light though your sin be exposed for a moment God will cover you with the righteousness of his son forever.

Two applications one live in the light of Christ don't be conformed by the ways and patterns of this world you've probably heard this illustration before I think it's a good one if all of a sudden things were to go really against the church in our country where they were coming to your house and able to imprison you and take you away from your family like they do in many other parts of the world would there be enough evidence for them to convict you in the way that you live in the standards that you have that measure up to God's or are you so much like the world that they wouldn't be able to tell live in the light of Christ if you're upset with what's going on in our country and you're not living like Christ then you're not doing the service that our country needs you to do live in the light of Christ to demonstrate the amazing love of God that you've received in this world it's unmerited it's undeserved it's unrestricted it's not based upon performance but on grace a love that makes preservations and protects a love that unites and a love that separates demonstrate this love in our church in your neighborhood in your workplace don't be somebody who uses others to get what you want but be used by the

Lord to serve him and serve others however they need