

The Love of the Father

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[0 : 00] For the Sundays leading up to and including Christmas Day, because as you know, if you've looked ahead in your calendar, Christmas falls on a Sunday this year.

And so, leading up to that and including that day, I want us to focus on the saving ministry of Jesus Christ.

The saving ministry of Jesus Christ, and that is, after all, the point of it all. Christmas, the Christmas celebration. That's the point of it, right?

I mean, from the biblical perspective, Christmas is all about the coming of the Savior. Now, I understand, well, where the fact that for many in our culture, it's not at all about the coming of Christ, sadly.

But it really is about that, about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The angel Gabriel said to Jesus, you shall call his name Jesus.

[1 : 14] Speaking of that little baby that would be born to Joseph's wife, Mary. You shall call his name Jesus, which in itself means Jehovah saves.

You shall call his name Jesus, for he will, what? Save. Save his people from their sins. And so, this morning, I want to, again, I want to, as I've said, jump ahead just a little bit in our study of 1 John and look at a passage of Scripture that really defines for us what this season is all about.

At the very foundation of it, the very core of it. It's all about love. Love. Not just any love, and really not your love. But specifically, the love of the Father for us.

The love of God the Father for us. For us. His children. His children. I hope you are one of his children. Through salvation in Jesus Christ.

It's all about the love of the Father for us. Through the giving of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. To be our Savior. And so, this morning, my text for this sermon consists of really just one verse.

[2 : 32] One verse. In fact, actually, two-thirds of one verse. Two-thirds of one verse. And that's possible. Believe me. I can preach a sermon on one word out of a verse if I have to.

And I've done that, actually. But this morning, our focus will just be on two-thirds of a verse. And it comes to us from 1 John chapter 3.

Chapter 3 and verse 1. And I'm going to read the entire verse. And if you will permit me, I want to read it, first of all, from the English Standard Version.

I know many of you do not have that version. That's okay. I have a reason why I want to read it from that version, first of all. Well, actually, by the time we're finished, I will have read it from a couple of other versions.

And even a paraphrase. But here it is from the English Standard Version. See what kind of love the Father has given to us.

[3 : 34] That we should be called children of God. And so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.

And now I want to read it, the same verse, from a paraphrase. It's the J.B. Phillips paraphrase or translation. And so listen to it very carefully. He kind of expands upon it a little bit.

Consider the incredible love that the Father has shown us in allowing us to be called children of God.

And that is not just what we are called, but what we are. Our heredity on the Godward side is no mere figure of speech, which explains why the world will no more recognize us than it recognized Christ.

And by the way, that explains a lot, doesn't it, in our culture today. But now, Christmas, again, is about the birth of Jesus Christ. And we all know that, don't we?

[4 : 41] I mean, without that great event, there would be no Christmas, regardless of what others have changed this holiday into. We wouldn't have Christmas. We would have this holiday if it had not been for the birth of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I can go a step further and say that the birth of Jesus Christ is all about God, the Father, expressing His saving love toward us.

Sinners. That's what it's all about. Remember John 3.16, For God so loved the world that He did what? He gave His only begotten Son.

All right, so John wants us to consider that. He wants us to consider, specifically, what kind of love this is. What kind of love this is.

And so, from this one verse, we can understand that, first of all, the kind of love the Father has given to us is, number one, a strange love.

[5 : 52] It's a strange love. I mean, if you really consider it, as John has commanded us to do here, then you would come to this very clear conclusion.

That the kind of love that the Father has bestowed upon us, has given to us, is a very strange love. Very strange. God says in Isaiah 55 and verses 8 and 9, For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. I don't know if you've ever entertained this thought.

You know, if I were God. Have you ever entertained that thought? Don't look so pious. You might not admit it. But you may have thought, on occasion, you know, given circumstances, if I were God, I would do things a little differently.

You ever entertained that thought? I mean, we think we're so smart. I mean, we really do. We think that we could somehow counsel God on how he should do certain things, or how certain things should be done.

[7 : 13] But as one man said, you know, we don't even know how a black cow can eat green grass to give white milk that churns into yellow butter. And we're going to counsel God?

We're going to somehow know better than God knows, and a better way to do certain things than God would do certain things and has done certain things. We can't counsel God.

And there are so many things about God, and so many things about what God has done, and how God works, that seem so strange. I mean, they really do. And perhaps the supreme example, and I think not perhaps, definitely, the supreme example of that is the strange way God chose to express his love toward us.

It's strange in nearly every way. That is the strange way God chose to save us. Some of you are familiar with Mark Lowry.

You know about this song. You've heard it many, many times. We always hear it this time of the year. But I think Mark Lowry has really captured this perfectly in his popular Christmas song, Strange Way to Save the World.

[8 : 28] You know this song? And you know, if you know it, you know that it's written from the perspective of Joseph, the husband of Mary, or the betrothed husband of Mary at the time.

The father of Jesus in the sense of a male parent of Jesus. He certainly was not Jesus' father. But it's written from his perspective, and he says what I would say if I had been him.

I would have said these things. Why me? Why me? I'm just a simple man of trade. And then he looks down at the little baby in the manger.

Why him? With all the rulers in the world. And then looking around in his surroundings. I mean, why here?

Why here of all places in this stable filled with hay? And then, of course, then looking at his sweet wife, Mary, why her?

[9 : 40] Why her? She's just an ordinary girl. And then, as the song goes on, now I'm not one to second guess what angels have to say, but this is such a strange way to save the world.

And it is, isn't it? I mean, if you really think about it. John wants us to think about it. He wants us to think deeply about it.

In fact, he actually commands us to think about it. Look at it. Verse 1, and this time in the New King James. Behold. Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us.

Behold. And that Greek verb, by the way, is an imperative. And you know what that means, don't you? This is a command.

It's a command. Behold. Look. See. Consider. And it can be translated in all of those ways, in other ways, and in numerous ways, but all of them point to this, that the Bible commands us to consider deeply what kind of love this is that the Father has given to us.

[11:04] To consider it deeply. Take time to think about it. Take time to let that truth sink deeply into our hearts.

This love of the Father. And by the way, the way John writes this, it's meant to startle us. To, in a sense, catch us off guard.

To amaze us. To amaze us. And if we will really think deeply about it, it's meant to take our breath away.

It's a shame that it has become, we have allowed it to become so common to us, the love of the Father, that it barely arouses any kind of emotion whatsoever in us.

Hence, the passage, and the importance of it, the significance of it, the command of it. Think about this. See, John is not asking a question about his love.

[12:09] It's not, just what manner of love is this? No, he is expressing his amazement about this love.

The love of the Father. What manner of love this is. It's amazing. Because it's unusual. It is strange in that sense.

It is a love that we are not accustomed to. What a strange love it is. Now, don't think that this love is just an emotion.

Don't think of the love of the Father in terms of emotion or feeling. God's love for us is not, first and foremost, an emotion, if it's an emotion at all.

You know, emotion suggests change, ebb and flow of things. Emotion suggests some kind of conditional aspect to it.

[13:23] It's not an emotion. It's not God's feeling that he has toward us. Don't think of it in those terms. No, it is an active thing in the part of God.

It is something that is expressed. Something demonstrated. And it is the way that the love of the Father is demonstrated toward us that makes it so strange.

God gave his only begotten Son. So, you know, consider how God's Son came into the world. Anything strange about that?

Well, almost everything is strange about it. About Jesus coming into the world. Consider how strange it must have seemed to Joseph.

After Joseph discovered that his wife was with child and he knew it wasn't his. And so he would naturally have to assume that it was someone else's child and not his.

[14:29] And he's all torn up about that, of course. And you would be too. But after that, consider Matthew 1.20 and the angel that spoke to Joseph in a dream.

And what did the angel say to Joseph? Don't be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. Take her to be your wife. Don't be afraid to do that.

And then what he said, For the baby conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And I'm sure Joseph was thinking, Are you kidding me?

I mean, it's so common to us. I mean, because we know the story. And we have known it and heard it. And it's so accepted by us. And we're not even amazed hardly about it.

By it anymore. But think of Joseph first hearing. The child is not yours. The child is not any other earthly man. It's conceived of the Holy Spirit.

[15:25] Really? Can you imagine how amazed he was? What a strange thing. And consider how strange it seemed to Mary.

The mother of Jesus. She's with child. She knows that she has not known any other man in that way. And yet, there's a child in her womb.

And in Luke chapter 1 verse 31, The angel said to her, You will conceive in your womb and bring forth a son, And shall call his name Jesus.

The Holy Spirit will come upon you. I mean, maybe you just want to know, How is this going to work? I mean, how could this be possible? God, all things are possible. The Holy Spirit will come upon you.

And the power of the highest will overshadow you. Therefore, also that Holy One who is in you is to be born, Will be called the Son of God. And what's Mary thinking?

[16 : 25] Now let me get this straight. I mean, imagine hearing that for the very first time. This is unusual. This is unheard of.

From our finite minds, And it's not even possible. What a strange thing. And consider how strange it was to the shepherds.

I could name all of the principal characters of the Christmas stories recorded in Scripture, But think about the shepherds. Luke chapter 2 verse 10, The angel said to the shepherds, Now these shepherds were Jews.

They had all their lives been looking for, And longing for, And expecting the coming of the Christ, The Messiah. In fact, I think you could prove the case, That not only with these shepherds, But with all of Israel at the time, There was a heightened expectation, That the Messiah may come at any moment, That he really was going to come.

Several indicators, Several things in Old Testament prophecy, That were possibly pointing to that, And there was this heightened expectation, Of the Messiah to come.

[17 : 44] And so, The angels appear. You know, This heavenly host, God's army, Appears in the sky. Imagine that scene.

And then the angel said to these shepherds, Do not be afraid, For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. This is what they've been hoping for, And looking for.

Actually, This is the gospel. I bring you the gospel, Which will be to all people. For there is born to you, That would be the first thing, That would be strange to them.

Born? Born to you this day, In the city of David, A Savior, Who is Christ, The Lord. And I'm sure they're thinking, Great, Where shall we find him?

And the angel went on to say, You will find a babe. A babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, Lying in a manger, Which is an animal feeding trough.

[18 : 52] And can you imagine, What these shepherds would be thinking? Really? Now let's get this straight.

The Christ, A baby? And in a feeding trough? See, What a strange way, To send the Savior, Into the world.

What a strange love. But then, You can consider, How God's son lived in this world. And, Ultimately died.

How strange. Everything about it is strange. He is the pre-existent, Eternal son of God. He is the Messiah.

The anointed one, The Christ. The ancient of days, The lion of Judah, The king of glory, King of kings, And lord of lords. He is the living word, Through whom, All creation, Was spoken into existence.

[20 : 05] And yet, When he came into this world, He declared, Foxes have holes to live in, And the birds of the air have nests. But the son of man, Has nowhere even to lay his head.

Isn't that strange? Think about it. He had absolute power. And yet, Without even a fight, His enemies were able to, Capture him and arrest him.

He had, Or was, Truth, Personified. And yet, He was arrested for, Basically lying.

Blaspheming. Claiming to be God. And he spent the final days of his life on earth, In jail. He, Was, The king of kings.

Yet, He stood in humility, And in subjection to Pilate, And to Herod, Mere earthly, Rulers.

[21 : 15] He was the living word, And yet, At his trial, He didn't utter a single word, In his defense. He was sinless.

Sinless perfection. Yet, He was convicted, And condemned, As a criminal. Anything strange about that?

He was absolute moral perfection. He was holy. Yet, On the cross, He became sin.

For us. All the sin. My sin, Your sin, Was laid on Him. Not just that He bore it, But the Bible uses a term, Interesting term, He became sin.

For us. He was the light that lights every man, And yet, On the cross, He hung there, For three hours, In absolute darkness.

[22 : 23] He was life. Life itself. And yet, He died. What a strange kind of love. What a strange way to save the world.

But God, Says 1 Corinthians 1.27, Has chosen the foolish things of the world, To put to shame the wise. And God has chosen the weak things of the world, To put to shame the things which are

mighty.

Who has believed our report? Says the prophet in Isaiah 53.1, And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He, For He shall grow up before us, Among us, As a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground.

He has no form or comeliness. There's no beauty about Him. He's not handsome. And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. Strange love.

Behold what manner of love. Second, We could say that it is a strange love, Because it is a sacrificial love. A sacrificial love.

[23 : 37] John says, Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us. Bestowed on us. Given to us.

And I must say, That I really like the NIV, On this passage. I don't always quote from the NIV. I've not always been a real fan of that translation. I'm sorry. But I think the NIV captures what John means here, More than any other translation.

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us. I love that. And the translators here are not taking liberty.

Now this really is how it could be translated. Lavished. Poured out in abundance upon us. See, listen.

[24 : 40] The sacrificial, This is what John wants us to know. The sacrificial aspect of God's love is breathtaking. When you think about it.

And John says, Think about it. Consider it. And let me just give you several reasons why. Number one, It is an unsolicited love.

It's an unsolicited love. Now, Many of the gifts that you and I will receive From family and friends this Christmas time, We'll have, Many of them will have been solicited by us.

That is, We've been asked, What do you want for Christmas? And we say, Well, Okay, This, Or maybe some of you even make a list of things. Making your list and checking it twice. That kind of thing.

And in a sense, We are soliciting. We are specifically asking for certain things. And guess what? Christmas morning, That's what we get. We get it. Hopefully. As a child, I didn't always get what I asked for.

[25 : 45] But, Not so with the love of God. The saving love of God. Romans 5, 8 says very clearly, But God demonstrates His own love toward us, In that while we were still sinners.

Still sinners. Still sinning. Still living in our sins. Still loving our sins. Still embracing our sins. While we were still sinners. Rebels. Enemies. We could add a lot of things into that phrase.

And what is implied here. While we were that, Christ died for us. Christ died for us.

Now, So, Remember this Christmas. When you open your presents this Christmas, Remember, The greatest gift that has ever been given you, Was a gift you did not ask for. You didn't ask for it. He said, Well, sure I did. That was given to you before you asked for it. You didn't ask for it. It's a gift that you didn't even want. In your sinful state.

[26 : 54] Depraved state. You didn't want it. There are millions, billions of people walking around this earth today. They don't want that gift. They don't want it. It's a gift you didn't ask for.

A gift you didn't want. It's a gift you didn't even know about. Now, Think about it in these terms. You would not know about it. Apart from God's Holy Word.

And you would not even want it. Apart from God's Holy Spirit. And you would not have it now. Were it not for God's Holy Grace.

It is an unsolicited love. Second, it is an unconditional love. We know that, don't we? Well, we should. It's unconditional.

I mean, how unlike God's love, our love is. It's not the same in any way.

[27 : 59] Our love is always conditional. You say, No, I have love for certain ones that is unconditional. No, it's not. It's conditional. Some measure or another. It's our love.

We can't help ourselves. Our love is conditional. And especially as it relates to God. In fact, 1 John 4, 19 says, We love Him because He first loved us.

Our love is conditioned upon God first loving us. God's love for us, by the way, does not grow out of a relationship with us.

That's the way our love works. Now, we may have some initial attraction toward someone. You husbands had an initial attraction toward your wife.

You couldn't really define that love yet, though we like to call it love. And in reality, the love, true love, grows, gradually grows out of the relationship.

[29 : 03] That's the way our love works. But with God, God's love has relationship as its goal.

That's the goal of God's love. Relationship with us. So, you see, it is motivated from within Himself. Nothing outside of God motivates Him to love you.

It's all from within Him. And so it is unconditional. Third, it is unlimited. It is an unlimited love.

Since love is what God is. See, that's another difference between us. Love is not what we are. It's not our nature. But with God, love is His nature.

And God doesn't have parts of Him like we have, you know, segments of our nature. God is 100% love.

[30 : 07] He's 100% power. He's 100% all of His, the things, the aspects of His nature are full in Him.

God is love. It's not just something He does. And so, it has no limit. I've told this story before and I just really love it.

It really illustrates this. But I heard about a father who took his little boy up to a tall mountain very near their home. And when they got there, it was, it was kind of this, this kind of a mountain where you could just see all around.

You could see all of the land, the countryside, all around you. And so, this father decided he would teach his son a lesson about God. And so, he pointed to the north and to the south and to the east and the west and he took his arms and he went all around the entire horizon and he said to his son, he said, son, that is how much God loves us.

That's the love of God. That's how big His love is. Like looking around in all directions, all of this.

That's somewhat how God loves us.

[31 : 21] And his little boy said, dad, that means that we're right in the middle of it. How true. How true.

God's love is an unlimited love and through Christ we are right in the middle of it. Not on the edge of it. Not on the verge of it.

In Christ, we're in the very middle of His love. love. So it is an unsolicited love, an unconditional love. It is an unlimited love. Fourth, it is an unspeakable love.

You can't say all there is to say about it. It's unspeakable. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift, the Bible says.

And listen, multiple thousand times, multiple thousands thousands of preachers over the last two millennia have tried to tell the whole story concerning God's love.

[32 : 23] Books, volumes and volumes of books have been written on the subject. Poets have attempted to put it all down. Songwriters have attempted to put to music the whole story of the love of God.

But as Frederick Lehman wrote, the love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell.

And then you're familiar with this stanza of that great song, The Love of God. Could we with ink the ocean fill?

And were the skies of parchment made? Were every stalk on earth a quill? And every man a scribe by trade?

To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky.

[33 : 33] It is also unchangeable. It is an unchangeable love. And you know this to be true, don't you? Christmas gifts that we have received in years past they become old and used and worn out and obsolete.

I mean today's Christmas gift in a few years ends up on the trash heap. Just the nature of things that are made on this earth.

But not so with the love of God. The gift of God's love in Jesus never ever changes. It does not change with the times.

Well some would claim that it does. It does not change with seasons of life. It doesn't change according to circumstances.

It does not become obsolete when something else newer or better comes along because there is nothing else better. Nothing better.

[34 : 42] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the prince of preachers, once visited a farmer who was a member of his church and as Spurgeon was walking around the farm he looked at the barn and up on top of the barn there was a very unusual weather vane.

And he noticed that on this weather vane were printed the words God is love on the weather vane. Interesting. And actually Spurgeon misunderstood it.

He said he asked the man he asked the farmer he said do you mean that God's love changes with the wind? And the farmer said oh no not at all what it means that no matter which way the wind is blowing God is love and he loves me.

God's love is unsolicited unconditional unlimited unspeakable unchangeable and one more sadly for many it is an unclaimed love. unclaimed love.

How sad that to countless millions of people the gift of God's love remains unclaimed. Unclaimed.

[35 : 58] Can you imagine that happening on Christmas morning? You know you have gone out and with love and with sacrifice you have purchased special gifts for those your love and you've taken special care to wrap them up you know and put bows on them and place them under the tree and as the day approaches you're you know the excitement begins to build because you're going to see your loved ones take those gifts and unwrap them and you know and receive them and enjoy them and as the day approaches you know and then the day arrives and it's Christmas morning and all the you know the unwrapping frenzy begins to take place and and everyone opens their presents and people say oh thank you it's just what I wanted oh you spent too much on me and oh you know and all the compliments and the joy of all of that the giving of a gift and seeing it to be received and then after it's all done you notice that there's one gift under the tree that you had bought sacrificially for a special one and it's still there left under the tree unwrapped

I mean unwanted unclaimed and it was a costly gift a sacrificial gift and it was left unwanted and the greatest gift of all the most costly of gifts No argument about it!

Sacrificial gift complete sacrifice in terms of value an extravagant gift most valuable of gifts God's Christmas gift Jesus remains unclaimed by millions millions behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed lavished on us a strange love sacrificial love then notice one last thing it is a sovereign love sovereign love John says and this time I want to read it in the New American Standard see how great a love the Father has bestowed on us that we would be called children of God and such we are we are who has called us to be children of

God who the Father God the Father in fact we could say it this way read it this way the Father has called us his children and that is what we are this is perhaps the strangest thing about God's love when you think about it and John says think about it how strange this is that he that God the Father would delight in changing enemies to children rebels to children sinners who love their sin who have rejected his son children who are sinners I mean people who are sinners and he has chosen to change us to be his children and he calls us children what an amazing thing about

God's love why would he do that why would God do that what a strange love God gave his son because he wanted you to be his son and daughter Galatians chapter 4 verse 4 really says it all but when the fullness of the time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman virgin born born under the law born to redeem those who were under the law that we might receive the adoption as children sons daughters receive the adoption and because you are sons that's what John said and that's what we are and because you are sons

[41 : 01] Paul says in Galatians 4 4 because you are sons God has sent forth the spirit of his son into your hearts crying what Abba Father is a