

What A Strange Kind of Love

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Preacher: Don Coleman

[0:00] Take your Bibles this morning and open them to not Luke.

! I'm going to deviate from my preaching through Luke for at least one Sunday. We'll get back to it next Sunday. But open your Bibles to 1 John. Not the Gospel of John, but the 1 Epistle of John. Chapter 3 and verse 1. In fact, my sermon is really going to come from half of a verse. A little better than half a verse. In 1 John chapter 3 and verse 1.

I'm going to wait to read it and give just a little bit of an introduction. And ask you a question. Have you ever entertained the thought that if you were God, and I say this very respectfully, have you ever entertained the thought that if you were God, you might do some things a little differently? Now, I'm looking around at you, and you look very pious and very holy. And you're thinking, well, of course not. Pastor, I would never entertain such a thought.

[1:18] But I bet you have, some of you anyway. Some of you are more holy than I. And so maybe you haven't thought that. But you would have to admit at least this, that God's ways are not our ways.

You better admit that because it's in the Bible. His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are not our thoughts. As high as the heavens are above the earth are His ways above our ways. And Scripture tells us that very clearly. His ways are not our ways. For example, the way God leads us by bringing us the long way around.

We were God, we wouldn't do that. We might even suggest to God, God, have you never heard of the principle that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line? God would probably say, I invented that principle.

I know all about that. I just don't always use it in your case. But if we were God, we would do it differently, wouldn't we? Or, to give you another example, the way God sometimes, well, really all the time, strengthens our faith by causing us to be weak.

[2:27] Or really allowing us to see that we are weak. Strengthening our faith by bringing us through some fire, some point of trouble or difficulty.

And if we were God, we would do that differently. In fact, we might even find ourselves thinking, God, isn't there a better way? Or another example would be the way certain things operate in God's creation.

You know, this past fall, I'm standing there in my yard, and with a leaf rake in one hand, and scratching my head with the other, and I'm standing there knee-deep in leaves, and I'm thinking, God, isn't there a better way to grow trees?

You know, not have to mess with these leaves and so forth. And so we might find ourselves from time to time thinking, well, God, you know, I think if I were you, I would do things a little bit differently.

And we might find ourselves trying to counsel God on how to do certain things a little differently. And yet we don't even know how a black cow can eat green grass and give white milk that turns into yellow butter.

[3:39] And we think we're going to counsel God. We think that we are so smart in relation to God. And so there are some things about God and the way God works and the way God does things that do seem strange to us.

For example, the way God chose to save the world. I don't know if that would be on your list of strange things about the way God does things.

It ought to be, number one, how strange the way God saved me and saved you.

You know, at Christmastime, and I know Christmas is over, but this really is kind of a transitional sermon. We're still thinking about Christmas and then going beyond that.

But at Christmastime, one very familiar, very popular song in the last maybe decade. I'm not sure when he wrote it. But Mark Lowry's song, Strange Way to Save the World.

[4:51] It's a precious song. Incredible lyrics. In fact, let me read them to you. I'm sure he must have been surprised at where this road had taken him because never in a million lives would he have dreamed of Bethlehem.

And standing at the manger, he saw with his own eyes the message from the angel come alive. And Joseph said, Why me? I'm just a simple man of trade.

Why him? Why him? With all the rulers in the world? Why here? Inside this stable filled with hay. Why her? She's just an ordinary girl. Now, I'm not one to second guess what angels have to say. But this is such a strange way to save the world.

I'm borrowing from that song, really from the title of it. Changing it just a little bit. Really kind of expanding it.

[5:59] Because God's uniqueness, the strange way he does things applies not only to how he saved the world, but to so many other things.

And it could come under the heading of love. And so I want to speak to you on this subject. What a strange kind of love.

What a strange kind of love. There is really one word that best defines the holiday that we just celebrated together. It was a word that I was thinking of this Christmas season because it was uniquely special to me, your pastor and his wife and family, to have all of our boys here for Christmas.

Just a great time. That hasn't always happened, not in recent years. I would happen to have additions to our family, to have Tony and Kelly and our granddaughter, Ella, to have them all there. And not only that, but this year to have my mom and dad with us for Christmas. Incredible time. Time of love. It was wonderful. And I don't know how many of you were able to make it to the Christmas Eve service, that very simple service we had.

[7:20] If you missed it, you really missed something. Where families came and took the Lord's Supper together. And I sat right over here and watched these families gather around the tables, the various tables we had set up, and to huddle together and to pray together and then to have the head of the household serve the supper, the bread, and then the juice.

It was an incredible time of love. Christmas is all about love. And yet, my observation of those things, my own personal time of Christmas and how we spent that together as a family and the love there and the love that I witnessed right here in this sanctuary on Christmas Eve, that kind of love I can explain.

And that's perfectly explained. The love a man has for his wife and for his kids and for his family and the love they have for one another and then to see families loving one another and praying together.

That's a love that we can define, we can explain, really. But what about God's love? I'd suggest to you that it is a strange kind of love.

A strange kind of love. The Bible says, For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son and whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[9:06] What a strange love. What kind of love is it? Well, I think this verse that I'm going to read to you and you're going to read silently in your Bibles your copy of God's Word.

1 John 3, verse 1 helps us to see it even though we cannot really explain it fully. Listen to it.

Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called children of God.

Therefore, the world does not know us because they did not know Him. Now, I'm really going to focus on the first part of that verse. Now, I'll go ahead and say to you and admit to you that some of you have different translations.

You have a few extra words in there and you have other words different than the ones I read a moment ago and we're going to kind of walk through all of that. But we're considering this verse to consider this incredible reality.

[10:12] That is that God's love is really a strange love. A strange love. And there are three wonderful truths about that that I want us to see this morning. Three truths and they all really come to us or we're led to these truths really through this one half or maybe three quarters of a verse.

God's love. Here are the three things. Number one. The love of God is, as I've already said, and this is number one, a strange love. Now, I don't use the word strange in the sense that we sometimes use the word strange.

We might look at someone walking through the mall, some young teenager dressed and pierced all over the body. We say, that's pretty strange. I'm not using the word in that sense.

In fact, maybe a better word would be unique. Unique. But because all of the points of my sermon start with S, I had to use the word strange and not unique. Okay? But think of it in those terms. His love is a strange love. It's a unique love. Did you know that the very first word in the text is a command? It's in the form of a command.

[11:29] The word, behold, is an imperative verb in the original language and that means it's a command. Behold, it's an imperative.

Now, some, of course, translate it, look. You might have that word in your translation. Look. Or, see. See. Behold, look, see.

God commands us right at the outset of the verse. He commands us to look at His love. To see it. To behold it.

But really, the idea is to take time to think about it. And not just to give it some thoughts, some casual thought about it, but to think deeply about it.

To consider it very deeply. To allow the truth of God's love, the fullness of that truth, as full as you can comprehend, to allow the fullness of that truth to sink down into your minds and into your hearts.

[12:34] To give it a full consideration. That's the idea here behind this command. And the force, then, if we consider the imperative, the command, then the force of what John is saying and the way he says it here is meant to startle us.

That's what it's meant. It's meant for a fact. John wrote in that way and was inspired by the Holy Spirit in that way. It's meant for a fact. It's meant to startle us.

To amaze us. To really, in a sense, take our breath away. And so John says this is a strange kind of love.

A love that we're not accustomed to. Even though we love one another and we experience love from others and we express love to others and, like I've said, our families spend time loving one another, but it's still, this kind of love, the love of God, is a kind of love that we're not accustomed to. It's an unusual love. Now you know that all true love is an active thing, right? Or it's not really love at all. That means it's a love that is demonstrated.

[13:52] And so God demonstrated His love to us in what way? He gave His Son. He gave His only begotten Son. And so it is in the demonstration of His love, the giving of His Son, that God's love is revealed to us as a strange kind of love.

Now let me explain. For example, think for a moment about how Jesus came into this world. Now we have been thinking about that this season and I have mentioned this a number of times in the course of my preaching over the holiday season.

but let's just think again about how Jesus came into this world. Think about the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. And I would ask you, anything strange about it?

I'd suggest to you that nearly everything about it is strange. What a strange way to bring the Savior of the world into the world. And think about how strange it was for those who were there.

For example, Joseph. And the angel comes to Joseph and speaks to him in a vision or a dream and he says, don't be afraid, Joseph, to take Mary to be your wife.

[15:08] Don't be afraid to do that. Because Joseph was, what, thinking about divorcing her privately, quietly. Kind of putting her out here. Because she was pregnant and it was not his child.

And so the angel says to him, now Joseph, don't be afraid to take Mary to be your wife. Why? Because the baby conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

And I'm sure Joseph is saying, now, wait just a minute. What did you say? You think it was strange to him?

Of course. Consider Mary. The same angel came to Mary, the angel Gabriel, and said to her, you shall conceive and bring forth a son.

The Holy Spirit shall come upon you, Mary, and the power of the highest shall overshadow you, Mary, and so that the Holy One will be called the Son of God.

[16 : 13] And I'm sure Mary is thinking, now let me get this straight. And how about the shepherds? Out there tending their flocks at night, and the angel comes and stands before them and makes that great announcement of the coming of the Savior and says to them, this is where you need to go, this is where you'll find the baby.

And so I'm sure the shepherds are thinking, now let me get this straight. A Savior in Bethlehem lying in a manger?

Strange. What a strange way to send the Savior into the world. What a strange kind of love. And think not only about His birth, but think about His life.

His life here on earth. He is, now consider this, this is true, He is the eternal Son of God. this Jesus. He didn't just become Him one day later on in life or after His crucifixion.

He came into this world as the very Son of God. God who became man, all God, all man. He's the Son of God. He is the Messiah. He is the Christ.

[17 : 31] He's the King of glory. He's the Ancient of Days. He is the Lion of Judah, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. He is the living Word through whom all creation was simply spoken into existence.

And yet He admitted that foxes have their holes and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to even lay His head. Do you find anything strange about that?

What a strange way for the Savior of the world to live in this world He created Himself.

A stranger yet, think about His unusual sacrifice. His cross. Think about that. Let me just give you a number of things to consider about who Jesus is.

He is, the Bible says, truth. Truth personified. Jesus said, I am the truth. He is the truth that sets you free.

[18 : 36] He's truth, and yet He spent the final hours of His life on this planet in prison. In jail. He is all power, and yet without a fight, even a fight.

Now, Peter tried to put up a little fight, but that was never going to get anywhere. But Jesus is all power, and yet without a fight, really, His enemies were able to capture Him and lead Him way captive.

He is the King of kings, and yet He stands before Pilate and Herod, mere mortal men. Strange.

Strange. He is the living Word, and yet at His trial, He didn't even offer a single word in self-defense. Strange.

He is sinless perfection, and yet He was convicted and condemned to death as a criminal.

[19 : 40] He is holy, perfect, sinless purity, and yet on the cross, He becomes sin for us. Strange.

He is light. The Bible says, I am the light of the world. That's what Jesus says, the light that lighteth every man, and yet on the cross, He hung there shrouded in absolute darkness.

Strange. This is strange. He is life, and yet He died. Strange.

What a strange way to save the world. This is a strange kind of love the Father has given, has bestowed upon us. The birth of Jesus, the life of Jesus on this earth, the sacrificial death of Jesus.

I tell you, none of it starts to make any sense until we get to His glorious resurrection when up from the grave He arose with a mighty triumph over His foes.

[20 : 40] And even then, it is strange, isn't it? We can begin to understand this strange love when we read what Paul wrote in Corinthians.

He said, But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. And God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty, the base things of the world, and the things which are despised hath God chosen.

Yes, the things which are not to bring to naught things that are that no flesh should glory in His presence.

A strange love. Behold. Look. See. What manner, what kind of love this is. Why don't you also consider God's love is a strange love because it is, second, a sacrificial love.

A sacrificial love. What did John say? He said, Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, has given us, has given us, a more literal translation, or I would say literal and expanded to kind of bring out the full meaning of the words and the grammar.

[22 : 17] It would go kind of like this. Look. Look at how great a love the Father has given to us and continues to give and give and give without end.

That's what He said. It's breathtaking. And it's meant to be that. The way the Holy Spirit inspired John to write it. It's meant to be breathtaking.

This love the Father has bestowed upon us. I like the NIV translation on this verse. Some of you might have the NIV. And here's how it reads.

How great is the love the Father has lavished, lavished on us. I love that. That helps me anyway to capture maybe a fuller meaning or import of what John is trying to say.

Lavished. Listen, what a strange kind of sacrificial love this is. Let me just give you a few words that describe it. You can jot these down if you want to.

[23 : 30] It is, in the first place, an unsolicited love. This sacrificial love is, I want you to know, dear people, it's unsolicited. You say, what do you mean by that?

Well, you know, many of the gifts, maybe even most of the gifts that you received this Christmas were solicited by you. Right? I mean, we've specifically asked for them.

We made our list and hopefully Santa Claus checked it twice. You know, that kind of thing. And so they were solicited. But not so with God's love for us.

The Bible says in Romans 5.8, God commends, commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Now, think of it. Think of it. This is true. When you opened your Christmas presents this past Christmas morning or Christmas Eve or whenever you did it, when you opened them, you should have been remembering this, that the greatest gift ever given you was a gift you did not ask for.

[24 : 40] Not initially. And would have never asked for it. You would have never even known anything about it. apart from God's Holy Word.

And not only that, you would have never wanted it apart from God's Holy Spirit. And not only that, you would not even have it apart from God's Holy Grace.

It was unsolicited. The Bible says in 1 John 4.19, we love Him. And you do, don't you? Don't you? A few of you do. Well, I hope all of you do. You love Him. We love Him, He said. Because He first loved us.

He first loved us. It's unsolicited love. That's so strange. And it's not the way it works with us. We want to love people who do not love us first, usually.

[25 : 49] Or do not want our love, anyway. Second, it's unconditional. We certainly know that about this love. God's love. This sacrificial love. It's an unconditional love.

And how like, or rather unlike, God's love, our love is when it comes right down to it. Our love is so conditional. Yes, it is.

I don't care how much love you have for someone. There is always a measure of condition there. Some measure of self-centeredness in our love.

We can't help ourselves. It's just there. But not so with God. It's unconditional. God's love is unconditional. It's unsolicited love. It's unconditional love. And let me tell you a third thing.

God's love is unlimited love. Unlimited love. I heard a story, read a story some years ago about a father and his son who were spending some time together out in the country.

[26 : 47] And the father took his son up to the top of a really tall hill so that they could look all the way around, see the horizon all the way around them. And the father took the opportunity to teach his son a lesson about God's love.

And so he pointed to the north and then he pointed to the south and then he pointed to the east and the west and with his arm and his fingers stretched out he went all around the encircling horizon and he said to his son, he said, that is just like God's love.

God's love. God's love is as big as all of that, he said to his son. And to his amazement, his son said, what? Dad, you know what that means?

It means we're right in the middle of it. Praise the Lord. How true. Right in the middle of his love. It's unlimited love and you and I are right in the middle of it.

It's a sacrificial love. It's a strange kind of love. Fourth, it is an unspeakable love. Unspeakable. Unspeakable.

[27 : 56] That is, you cannot speak all about it because you don't know all about it. We're limited in our understanding of it and so we can speak about it to a point, but it's really an unspeakable love.

Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9.15, he said, thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift. Literally, untraceable. As we just cannot plumb the depths of it and so our speaking about it can only reach a certain point.

It is unspeakable. A thousand times a thousand preachers have tried to preach on it and tried to expand upon it and explain all about the love of God and we just can't get all the way there.

Poets and songwriters have written about it and there are books written on the love of God. I have, throughout my ministry, tried to preach the whole story of this unspeakable gift that God has given to us, but no one has been able to plumb the depths of it.

No one is able to tell all there is to tell about it. In fact, I'm not sure that we can even tell half the story of God's love. It's unspeakable.

[29 : 15] It is also unchanging It's an unchanging love. This sacrificial love is unchanging. Christmas gifts that you received this past Christmas probably be sold in a yard sale in the next couple of years sometime if it makes it that long.

Or it becomes obsolete. Maybe you give it to goodwill or maybe you throw it in the trash eventually. Now, that's not really a very nice place to think about. Right now, we want to think about the newness of the gift and how much we enjoy it, how much we're thankful for it, and what a precious thing it was for our loved one to give it to us, but eventually, we're not going to want it anymore. Because it becomes obsolete. And, you know, but that's not the way with God's love, is it? It doesn't change with the seasons. It does not become obsolete when something better or newer comes along.

There isn't anything better or newer than God's love. It's unchanging. It's like Jesus Himself. The same yesterday and today and forever.

I read a story from the Prince of Preachers. That's Charles Haddon Spurgeon. And he told this story. He said one day he was visiting with a farmer.

[30 : 30] And the farmer had on his barn one of these weather vanes, you know. And on the arrow just below it, the farmer had placed there the words God is love.

Kind of interesting. And Spurgeon looked up at that and he totally misunderstood it. And he said to the farmer, are you saying that God's love changes with the wind? And the farmer was appalled. He said, no, no, not at all. Just the opposite. What I mean is that no matter which way the wind blows, God is love. Amen. Let me tell you something else.

His love is undeserved love. Undeserved love. God's love is not based upon anything worthy of love in us.

Because there isn't anything in us worthy of love. We're nothing but trouble together. God's love is not measured out according to how much we love Him.

[31 : 34] Now, that is the way we operate to one degree or another, but that's not the way God's love works. Now, I do love God. I do. You do.

I hope you do. But that is not what compels God to love us. Let me give you an illustration. This past week, it was a joy to have our granddaughter with us.

Little Ella, just barely over one year old, just a darling little girl. And, you know, her mom and daddy love her.

And you know what? Her grandpa and grandma, that is, Papa and Nami, love her.

But now, hold on to your seat. You're going to get mad at me. She doesn't love us. She doesn't love her mom and dad.

[32 : 33] She doesn't even know what love is. Not yet. Kelly, this past week, was sick. I mean, all throughout the week. Just bless her heart, was sick.

Because she's carrying our next grandson or daughter. She was sick. Did that bother Ella? Did that interrupt her playtime?

That her mom is in the bathroom throwing up her dinner? Sorry for the crudeness. It made no difference to Ella one way or the other.

Was she concerned about her mama? No. She didn't know what love is. And, you know, Ella is nothing but a drain on her mom and daddy's finances.

She didn't contribute not one red cent to the household funds, you know. She's not earning her way, deserving her keep in any way.

[33 : 38] And yet, there's not enough money in all the world to buy Ella away from her mom and daddy because they love her that much.

An indescribable love. An unconditional love. You see, that's God's love. God loves me.

His love for me is totally undeserved. Totally. God just loves me. So God's sacrificial love is unsolicited, unconditional, unlimited, unspeakable, undeserved.

It is, sadly, unclaimed. an unclaimed love. God has fully expressed His love in the gift of His Son, Jesus.

And so, how sad that to countless millions that gift remains unclaimed. Can you imagine that at Christmas time? I mean, you have sacrificed and you've gone out and searched all of the stores in the mall and maybe the internet in these days and you have chosen very special gifts for the ones you love, let's say your children.

[35 : 04] And you wrap them up and put them under the Christmas tree and you can't wait until Christmas morning when they're unwrapped and so the anticipation is building and you're very excited about it.

And that's the fun part of Christmas, isn't it? Once we get a little older, we don't care what we get, it's just watching someone open the gift that we gave them. It's an exciting time.

And so it begins. The day arrives and it begins and one of the gifts is open and, you know, my son, one of my sons says, oh, thank you, Dad and Mom. They usually start with Mom and Dad. It always starts with Mom, then Dad. She probably bought it anyway. But anyway, thanks, Mom and Dad. It's exactly what I wanted. And then another one is opened up. Oh, Dad, Mom, you're so wonderful.

Thank you so much for it. I don't know if my kids said that this Christmas or not now that I think about it. No, I know that they did. And then another one, you know, says, you must have spent a fortune for this.

[36 : 04] I know they didn't say that. But you can kind of imagine the scenario and then it's all over and the next day you're walking through the living room and the Christmas tree is there.

You still have it lit up because you still want that atmosphere. And you look down there and there's still a gift down there. Unopened. Unclaimed. And it's a gift that you wrapped. You bought.

You wrapped for a certain one. and it's there under the tree unclaimed, unwrapped. How sad to think that you had sacrificed, that you had given a costly gift and the gift was unwanted.

Folks, the greatest gift of all, the Lord Jesus, God's Christmas gift, Jesus, is still unclaimed by countless millions of people.

Many of them have not even heard, not even heard about the gift. So God's love, it's a strange love, isn't it?

[37 : 19] A strange love, a sacrificial love. And then one more. It is a sovereign love. A sovereign love.

Jesus says, or John says rather, Behold, what manner of love, what kind of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, lavished on us, if you will.

Then He said that we should be called the children of God. this is incredible. That we should be called the children of God.

Now the Greek text includes two more words that, two more words in the Greek that do not appear in the King James or the New King James for reasons that we don't need to get into here this morning.

But these two words could be translated and are indeed translated this way, and we are. And we are.

[38 : 28] Now when you put that together, the phrase reads like this, that we should be called the children of God and we are.

And we are. Children of God. Or to put it another way, the Father has called us His children.

And that is exactly what we are. His children. Now listen to me. This is perhaps, I think, the strangest thing about God's love.

The most unique part of His love. God's love is a love that takes all the initiative. It is a love that gives lavishly and freely according to His grace to those who are utterly undeserving.

That's God's love. And yet, though we are undeserving, listen to this, the love of God delights to change us from rebels into children.

[39 : 43] From enemies of God to children. Rejectors of God to lovers of God. That's God's sovereign love.

God gave His Son because He wants you to be His sons and daughters. And that is what that baby in the manger that we have celebrated this season.

That's what He's all about. That's what this whole scene's about. Listen to what Paul wrote in Galatians 4.4 and I'm through.

Paul said, but when the fullness of time has come, that is when the time was just right, the chosen time had come.

God sent forth His Son made of a woman made to be under the law so that He could redeem to redeem them that were under the law.

[40:56] That He might receive, that we might receive the adoption of sons. Become children of God. That's why He did this. And because you are sons, that's what Paul is saying just like John said, because you are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son, the Holy Spirit, into your hearts crying, Abba, Father.

Therefore, you are no more a servant but a son. A son. And if a son or since a son, then what? An heir of God through Christ. Amen. The sovereign love of God that we should be called the children of God.

And that is what we are. Thank you.