

THE INDWELLING PRESENCE OF THE GOD OF LOVE

1 John 4:11-16

Intro: Last Sunday I mentioned at the beginning of my message the many verses in 1 John which are devoted to one of the main evidences that we are saved, and that is that a true believer in Christ is going to manifest that he is a believer by the love that he has for other believers. As we all should know by now the main purpose that the Apostle John had in writing this epistle was, in the words of 1 John 5:13, “that we might know that we have eternal life.” And he made it clear that he was not writing to everyone because every person does not have eternal life. But he wrote, as he said in that same verse, “unto you that believe on the Name of the Son of God.” By that he meant that he was writing to those who believed in the Deity of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, but also that those same people were trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for their eternal salvation. It can’t be said too often that believing in Christ not only means believing that He was, and always has been, and always will be the Son of God (even in His humanity), but that we are saved from the penalty of our sins, not by what we have done for Him, or for God, but we are saved by what He did on the Cross when He died for us, taking the penalty of our sins upon Himself, that we might received the gift of eternal life.

You know, there are a lot of good people, good by human standards, and many of them are religious people, who just have difficulty believing that salvation can be so simple. They find it hard to believe that salvation is a gift, a free gift, and that there is nothing that we need to do to be saved except to receive the gift. Receiving salvation means trusting in Christ and what He has done for us, not in what we think we have done for Him. The wages of sin is death, all kinds of death. We die physically because we are sinners by nature and by choice.

Spiritual death is separation from God. When Adam and Eve sinned they covered themselves with leaves, trying to make themselves acceptable to God, but when God came to be with them, they hid themselves from His presence. So they learned by personal experience that they could not make themselves acceptable to God. Man can neither hide from God, nor make himself acceptable to God. That is why we need a Savior. That is why Jesus Christ came into this world as a Man without ceasing to be God, because the only one who could save us was one who had never sinned.

Eternal death is just exactly what it sounds like it means. It is eternal separation from God and eternal punishment in hell.

This is why it is so important for people to hear and believe the Gospel. What is the Gospel? It is stated for us in verse 9 of our chapter, and it is stated again in verse 10. And you will find the Gospel mentioned throughout the Bible. You have it in Isaiah 53:6. You have it in John 3:16. It is beautifully pictured for us in Genesis 3 where God sacrificed an animal, shed its blood, took its life, and then clothed Adam and Eve with the skins. In the same way Christ died for our sins that we might be clothed in the righteousness of Christ which is identical with the righteousness of God! Is Christ the One you are trusting for your salvation? He had better be because there is no other Savior.

If you are trusting in yourself and what you do for God, or what you give to God, or the very fact that you have taken the time to come to church this morning, you will never be saved that way. One of the tests that the Apostle John has given us to be applied to our lives, is that we believe the truth about Jesus Christ. He is the only Savior. There is no other.

So we actually have two of the tests the Apostle John has given us so that we can make sure that we are saved. We have to believe in Christ, and if we are trusting in Him, we realize that God has also put a love in our hearts for every person who is also trusting in Christ for his or her salvation. The Apostle John combines the two: God's love for us, and our love for each other. This is what verse 11 here in 1 John 4 tells us, as does verse 14. And so does 1 John 3:16.

But having said that, I want you to see that in our text for today the Apostle John presents to us another great truth which is mentioned four times in verses 12 through 16. Let me point out to you what I am talking about.

First, in verse 12, the second part of the verse: "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us."

Second, in verse 13, the whole verse. (Read.)

Third, in verse 15, again, the whole verse. (Read.)

And fourth, in verse 16, the latter part of the verse: "God is love, and he

that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.”

Now with this much repetition of one particular truth, there can be no question but that this is the main point of what the Apostle John had to say in verses 11 through 16.

And I want to point out to you that this truth, that God is actually dwelling in us, is one of the most amazing truths that is expressed in the Bible. Think about this until you are overwhelmed with the thought, that God is dwelling in us, and it is all tied in with this truth which the Apostle John emphasized throughout this epistle, that those of us who truly know the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation need to love each other. God has planted His love in our hearts, and it is going to find expression with others who know the Lord. We may not see eye to eye on all points of doctrine, but regardless of our deficiencies, if we are saved, we are going to love the other members of the family of God. And the main reason that such a fellowship of love is possible is because of the presence of God Himself in our lives.

I have been reviewing the verses we had in our Bible memory this year, and I have been blessed all over again by those great verses on the attributes of God. But two verses I want to mention this morning have to do with *the presence of God*. And those of you who memorized them will remember them, I am sure. They are found in Jeremiah 23:23-24:

23 Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off?

24 Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?
saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.

When we talk about the presence of God, we are talking about omnipresence! He is a God Who fills heaven and earth! He is everywhere present at the same time. And God said through Jeremiah, “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?” Now, you say to me, “Pastor, are you saying that the God Who “fills heaven and earth” so that I cannot go any place but what He is there, and yet He has not left the place where I was – that this God dwells in me twenty-four hours of every day just like He was nowhere else?” And I will respond to you by saying, “That is exactly what I am saying.” Then you will say, “Explain this to me.” All I will be able to say is that this is what it means that God is God. We will understand it fully the moment we enter heaven, but, for now, we believe it because it is taught in the Word and not because we can explain it. This applies to all of us who know the Lord, and to every person who knows the Lord wherever they might be in all the earth. As I have said

about the Holy Spirit, this does not mean that God divides Himself up so that all of us can have a little part of Him. This means that He is with us, and in us, in the totality of His Person, just like He didn't dwell anywhere else.

That is true for meditation, isn't it? The greatness of our God is beyond our ability to comprehend. We believe it because it is taught in the Word even though we cannot explain it. And this amazing truth about God, is true also of the Lord Jesus, and it is true of the Holy Spirit. So when you have thought about God for a while, then think about the Lord Jesus, and then think about the Holy Spirit – because this is true of all of them. What wonderful people we *ought to be* to have such a God with us twenty-four seven – twenty-four hours of every day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days out of every year – and an extra day when leap year comes along.

But now let us notice the first statement in verse 12: “No man hath seen God at any time.” Now this ought to remind you of this same statement which appears in the eighteenth verse of the first chapter of John's Gospel. Most of you will remember it, but let me quote it for you:

18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him (John 1:18).

This means that God has never appeared in His Person to anyone. How then has God made Himself known, according to this verse? He made Himself known in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now this means that all of the appearance of God in the OT were Christ, and finally Christ came in the flesh, and He told His disciples, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

But what about now? The Lord Jesus went back to heaven approximately twenty-one centuries ago, and He hasn't been seen on earth since then. We have the Word, and God is revealed in the Word. But what was the Apostle John preparing to tell us here? Remember that our Lord told His disciples in John 13:34 and 35 that they were to love each other as, He said, “I have loved you.” Now the only way that we can love like that is for Christ to love through us, and the only way that an unbelieving world can see evidence of the living presence of God today is by the way we love each other. That is something that the world can see. So what the latter part of verse 12 means is, that “if we love one another” as God has loved us and sent His Son to die for us, it is because “God dwelleth in

us,” present tense, *abides, remains*, at that very moment. It is not as though anything is added to God’s love through us, but that by our love for each other the world has a present-day opportunity to see practical evidence of the love of God. Our love for each other is so miraculous, so unique, that the world will realize that our love for each other is something greater and more permanent than any example of human love. So the glory for what we are, and for our love for each other, is not traceable to us but to God Who dwells in us.

But now let us go on to verse 13. It builds upon the truth in verse 12.

Here the Apostle John points to the ministry of the Holy Spirit Who has been given to all of us. It is by Him that we are assured that God dwells in us, and that we dwell in Him, and both of these are a continuing and progressive, or growing relationship. The Apostle Paul said this in Romans 8:16-17:

16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

You see, assurance of salvation is ultimately a work of the Spirit. He puts within our hearts the realization that we are in the family of God, and much of that understanding comes to us through the love that we have for each other. The Apostle John is here drawing aside the curtains which before have kept us from understanding how all of this comes to us, but it is actually the fruit of the love that we as the people of God have for each other. A right relationship with our fellow believers, that is, in our love for each other, our hearts are made more receptive to the work of the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us. When we are saved, the Holy Spirit comes to us and dwells in us forever! See John 14:16.

I hope we are all seeing how vital it is that we love each other in the Lord. It impacts our testimony to the world, and it opens our hearts to all of the ministry of the Spirit.

Verse 14 tells what we have “seen,” that is, what we understand about God the Father, and about why He sent His Son into the world. We do not claim that the love we have for each other, is of our own doing, but it is the fruit that the God has produced in our hearts that what we are in our

relationship with each other, is the message that we proclaim to a world that is filled with hatred and sin, that what we are is the result of what God was doing when He sent His Son into the world, and we proclaim this message that “the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.” So by our lives and by our love for God and for Christ, which is poured out in our lives for each other, we commend to a needy world the message of the only Savior for people wherever they are and however deep in sin they may be.

The Apostle John wants us to know that when we, or anyone else, confesses “that Jesus is the Son of God,” the confession that leads to salvation, it is because God has already taken up his abode in Him, and he in God. The question often comes up, which comes first, life or faith. The answer that many give is that faith precedes life. But how can a dead person believe? Like with Lazarus, he had to have life restored to him before he was capable of hearing the Lord say, “Lazarus, come forth.” So the Apostle John is saying here that when a person confesses his faith in Jesus, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, it is because God has already taken up his dwelling in that human heart, and that is why he believes. The first part of verse 16 really belongs to verse 15. The person who knows and believes the love that God has for him, is the person in whom God has already done the work of salvation and who believes the love that God has for His people.

In the latter part of verse 16 the Apostle John went back to what he had declared in verse 8. Because “God is love,” the one who abides in love, both love for God and love for the people of God is the one who is really saved, dwelling in God, and “God in him.”

Concl: So to understand salvation, we must begin with the love of God.

There is no record in Scripture that God sent His Son into the world to provide salvation for sinners. God has loved us with an everlasting love. He loved us long before we knew Him. His love for us preceded our love for Him just as eternity preceded time. Our salvation rests upon God’s love for us, not on our love for Him. We love Him because He first loved us. But the evidence that we love God is to be seen in our love for each other.

Note 1 John 4:7 and 20.

We all have to admit that there are things about us that are not loveable,

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that make it difficult for others to love us. And we all struggle with the unlovely things that we see in the lives of other believers. But when we face difficult people and difficult conditions in the lives of those people who know the Lord, let us always keep in mind that the Lord set His love upon us while we were at enmity with Him, and while we were still in our sins. And yet He loved us while we were yet sinners, in fact, He “so loved us.” Therefore, we have no excuse for no loving each other. It is by our love for others that we are going to be a blessing and a help to them, and it is by our love for each other that our hearts are opened up for an even greater work of the Lord in our own souls.

Nothing makes a greater impression on people in the world, under the blessing of God, than the God-given love which, by God’s grace, we manifest toward one another.