

Text: I John 4:7-12,16-21

Title: “Where’s the Love?”

Let’s open our Bibles this morning to I John 4. Read vv.7-12, then have congregation join in vv.16-21.

God has something huge in mind for marriage. It’s not just that He wants for husbands and wives to live together in unity and happiness. God has bigger things in mind. He wants to use the marriage between two believers as a giant screen to display the glory of the Gospel of His Son Jesus Christ. Through the union of a Christ-following man and woman under the Lordship of Jesus Christ God intends to communicate the Gospel that Jesus Christ died to save us from our sins and give us a new life. At its roots, sin is selfish. So the work of God in saving us will make us increasingly more loving and selfless in our relationships with other people, most importantly our mates and our children.

ILLUSTRATION – Reality TV is the rage today. These are shows where you actually get to watch what’s going on inside families. There’s “Keeping Up with the Kardashians,” “Duck Dynasty,” “Real Housewives of Atlanta,” just to name a few. Some of the shows portray healthy families, but honestly most of them give a perverted picture of family life. Well, what if there was a TV reality show produced about your family? What if the television cameras were rolling and the microphones were live throughout every conversation and situation in your family. What would it communicate? Could your non-believing neighbors watch a video feed of what’s going on in your marriage and be drawn to Jesus?

So we ask, “Where’s the love?” We’d be surprised at how many loveless marriages there are. A husband and wife may appreciate and respect each other. There may not be a lot of fussing and fighting. Occasionally they may really enjoy being together. But there’s no personal, practical sacrificial love in the relationship. Many couples have just grown satisfied and content with a loveless marriage, when God intends for the marriage to be so much more.

So we need to learn to love each other in marriage in a way that others can watch and see the love of Jesus. The Good News for marriages is that while our human love falls far short all the time, the love God has shown us in Christ is perfect ... and it gives us the strength to truly love each other.

Let’s just zoom out of this passage to look at the whole book we call I John. It is written by the Apostle John, author of the Gospel of John, I, II, & III John, along with the Revelation. John is a pastor in the ancient province of Asia (today western Turkey) and he writes to believers who are facing some real challenges. Some of them are doctrinal challenges brought on by false teachers. But John also addresses some very practical challenges, like how our faith in and love for God works itself out in love for others. So John says...

1 John 4:7 - Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

The NIV from which I am reading has John using the word “love” nearly fifty times in I John.

DEFINITION – Love is willing and working toward the absolute best for another regardless of their response or worthiness.

It's not just a feeling. It is a matter of the will that causes us to actively work for the good of another. We want God's absolute best for others, particularly our mates. And this love is totally unconditional. We show it regardless of how our mates or others respond back to us.

As we ask the question "Where's the love?" there are three big ideas that the Holy Spirit has for us in these verses in I John 4. The love God has shown us in His Son Jesus Christ is...

1. THE OVERWHELMING FACTOR IN CHANGING OUR LIVES

God's love for us in Christ changes us. When we meet Jesus His love transforms us.

1 John 4:9 - This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

1 John 4:10 - This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

That atoning sacrifice is the powerful action of God to deal decisively with our sin problem. The reason that Jesus came, suffered, died and rose from the grave was that through faith in Him we might live ... really live. And this life is a life of love. He came not just to forgive us for how we have been unloving toward Him and toward others. He came to radically change our lives so that we live a life of love ... that we would have the power to love as we should. And so...

1 John 4:13 - We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

So the Holy Spirit comes to live in us when we are saved. The Bible tells us that when that happens He causes us to really feel and experience God's love. The Bible says ...

1 John 3:1a - How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!

So the love of God in Christ is the overwhelming factor in changing us. But also the love God has shown us in His Son Jesus Christ is...

2. THE INNER MOTIVATION TO LOVE OTHERS SELFLESSLY

This transforming love of God through Jesus changes our hearts, and we become increasingly less self-centered in our lives.

1 John 4:11 - Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

In fact, this sacrificial love for others is the evidence that we have experienced eternal life in the love of Jesus.

1 John 4:8 - Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

So if there's not a lot of sacrificial love in your marriage or in other relationships, then the Holy Spirit would diagnose that as a spiritual problem ... you haven't been with Jesus enough to know His love in an intimate way. Since God is love, if we have an intimate relationship with Him it will produce love in us.

1 John 4:12 - No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

When believers love each other, the invisible God becomes real to us and to others. Just think of the difference this kind of love makes in a home. Where this self-sacrificing love exists empowered by the Spirit of Christ, God's presence is experienced.

ILLUSTRATION – When talking to couples who are about to get married I like to illustrate it using a triangle, with God at the top and the husband and wife at the two points at the bottom of the triangle. When the two of you as individuals grow in your love relationship with God you grow closer to each other. The closer you move up toward God the closer you grow to each other.

Again, here's where the Gospel comes in. We can't be right with our mates if we aren't right with God. We fix our marriages vertically before we fix them horizontally. We get right with God and that makes it possible to live a life of love for our mates and our kids.

1 John 4:16 - And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

That's the real experience of the love of God in us ... to know and rely on the love God has for us. It's one thing to know that God loves you; it's another thing to know it and rely on it. What if you woke up every morning and your first thought was, "God how can I love you today with every fiber of my being?" And your second thought was, "How can I love my husband, my wife, with sacrificial serving love today?"

The love of God through Christ is the inner motivation to live a life of love. Here's the next big idea: The love God has shown us in His Son Jesus Christ is...

3. THE PRACTICAL EXAMPLE FOR HOW WE ARE TO LOVE OTHERS

ILLUSTRATION – As I talk to couples I sometimes hear a husband say, "I didn't have a great role model in a dad. I never saw him really speak lovingly to my mother or serve her. I don't know what sacrificial love looks like." Because love is action, we need to see it acted out so we

know what it looks like. And that is what God did when He sent His Son. Remember that love is willing and working for God's absolute best for another. So there's sacrifice involved.

1 John 4:9 - This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

Love is not just felt; it is shown. God showed His love for us in giving us His Son and that is not just the inner motivation for us ... it is also the pattern and example for us in loving our mates.

1 John 3:16 - This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

That's what makes marriages strong ... laying down our lives for one another.

ILLUSTRATION – I have had the privilege of watching this happen on at least two important occasions ... one in the death of my dad and the other in the death of my mom. When my dad was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer the doctors told us that he probably only live a few months, and they would be difficult months. As he slowly deteriorated I watched my mom carry a heavier and heavier load. But she never complained. It's like her love grew stronger. She prayed and consoled my dad. She endured sleepless nights and the ugliness of cancer. I learned sacrificial love isn't seen so much in the romantic candlelight dinners, but in the dark room of suffering. After my dad died my mom married a wonderful man whose wife had also died of cancer. Charles loved my mom with all of his heart. He showed her such sacrificial, serving love. Through he worked in the oil patch all of his life, he was tender and selfless. And that love was put to the test when Mom began to display symptoms of dementia. But Charles never wavered in his love for her. When she would repeat herself or forget things, he was patient. When she said mean things he knew that she wasn't herself, and loved her even more. As dementia took its terrible toll on Mom, Charles' love for her grew deeper and deeper. He sacrificed sleep and his own comfort to care for my mom to the very end. And all along I knew that that love came from Jesus ... from His indwelling Spirit and His powerful example on the Cross.

So let me show you some of the daily sacrifices that love makes and that make a marriage work. You can jot these down. Sacrificial love...

- **Takes the initiative.** John said in v.10 that this is love ... not that we loved Him, but that He first loved us. God took the initiative in first loving us when we didn't deserve anything but punishment. So love pushes us out of our indifference. Typically in a marriage we wait for our mates to meet our needs, then we respond. But sacrificial love always takes the initiative to start loving before we are loved.
- **Pursues God's best.** When He sent His Son God had in mind our freedom from sin. He loved us with redeeming love when He let His Son be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. And this love in us causes us to desire God's very best for our mates. We pray for them and encourage them and serve them in a way that will help them to become all that God desires

and designs for them to become. We resist the temptation to constantly criticize and look for every opportunity to praise and affirm them. We ask, “What is God’s best for my mate and the unity of our marriage?”

- **Celebrates differences.** Selfish love makes us impatient with differences because we want everything our way. Selfish love pushes us to win the argument and prove our way is always right. Sacrificial love celebrates our differences rather than being critical of them.
- **Listens in order to understand.** We take the time to listen and to understand. Selfish love is only concerned about our mates understanding us and about winning the argument. Sacrificing love makes the sacrifice of really trying to understand in order to preserve the unity in your relationship.
- **Overlooks the little stuff.** We overlook minor weaknesses and irritations because we don’t want anything to separate our life together. Yes, sometimes things need to be lovingly addressed. Sometimes things just need to be lovingly overlooked.
- **Strives for reconciliation.** We draw on the strength of God’s love to work for reconciliation in difficulties and disappointments. And there are plenty of them even in the best of marriages. Selfish love pushes us to hurt back when we’ve been hurt. Sacrificial love will cause us to show mercy and restraint when we want to hurt our mate with our words.
- **Readily confesses sin and offers forgiveness.** In marriage you will sin and you will be sinned against. And self-righteousness makes us blind to our own sin and weaknesses. And when our mate confronts us about something we examine our hearts rather than shifting the blame. It’s love that allows us to let our mates help us see ourselves as we really are. And its love when our mate freely offers forgiveness when we are honest about sin.
- **Willingly endures hardship.** Just look at what Jesus did. He stepped out of the glory of heaven to come to get involved in our messy lives ... to love when He wasn’t loved in return. As married believers filled with the love of Jesus we will abandon our wishes for a trouble-free life. It means you love your mate when they are struggling in a bad day or when they are irritable and hard to live with. It’s the love of Jesus that enables to suffer long and to persevere.

Sacrificial love makes you willing to say “no” to yourself, to have less free time, less sleep, a busier schedule, a messier house, some tense conversations, some humbling moments all because you want God’s absolute best for your mate and for your marriage. Sacrificial love makes you willing to give up your right to control everything in your life for your pleasure and happiness. Jesus sacrificed Himself so that you and I, right here and right now, would have the strength and power to live a life of love.

Maybe you’re looking at your life and your marriage today and you think, “I’ve really made a mess of this.” But remember the Good News. God comes to us in our sin and failures and loves us anyway. So let your problems force you to move beyond our own strength and wisdom to God’s strength and wisdom. Problems push us beyond the limits of our patience and love to

where we have to draw upon God's patience and love. Problems show us how self-focused we are, and how in need of God's grace and mercy we are.