

First Baptist Church Merritt Island

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So That Your Joy May Be Complete – a study of First John

Are You More Like Cain or Christ?

1 John 3:11-18

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The older I get, the more I find I repeat myself. I tell the same stories over and over again. I'm not sure I've learned a new joke in the last decade. My kids can finish my sentences. You guys know what I'm talking about. You listen to me every week.

Sometimes, I'll be studying for a sermon, and I'll come up with what seems like a new and effective way of saying something. When that happens, I thank the Lord for helping me come up with something new. But I can't tell you how many times, as I continue studying, I look back at some of my old study notes and realize that what I thought was a new way of saying something is exactly what I said about that thing 15 years ago. The older I get, the more I find that I repeat myself. Well, 1 John has made me feel a lot better about myself. By the time John wrote this letter, he was an old man. Some scholars think he was in his 80s or 90s. And he basically repeats himself from start to finish.

Remember, John is writing to a group of Christians who had become the target of false teachers. These false teachers had claimed to be Christians but had abandoned genuine Christianity. So, John lays out a series of tests to help us differentiate between genuine followers of Jesus and those who may say they are Christians but are really just imposters.

And John's test comes in three parts:

- The Moral Test – (2:3-6; 2:28-3:10; 5:1-5) Do you obey the commands of Jesus? You aren't a follower of Jesus if you don't follow Jesus.
- The Relational Test – (2:7-11; 3:11-18; 4:7-21) Do you love others like Jesus?
- The Doctrinal Test – (2:18-27; 4:1-6; 5:6-12) Do you believe the truth about Jesus?

I know I showed you that slide a couple of weeks ago, but the older I get, the more I find that I repeat myself. But John's repetition is not accidental. He has a purpose. As he revisits each one of these tests, he reveals a new layer of truth or includes a dynamic he hasn't said before. You can think of John's teaching like a screw that he is turning round and round. He isn't just going round and round, he is also drilling into deeper layers of truth.

And our text or today is no exception. In chapter 2, John said that one of the main ways you can know someone is experiencing the work of Jesus in them is by the way they love others. And he is saying the same thing in our text today. However, he adds a new layer of teaching this time around. So, before we begin, let me give you our big idea, so you can be looking for it as we read out text.

BIG IDEA: AS WE ARE RAISED TO NEW LIFE IN JESUS, WE RESIST LIVING LIKE CAIN AND BEGIN LOVING LIKE CHRIST.

With that in mind, let's look at our next passage of study in 1 John.

1 John 3:11-18

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. 12 We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. 13 Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 17 But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

This text is pretty straightforward. John is clearly telling us we should love each other. He says that in verse 11, verse 14, and verse 18. And then he gives us two vivid examples – Cain is a negative example (we shouldn't be like Cain) and Christ is the positive example (we should love like Jesus). But John isn't just saying we should love like Jesus. He's saying that Christ-like love is evidence of our experience of the work of Jesus in us. If we hate each other, that's not just an indicator that something is wrong in our relationship with other people, it's an indicator that something is wrong in our relationship with Jesus. That's why our big idea starts with the phrase...

1. AS WE ARE RAISED TO NEW LIFE IN JESUS

1 John 3:14

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers.

When we love like Jesus, it's evidence that we have passed from death into life. What does it mean to pass from death to life? He's talking about the work Jesus does in the lives of those who place their faith and trust in Him. Ephesians 2 says that because of our sin we are spiritually dead. We are separated from fellowship with God and the life He desires to give to His people. And being spiritually dead means we are powerless to overcome our sin. We are powerless to make ourselves right with God.

That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Jesus, we have Him because God so loved this world that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus. As a man, Jesus lived a life we all failed to live – a sinless life of perfect obedience to God the Father. As a man, Jesus died the death we all deserve to die – He died as a substitute in our place and a sacrifice for our sin. That's how we can be forgiven of our sin and restored to fellowship with God. And when Jesus died, He didn't stay dead – He rose from the grave as a display of His power over sin, Satan, and death itself.

And the promise of the gospel is that when we place our faith and trust in Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we are miraculously united to the life of Christ. His resurrection power is at work in us by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 2:4–6

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

God makes us alive with Christ. He raises us up from spiritual death by uniting us to the life of Christ. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead raises us up to a brand-new kind of life. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus lives His life in and through those who trust in Him.

That's the hope of the gospel. Christianity isn't about a work we do for Jesus; it's about a work Jesus does in and through us.

And I know most of you aren't doctors and none of you came here prepared to take a test but let me ask you a pretty important medical question: Can you tell the difference between someone who is alive and someone who is dead?

Of course you can. There are signs of life in someone who isn't dead. We check to see if they are breathing. But sometimes you can't tell if a person is breathing. So, you check for something else. You look to see if they have a pulse. As long as our heart is working, we are still alive.

And that's what John is saying in our text. There's one particular sign of life in those who are alive in Jesus. Their heart is working. Love is the sign of spiritual life. That's why verse 14 ends with the statement, "*Whoever does not love abides in death.*"

If you don't love other believers with the love of God (agape), you aren't spiritually alive in Christ. So, what does that look like? Well, John provides examples that help us know what that looks like. And He starts with a negative example someone who didn't love his brother. That's the second part of our big idea...

2. AS WE ARE RAISED TO NEW LIFE IN JESUS, WE RESIST LIVING LIKE CAIN

1 John 3:12

We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Cain was the firstborn son of Adam. His story is found in Genesis 4. Cain and his brother, Abel, brought offerings to God. Cain was a farmer and brought some of his crops to God as an offering. Abel kept livestock and brought one of his animals as a sacrificial offering to God. God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's.

Cain became jealous and angry. He hated Abel and, in his hatred, he murdered him. And John says we should resist being like Cain. Now, I don't know about you, but at first glance this seems like a pretty low bar for loving someone. "I haven't killed anybody, so...I guess I'm doing ok." But don't be so quick to let yourself off the hook here. Think about what led Cain to murder his brother.

Cain was jealous.

If he had loved Abel, he would have been happy that Abel's sacrifice was accepted. But jealousy doesn't allow us to celebrate good things that happen to others unless those good things happen to us, too. When your co-worker gets promoted over you, are you happy for them or jealous? When your friend can afford a new home and you are stuck in your studio apartment, are you happy for them or jealous? Being jealous is being like Cain.

Cain was angry.

His anger was completely irrational and unjustified. His pride was wounded, and he needed someone to blame, so he blamed Abel. Are you ever irrationally angry? Have you ever had a bad day at work and come home in a foul mood? You get home and your wife has had a great day and made dinner and is in a great mood. And her good mood gets under your skin because you're mad. So, you take out your anger on her. Being angry like that is being like Cain.

Cain hated.

We don't normally want to admit to hating people, but hatred can be a subtle thing. It's what happens when we harbor bitterness and resentment toward people. It's what happens when we want to see them fail or get fired or have something bad happen to them. Hating is being like Cain.

Cain murdered.

We might think we are safe here, but be careful. There's a subtlety here that can be easy to overlook. The word that's translated "murder" in our text is a work that literally means "to slaughter." It's a word that was used to describe killing an animal for a sacrifice. It's as if Cain thought to himself, "If God wants a sacrifice, I'll give him a sacrifice."

Cain took his brother down in an effort to lift himself up. He sacrificed his brother on the altar of his own bitterness and pride.

And we do this more than we might realize. When we gossip and talk poorly about others, we kill their reputation. We take them down in an effort to lift ourselves up. When we use people to get ahead or manipulate them to take advantage of them, we have stopped loving them as brothers and started using them as sacrifices. That's not love, it's hate. And a hating heart is a murderous heart. That's why verse 15 says...

1 John 3:15

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

That's another strong statement from John. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Bitterness, jealousy, uncontrolled anger, taking people down to lift ourselves up...it's a sign that our hearts are taking after Cain and not Christ. That's why verse 13 says we shouldn't be surprised when this world hates us. This world is under the influence of God's enemy, just like Cain. They are still dead in their sins. And when the righteousness of Christ in His people exposes the wickedness of this world, the response is the same as Cain's – bitterness, jealousy, anger, hatred, and murder. But John doesn't just call us to resist living like Cain. He calls us to love like Jesus. He moves from Adam's firstborn son to the only begotten Son of God. And that's the last part of our big idea.

AS WE ARE RAISED TO NEW LIFE IN JESUS, WE BEGIN LOVING LIKE CHRIST

1 John 3:16-18

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

John moves from the first example of hatred in the world to the foremost example of love. In these verses, we see at least 4 characteristics of Christ-like love that Jesus desires to empower in everyone who will trust in Him.

Christ-like love is self-sacrificing.

1 John 3:16

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Christ-like love sacrifices. Jesus laid down His life for us. He willingly sacrificed Himself in our place. And one of the evidences that Jesus is living in and through you is that you are willing to die. You're

willing to die to your rights. You're willing to sacrifice your time and your money and your preferences and your way of doing things. Love is sacrificial.

In the 1940s, two brothers from Richmond, Virginia were born into a Christian home where they learned about the transforming love and sacrifice of Jesus. In 1967, they both found themselves serving in the United States military. At the time, thousands of young military men were being sent to the war in Vietnam. As you know, thousands lost their lives in that conflict.

What you might not know is that, because of how many brothers had been killed in WW2, the US government made a decision not to put two brothers in the same war in the same country at the same time. That meant the two brothers from Richmond couldn't serve in Vietnam together. The older brother was a lieutenant at West Point. The younger brother, whose name was Johnnie, was an enlisted Marine. The younger brother was sent to Vietnam. During his tour in Vietnam, Johnnie was exposed to things he never wanted his older brother to see. Knowing that his brother couldn't come to Vietnam while he was still there, Johnnie approached his commanding officer to ask that he be given another tour. Johnnie wanted to spare his brother the pain of war and give him the opportunity to pursue a life outside the military. Johnnie's brother knew nothing of Johnnie's decision.

The following year, Johnnie's brother took full advantage of Johnnie's sacrifice. You see, the older brother was a rising tennis star. His name was Arthur Ashe. In 1968, he became the first African American to win the US Open. A win that might never have happened had it not been for the love and sacrifice of his brother.

When asked about all he had done to help Arthur, Johnnie said he didn't want to be thought of as a hero or someone who had done anything miraculous. He said, "I just want to be a footnote in Arthur's story." That's Christ-like love.

Christ-like love meets needs.

1 John 3:17

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

John gets really practical here. Love isn't just a condition of our hearts; it's the action of our hands. It isn't just an expression of how we feel, it's an expression of what we do. And at the most basic level, it's expressed by meeting the needs of those around us. Love is what happens when we lay aside what we want in order to help others with what they need.

And there are more examples than I can possibly list but let me share a few with you from the lives of people that are part of this church family.

Every week, hundreds of people lay aside their wants to meet the needs of others. They serve in children's ministry and student ministry and House of Hope and Merritt Island Christians School and English as a Second Language. They drive golf carts and welcome people at the doors and work on widows' houses and minister to expectant mothers and their unborn children at Agape Women's center.

Why would they do that? They've passed from death to life and choose to put the needs of others above their own wants. Christ-like love meets needs.

Christ-like love is personal.

1 John 3:17

But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Love sees the individual. Love isn't a generic feeling. When you love like Jesus, you don't love everyone in general and no one in particular.

I want to challenge you to do something today. Would you ask the Holy Spirit to bring to your mind someone in your life that Jesus wants to love through you? Even more, would you ask the Lord to bring someone to your mind that you are tempted to treat like Cain, someone who might be hard for you to love or someone who might be the recipient of your anger or someone who you've been tempted to put down? Ask the Lord to show you what it would look like for you to see that person as a person Jesus loves and died to save. Ask Him to lead you into one practical thing you can do as an act of love toward them. Christ-like love is personal. It's individualized. It's tailor-made for the people around us who need to experience the love of Jesus through us.

Christ-like love is guided by truth.

1 John 3:18

Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

John isn't saying that our words don't matter. Of course, we are called to express our love through what we say. Our speech should be full of grace and encouragement, not bitterness or harshness. But our words don't define what love is. God's word defines what love is. This is an essential boundary for how we genuinely love the people around them. We love them when we align our love with the truth of God's word. That's why we don't condone sin in the name of love. Love tells the truth. Love points to the gospel. Love reminds people of what God says is good and right.

So, as you are seeking to love the people in your life, you should always align your love with the truth of God's word. As you love your kids or your friends or your co-workers, you don't just support them in whatever they want to do. You love them by leading them to the truth. You love them by pointing them to Jesus Christ, the person of truth.

The most loving thing we will ever do for the people in our lives is to lovingly tell them the truth about Jesus. Would you pray for God to open a door for you this week to love someone who is far from God but close to you so that you can tell them the truth about Jesus.

Because the truth is, we can't love like Jesus until we are raised by Jesus from death to life. That's why we need Jesus. And we don't just need Jesus, we have Him. He first loved us. He loved us sacrificially, beneficially, personally, and in truth. He went to the cross to save us from our sins. And He rose from the dead to raise us up by His power so that we could resist living like Cain and live a life of love in Christ.