

Grace, mercy, and peace are your in abundance. Amen.

¹ Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well. ² This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.

³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, ⁴ for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We have spent the 1st half of this year dwelling on God's love for us and that is important because it is God's love that has changed our lives and now directs our lives. That is what John was getting at as he wrote this portion of scripture **"God's Love for us and as a result of that our love for God."** As we take some time to consider John's words, that will be our focus this morning.

I. So let's talk about God's love for us because that is the basis for everything else. That's why John begins this chapter with, **"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God,"** We often mention how we are children of God but what does that mean? John tells us. It means we have faith in Christ. That connection with Jesus, through faith, makes us a child of God.

Jesus once told Nicodemus that in order to see the kingdom of God – in order to be a member of God's family - we must be born again. What he meant is that when we come into this world we are without faith. We have been born physically but need a spiritual birth to have spiritual life and to be part of God's family. Just as children can't pick their parents, you could say that we don't participate in our salvation either – we don't decide to become a child of God. God has already done that for us and gives us the faith so we can believe – so that we can be his child. For many of us, we received this gift of faith – this spiritual birth – when we were baptized.

That is part of God's plan – part of his grace – his undeserved love for us – that we might become his child through faith. God does all the work as he sends the Holy Spirit to create faith and to sustain that faith through the means of grace – the gospel in Word and sacrament. That's why Paul in his letter to the Corinthians reminds us, **"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."** (1 Corinthians 12:3). Without the work of the Holy Spirit we belong to the world but because the Holy Spirit has changed our hearts, we belong to God.

Easter, which we just celebrated last week, gives us a vivid picture of the love of our God and the cost of bringing us into God's family. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead assuring us that the price for our sins has been paid in full. And yet, the holes in his hands remind us of the enormous cost of our redemption – it reminds us of the suffering and death Jesus endured to

redeem us. That all took place so that we can be children of God – that is how much God loves us and cares about us.

The result of God's love is that our hearts are no longer as hard as stone, but rather they are pulsating with spiritual life so that we want to follow God's commands because that is what his people do – that is how God's people show their love – by doing what God wants us to do. When we think of God's commands, we usually think of the ten commandments but Jesus summed up God's commands in a very simple way for us, **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.”** (Matthew 22:37-39). Love God first, above everything else, and then love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.

John reminds us that following God's commands are not burdensome, at least not for the believer – they are not hard to do – they are not a huge burden that we struggle under because we have no help. Jesus tells us to **“Take my yoke upon you For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”** (Matthew 11:29-30). His yoke is easy because he is helping us to bear the load. A yoke usually has two holes for a team to pull together. Jesus is helping us to bear the load of following his commands and so that burden is light. With the help of our Savior it is not hard to do. Faith helps us to reflect the love of our Savior in all that we do. Real faith and real love are inseparable – like the heads and tails on a coin – 2 faces of the same power.

But Satan works hard to try and separate our faith from God's love. He works hard to try and make us think that following God is burdensome and hard to do. At times, we listen to Satan. His arguments appeal to our sinful nature. In just eight short weeks Satan will try and convince you that summer time is vacation time and it's okay to take a vacation from church, even though God never takes a vacation from us.

Maybe you won't even wait for summer. Maybe you'll get a jump on summer and stop coming in May already. Same with our offerings. If we aren't here, why should we support the ministry of the church. A lot of times we don't give these things a second thought and that pleases Satan because he is accomplishing his goal of making God's Word burdensome to us.

So how do we keep God's commands from becoming burdensome? How do we resist the temptations of the devil and the influences of the world? Through a daily dose of God's love. By hearing and reading the scriptures on a regular basis. By not taking a vacation from God's Word, but rather spending a few minutes every day in God's Word. As we spend more time with our Savior, he will help us reflect the joy and love he has given us through faith.

II. God's love for us allows us to share in Christ's victory. The faith and obedience that connects us to Jesus enables us to share in his triumphs. When Jesus said, **“It is finished,”** on the cross, those words came crushing down on the head of the serpent dealing a fatal blow. When we confess our Christian faith according to the Apostle's Creed, we point out that “Jesus descended into hell.” Did you ever wonder why he did that? He didn't descend into hell to convert the souls that were already there. No, he descended into hell for a victory parade! To declare that he had won. And we share in that victory through faith. When the devil comes knocking on our door, we

can point to God's word knowing that he will have to flee because he has been defeated (James 4:7).

The world says that we should live for ourselves but God's Word turns that philosophy upside down. Remember the second greatest command is to love your neighbor as yourself. That is part of God's value system but how do we do that?

Maybe this illustration will help you understand that idea. There was a barber who one week noticed that there was a substantial, unexpected increase in his business. When he tried to find out why, he discovered that his competitor, another barber in the same town, had been sick all week and couldn't work. When the week ended, the 1st barber took all that he had made above his average earnings and gave it to his competitor with his Christian love and sympathy. The love in this man's heart was evident in his actions.

It is easy to be reactive in this world in which we live – that is we react to whatever is going on around us. But I think John is encouraging us to be proactive. To see a need and to take action. How many times have you told someone, “Call me if you need help/something/etc?” We have all done that knowing that the person will probably not call or ask for anything. We feel we have done our part by offering. But what John is encouraging us to do is to take action without being asked.

Maybe you see that single mom struggling with her children, see if you can help. Maybe you have a friend who is having a hard time making ends meet – drop off a bag or two of groceries. Maybe you know someone who doesn't drive or doesn't have a car – offer to give them a ride. You might know someone who doesn't get out too much anymore, stop in for a visit. It doesn't have to be much but a little gesture – done out of Christian love, can mean a lot and it gives glory to God as we follow his command to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We will be celebrating Easter for the next 5 weeks – God's great love for us as seen in his Son's sacrifice on the cross for our sins. As we celebrate, we rejoice that God's love has brought us into his family by giving us the gift of faith and that gift of faith brings us forgiveness for our sins, life and salvation. As we share in Christ's victory, may we look for opportunities to reflect the love of God in our lives and then take those opportunities as we look to live for God. Amen.