

Expecting Christmas: The Love of Jesus

1 John 4:7–11

December 15, 2024

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Lonie and I watched a new Christmas movie yesterday, Red One. In the movie two things were said that caught my attention. Dwayne Johnson's character told Santa that there are more people on the naughty list than there aren't. Second thing I noticed is that the movie had nothing to do with Jesus. I didn't think it would.

As we continue to draw closer to the celebration of Jesus' birth I'm using a few non-traditional Christmas passages. Again this week is were looking at First John four. There are expectations at Christmas. I'm thinking about five them. Here are the first three: the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son.

Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. 1 John 4:7–11 (NLT)

This what we expect at Christmas: The Love of God in Jesus Christ. Our world is filled with people expressing their anger. Around the globe there are wars, people are dying. What's being expressed certainly isn't love.

You've seen the commercial of the janitor who sings while he cleans the theater. All of his co-workers are impressed. They order a tuxedo jacket for him. When it arrives they put it on him while he's standing on stage in front of a microphone. He sings "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." Everyone is impressed. But love doesn't begin with the masses. Love begins in the heart of the individual. That's a misnomer because the individual is God. Love begins in people when God places it in their hearts.

Love isn't like the song, sweet love. Love is compelling, at times exhausting, sacrificial, and satisfying. Love isn't chocolate, popcorn, or ice cream. Love is empowering, encouraging, enduring. Love isn't make believe, reserved for special occasions, or manufactured by a song. Love is everlasting, supernatural, and all encompassing. That is the love we expect. That is the love God sent to us through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We can become apathetic to the problems all around us. Some days I just want to retreat. I don't have enough love to go around. My love tank – that sounds weird – gets empty. This is because I try to love on my own abilities and skills. That's not love. Love can only come from God. The only way that I can love others is by allowing God's love in Jesus Christ to consume me. Does that resonate with you?

We can make excuses for not loving others. We can talk about being busy. Everyone has things to do. We can talk about not having enough time. Everyone has their own priorities. We can give

reasons for others not being worthy. There isn't one of us who is worthy. Through all these excuses the love of God in Jesus Christ is still expected. The expectation is from Jesus.

Jesus expects us to love others as He has loved us. The two greatest commandments are always valid: love God and love your neighbor. The expectation never originated with us. God has always been the greatest lover.

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. 1 John 4:9-10 (NLT)

There are unlovable people in our lives who are loved by Jesus. One of the reasons so many people want Christmas to be spectacular is they want to love and be loved. Not only is our world an angry place, but it's also a lonely place, and a troubled place. For many in our world they want at least one day without troubles, to be with family, and for people to love one another.

Jesus chose to share God's love with us by becoming a person like us, facing troubles, being alone, and encountering hatred. Jesus did all this because His love is eternal, encouraging, enduring. Jesus entered our world loving us in supernatural ways, that were exhausting, and sacrificial.

Jesus is able to love us because He is love. It's not merely a quality or characteristic. Jesus at the core, the deepest depths of His nature, is love. That is why we pray for people to experience the height and depth, width and length of His love. Jesus is always love. Every part of Jesus is love. Jesus' love has no beginning or ending, no top or bottom.

I know that's beyond our understanding. Yet we yearn for His love. We live in expectation of His love. We are satisfied by His love.

It is universally accepted that genuine love is not about self but about others. This is what Jesus demonstrated and what we celebrate at Christmas that He loved us. I've mentioned this many times that Jesus gave up heaven to come to earth as our Savior. He could have remained in heaven and left us in our sin. We would still be trying unsuccessfully to earn our salvation, to pay the penalty for our sin, and endlessly failing in the process.

Jesus saw this great need and made the sacrifice that we couldn't make. Not one of us can remain faithful to the image of God that is created within us. Not one of us can love without the love of God. We fail to trust, to be kind, to be loving.

Jesus chose to leave behind His seat at the right hand of God in Heaven's throne room. Jesus left behind the incomprehensible intimate communication with His Father. Jesus gave up His unlimited powers to live in a body of flesh blood.

Love is not about self, love is about others. Love puts others first, cares about the needs of others. Love doesn't tear down others, but raises up others. Love looks beyond grievances and forgives. Love seeks out ways to be kind and compassionate. Love knows the truth about people and rejoices while being patient. Love is willing to hang in their with people when they make mistakes. Love is ready to believe in God's power to transform people. Love is always hopeful even through the most challenging and difficult experiences.

This love is Jesus. This love comes to us from Jesus. This love can dwell within us not only at Christmas, but all the time because of Jesus.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. 1 John 4:11 (NLT)

You can be at peace with yourself and others when you love the unlovable. Loving others isn't automatic for us like it is for Jesus. Automatic isn't the right word, because Jesus is love. Even though you and I are created in the image of God we don't automatically love. We're selfish, or defensive, or angry, or apathetic. Every one of these attitudes and actions deprives us of hope and peace.

Selfish people aren't at peace, neither are the defensive, angry, or apathetic. They're level of hope is low. They can't see beyond themselves. They don't see others who need to be loved.

Anyone and almost everyone loves the people who are lovable. I'm talking about loving people that are like us. People who think like us, people who do what we do, people who go along with our ideas. We love people who give us what we want. We love people who do what we want. These are lovable people.

Do we love the people who think differently than we do? Maybe we do. Do love the people who don't do what we do? We might love them. Do love the people who have their own ideas and ignore our ideas? That's hard to do. So they might become unlovable people.

It's are harder to love those who disagree with you, especially the ones who never stop arguing. It's not easy to love people do things that you find disagreeable, distasteful, disgusting. It's nearly impossible to love the people who reject you and your ideas. They all become unlovable to us. When we are face to face with them we aren't at peace. They blind us to the hope that Jesus loves them.

Our attitudes about ourselves and others changes when we pray for unlovable people. Why would we want to do that? Why would we want to pray for the people who reject us or ignore us; whose lives are the opposite of ours; who are always ready for a fight?

We pray for them because Jesus loves them. We pray for them because Jesus was born to save to them, just as He has saved us. We pray for them because Jesus has entered our lives and given us His love for them.

You and I were once unlovable people, but not in the eyes of Jesus. You and I once did what we wanted, lived disgusting lives, rejecting Jesus. Then Jesus entered our lives. He took away our sins, turned our hearts and minds to Him, and we embraced Him. That's when we were at peace, found hope, and were filled with His love.

The love of God in Jesus Christ entered our lives. Now we see those around us with His eyes. People who need Him. People who need to be loved. When we encounter the unlovable He compels us to pray for them, to have a love for them. They are no longer unlovable.

Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. 1 John 4:11 (NLT)

Pray for an unlovable person to enter your life, then share the love of Jesus. I admit that this request will be challenging for me. How many of us want unlovable people in our lives? But we do want to share the love of Jesus. We do want people to trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

We can pray for opportunities to share the love of Jesus, right? In so doing God will eventually bring someone to us who is unlovable. That doesn't mean you will be face to face with an axe murderer. It doesn't mean you are responsible for the entirety of their lives.

You are asking God for someone who needs Him. They may need to be comforted. They may need an encouraging word. They may need a helping hand. They may need to be held accountable.

We have been loved by Jesus, filled with the love of Jesus, so that we can love others. Jesus even said that His followers would be known by their love.

While we're praying to God for opportunities to share the love of Jesus our faith is going to be stretched. We will be pushed out of our comfort zone. That's when we get to trust Jesus to love us. That's when we get to trust Jesus to encourage, empower, and strength us.

We have been built for Christmas 2024 so we can share the love of Jesus. There are no coincidences in the timing of Jesus. He is moving everyone of us through life knowing that we can and we will share His love.

Sharing the love of Jesus may result in another person coming to Jesus. Well, then thank you Jesus. Another person in the Kingdom of God is good. The angels in heaven rejoice every time a sinner is saved. Thank you Jesus that another person will be delivered from the punishment of their sins.

Nobody needs to live without Jesus. Nobody needs to spend eternity separated from Jesus. The anger, frustration, disappointment, and faithlessness of one life can and will be filled with the hope, peace, and love of Jesus Christ. That is what Christmas is all about.

All of us will get to share with family. We're all going to eat good food. All of us will have an opportunity give and receive some gifts. Christmas is about God loving you and me by giving us His Son. It was a great sacrifice for Jesus to enter this world and then to die on the cross as our sin. When His love fills our lives we begin to think it's nothing to make sacrifices to share His love with another person.

Christmas can be spectacular as one person after another turns to Jesus, finds Jesus, and experiences the love of Jesus. Are you willing to share the love of Jesus this Christmas?