

Call to Worship.

Matt. 1:18-25. The Birth of Jesus Christ..

Hymn 1. Ode to Joy

Hymn 2. Angels We Have Heard on High.

Hymn 3. Away in a Manger.

Announcements.

Phil. 2:5-11. The Incarnation and Exaltation of Christ.

Hymn 4. Silent Night

Hymn 5. O Holy Night.

Offering.

Pastoral Prayer.

Sermon text.

John 17:24-26 | Marks of a Church: Love.

'Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.'

Joy – Truth – Holiness – Unity – Love

It is fitting that we are ending the prayer of Jesus' last day on earth, the day before we celebrate His first day on earth.

Today, we look at the last desire of Christ in His High Priestly Prayer.

That 'the love with which You loved Me may be in them' – That is Jesus' final desire for the church in this prayer.

That the Love of God for Christ be in the people in His church.

During the Great Awakening in American in the mid-1700's, Jonathan Edwards wrote that one of His chief aims as a pastor is to **raise His congregation's affections for the love of God.**

Love is the Mark of a Church, but we have to consider love of what? Everybody loves something, so love is obviously not created equally.

A church is supposed to be marked primarily in this way as well; its **love of God**.
The absence of love is the presence of pain. And it is true that we live in a painful world.

What is the love of God? How can we know the love of God? And How can we live in and experience the love of God?

Everything that a church believes, states, thinks about God is a statement about its **love of God**.

Often love is spoken of at churches in a false way. I want to give you a very obvious distinction of this.

There are so many incredible promises in the Bible about the **Love of God**.

The explanation of God's love can be seen in two ways; the **Love of God and the Love for God**.

The Love of God is God's love demonstrated and the best example of that is God's love to His Son, Jesus Christ.

The Love for God is best demonstrated in our relationship to God which is experienced in obedience to Him.

The Love for God is best seen in our response to God, our response to Christ, and our response to mankind. But that is not what I'm going to talk about primarily today.

Primarily, I am going to talk about the **Love of God** and how we can know the love of God and live in and experience the **love of God**.

Some have claimed that knowing the love of God is incomprehensible because God is incomprehensible. But that is not exactly true.

God is knowable and His attribute of love is knowable as well.

The primary way that we know the love of God is in the birth of Christ. The life of Christ. The death of Christ. And The resurrection of Christ.

What we celebrate at Christmas is the birth of Christ. The birth of Christ is the Love of God.

We know God's love because of God's love for His Son, Jesus Christ.

Love is most often spoken of and taught at churches in a way as it relates to men and women. A view of love that is based off of the relationships between mankind is doomed to be imperfect and temporal, because we are imperfect and temporal.

This is an incorrect view of love. in a **theological system called Pelagianism**.

Pelagianism is an ancient heretical view of the Christian faith expressed by an early priest named Pelagian. The basic premise of Pelagian thought is that mankind is generally good and we should be generally good to one another and this is the general expression of love in Christianity.

It's the spiritual ideology that Jesus rebuked at the Laodicean church in Revelation where He stated 'because you are lukewarm I will sit you out of my mouth' Rev. 3:16

What were they lukewarm about? About God. Not about themselves. They were overly infatuated with themselves.

Pelagian Theology

Life is directed by us

Truth is self-determined

Man is generally good

Love yourself.

Church is about self-improvement.

Biblical Theology

Life is directed by God

Truth is determined by God

Man is completely sinful

Love God.

Church is about God.

Pelagian theology creates lukewarm churches because it is not marked by the Love of God. It is marked by people that just love themselves and tolerate other people who love themselves. This creates a lukewarm church. They have a constant self-focus and that focus does nothing to fan the flames in the **love of God**.

What you and I am is the Love of God. And what people so often mistake and experience the mistakes of is misrepresenting the Love of God.

God's love is never experienced in self-focus it is always **experienced in knowing Him**.

'the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known You' Jn. 17:25

Church is actually not even about us. I know that flies in the face of our culture but it is the truth. **Church is not about you or me**. Church is about God. Church is about the Love of God and it is the Love of God that compels us to worship Him.

It is very fitting to look at this today because tomorrow is Christmas Day. Christmas day is an important calendar day with regard to celebrating the Love of God.

Did you realize that we orient every calendar year off the Love of God. This year we will complete the 2000th, 23rd year, in the Love of God.

The year will end, but the Love of God will not end.

If there is one thing you should know about God is that **He put His love on display in the Birth of Jesus Christ**.

NOW, Pelagian theology keeps a church lukewarm. BUT, a sound theological view of love of God makes a church white hot.

You might wonder, Why the distinction is results? It's because of this.

Pelagian theology makes a person self-conscious. Biblical Theology makes a person God-conscious.

Pelagian theology makes a person concerned with being offended. Biblical Theology makes a person concerned with offending God.

This is the power of a church; the Love of God is the power source of a church.

As I said in 1 Tim 3 the church is the 'pillar and support of the truth'. Well the horse power of a church is the Love of God.

If a church lives in the Love of God, it would never lack for anything from God. That church will receive **'every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies' from God.** Eph. 2

The church that is marked by the Love of God will get all of the things that church needs for God to accomplish His purposes in those people.

There is the type of church that loves the world and gets everything the world has to offer. Then there is the type of church that sacrifices loving the world, and instead loves God, and gets all that God has to offer.

We want to be the kind of church that stops evaluating things as the world does and starts evaluating things as God does.

God does everything orbited through His love. **Please turn to 1 John 4.**

BUT, as it is, Proverbs says 'open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed' – There is a war at hand. There is a war on the Love of God. There has been a strategy by Satan to carefully conceal the love of God as seen and described in the Bible and Satan has done this through a variety of means.

Politically correct speech has quieted the love of God. Where men chose comfort over the truth.

People have elevated their emotions above the love of God. Making their feelings out to be an idol. Ego and emotions have become people's god. That will lead to a lukewarm life.

Christ would rather us be hot or cold, but not lukewarm.

You can be cold to the things of the world and hot to the things of God and that brings Christ pleasure.

Christ wants us to be turned on to the Kingdom not turned off by it.

The Results of a lack of love of God.

Its results have been a **lack of revival in religion.**

Its results have been a **lack of thriving in spiritual life.** (*when people fail to pray and read God's word those are the primary markers of being out of the love of God*)

Its results have been a **lack of conviction in the hearts and minds of men and women.**

A lack of love of God in the heart has turned men away from God. They no longer spend significant amounts of time in prayer.

There is a type of love that is worth sacrificing yourself for. That is God's love.

God's love is not...

The type of love that is **set on self-preservation** is not God's love.

The type of love that is **set on self-esteem** is not God's love. 'deceitful lips us flattery, but the wounds of a friend are faithful'

The type of love that is **set on self** is not God's love.

God's love is... -Markers of a Church that Love's God.

God's love is about self-denial. A church must be principled in self-denial.

God's love is sacrificial. A church must have a sacrificial system of dying to self.

God's love is set on Christ. A church must esteem Christ above self.

The Church Age.

In the Church Age that we live the Church has become about the love of people and that has led people to prioritize the people above the love of God.

What people do not realize is that that is a church marketing gimmick. It is a marketing gimmick to make church about people because it then intuitively becomes about consumption and consumerism.

It is a marketing strategy to get people in the door, tell them what they want to hear, make them feel the way they want to feel, overlook and ignore the realities of our fallen world and call that love.

That is not church and it is not love.

Church is about worshiping God and love is about knowing Him.

Q: Could you have imagined a priest in the OT asking well what does the community like, should we come up with a program to make them feel better about themselves? Well, that actually did happen, Aaron's sons decided they knew a better way of worshiping God and it was inspired by their love for themselves. They got the consequences of moving out of the Love of God.

When a person holds on to anything other than the love of God through Christ, through a thousand different practical examples, that person is living a life of idolatry.

When a person blames others for their circumstances, that person has refused to live God's love in their life, and does not even know God enough to know that God loves them so much that He has specially designed the exact circumstances they are living in. They become like the Jews who grumbled against Christ in John 6.

Q: Why was Christ born? What is Christmas?

Primary Point: Knowing God is Knowing Christ, and Knowing Christ is Knowing the Love of God.

Summary of the Upper Room Discourses.

John 13-17.

Love.

v. 24 'Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for you loved Me before the foundation of the world.'

Father – The standard of Christian love is based off the standard of love between God and Jesus.

Christian love must be defined by the standard of God's character.

The Qualifications of Christian love.

1st. God's love is because of Him, not us.

2nd, God's love is because of Christ, not us.

3rd, God's love is measured by His character, not ours.

Deut. 7:7 'The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people; for you were the fewest of all people. But because the LORD loved you, He will love you and bless you.'

Q: Why can we have confidence in God's love, because we have confidence in the character of God?

'this is eternal life, that they know God'

Knowing God and Knowing Love are synonymous.

1st – God's loves because it is the nature and essence of His character.

Look at 1 John 4.

God's Love for Christ. God's Love for All of the World. God's Love for those who are in Christ.

3 attributes of God's love; Infinite, Eternal, and Perfect.

Infinite means that it is without limits.
Eternal means that it is without end.
Perfect means that it is without error.

Limitlessness, no end, and perfection are things our limited, imperfect minds struggle to understand.

That is a type of love that we hardly comprehend.

God's love is limitless/infinite, eternal, and perfect because that is an extension of His nature.

2nd, God's love is because of Christ, not us.

John 3:16 'for God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life'

God loves the world. Yet there is an extent to which God loves the world.

God loves the world through Christ.

'All things came into being through Him/Christ' Jn. 1:3 Namely, all manifestations of the attributes of God.

God's love and the birth of Christ are directly connected.

God's love and the life and death of Christ are directly connected.

Christ has been born on Christmas day as a representation of God to mankind, yet

'He was in the world and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him' Jn. 1:11

Christ was born in Israel.

'He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him' Jn. 1:11

God does love the world, but to an extent. The extent to which God loves the world is the extent to which they receive His Son.

Jn. 1:12 'as many as received Him. To them He gave the right to become children of God'

There is no limit to God's love, but there is an extent to which it is applied. God has a limitless love for His eternal Son and anyone who is in Him is in His love.

God gives Common Grace to all the world

God has established the measurement of His love by His personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

To be in God's love is to have a direct connection, to have Unity with God through Jesus Christ.

God's love is not validated by personal emotions, it is validated by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The personhood of Jesus Christ is the sum total of the explanation of God's love. John puts it this way 'No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him' John 1:18

Jesus Christ is the explanation, the revelation of God to mankind.

Q: What is Christmas? It is the explanation of God's love to mankind in the person of Jesus Christ!

3rd -

I desire -

That they be with Me where I am

Q: Where is Christ?

Christ is not speaking that they be with Him in that current event for that is already taking place. He is referring to His ascension and His current location that they be with Him in Heaven.

That is where Christ glory is on full display.

Q: Why does Christ desire that we be with Him in Heaven?

'so that they may see My glory which You have given Me'

Seeing Christ's glory.

This is what Christmas is about. Seeing the glory of God through Jesus Christ.

OK – but why does Christ so desire that we see His full glory in Heaven?

BECAUSE, God has 'loved Me before the foundation of the world'

The reason Christ prays for us to be in Heaven with Him is because of the same love that God has for His Son.

v. 25 'O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me'

O righteous Father.

The only place in the NT this terminology is used.

Christ addresses His father twice in this single statement. It makes it very clear that there is personhood in both God the Father and Christ the Son.

There is a direct, personal relationship.

Knowing God is Knowing His love.

God is incomprehensible; therefore, His love is incomprehensible as well.

The only way we can understand God is through how He has revealed Himself in the Word of God and that is the reason the world does not know Him.

The world has not known You.

I have known You.

These have known that You sent Me.

v. 26 'and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.'

I have made Your name known to them and will make it known.

Q: Why?

So that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

God's love for Christ is the standard of love for us.

The best way we can understand the love of God, relationally, is in His love for Jesus Christ.

The Love of a Church. (Love of God and Love for God).

Church is about our love of God and knowing God's love we love others.

a. Love of God.

This is not necessarily defined by His attitude and action to us. It is defined by His attitude and action to Christ.

The Meaning of Christmas.

Making God known to us. Making His love known to us.

Christmas is the Love of God. That is what Christmas is.

God taking His infinite, eternal, and perfect love and making it known through the Person of Jesus Christ.

So How does that apply to you? And does it apply to everyone.

Common Grace and Saving Grace.

Q: How do we know that God does love all people? Christ tells us to be like God by loving our enemies.

Christ says we will be like God by loving our enemies. So obviously God's standard of love is that He loves all people.

But He does not love all people in an infinite, eternal, and perfect way. Q: What does that mean?

God loves all people in a common way. God loves all people that He gives them life. God loves all people that He gives the breath and the love of other people.

It is because of God that you can have a marriage. Marriage is an act of God in common grace. Parenting, the love for children and children to parents. That is an act of God's love in common grace.

Food. Good food is an act of God's love in Common Grace.

But here's the difference. Food is not infinite, eternal, and perfect. Marriage is not infinite, eternal, and perfect.

Q: So how does a person have infinite, eternal, and perfect love?

Infinite, Eternal, and Perfect Love can only be given by an Infinite, Eternal, and Perfect Person. That person is Jesus Christ.

The birth of Christ on Christmas is the explanation of God's Love.

So how do we know God's love beyond what is common, it is this, that God loves you Infinitely/Without limit, Eternally/Forever, Perfectly/Without Error because that is who Christ is.

Q: A person could ask, why do you make such a big deal about the doctrine of the Deity of Christ? Because the love of God is at stake.

Conclusion.

The Love of God is the point of Christmas and it is beyond just common love. It is saving love. It bigger than the Holiday. It is infinite, eternal, and perfect.

Pastoral Prayer.

Hymn 6. What Child is this.

Hymn 7. Joy to the World.

Benediction.

1 Cor. 15:57

Small Group Questions.

1. What is the difference of the Love of God and Love for God?
2. Do you ever struggle with experiencing love because you are hoping for love from people or things that are not infinite, eternal, and perfect?
3. Can you discuss the differences between common grace and saving grace and how they relate to enjoying the Love of God in your life?
4. Do you pray that the Holy Spirit would help you experience the Love of God daily and be an expression of that to others as a marker of the church?