



**1 John 4:9-11**  
**Resurrection Sunday 2016**

Today we celebrate what some call Easter, what others more appropriately call Resurrection Sunday. It is the most important holiday in the Christian faith.

Three months ago we celebrated the birth of Christ at Christmas, two days ago we celebrated Good Friday and Jesus' death on cross, but today we celebrate His resurrection and without that, the story would not be the same.

As Christians we believe that God created the world, and He created it as something perfect and beautiful. And, we believe He created the first human beings – Adam and Eve and put them into this perfect world. They lived in an all-inclusive resort where there was only one rule: don't eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if you do, you will die.

So, they had a pretty good gig – living in paradise, just the two of them, with a direct relationship with God, and only one rule. It sounds like the kind of thing most of us would take in a heartbeat.

But things didn't last that way for long. The serpent came around and tempted them – he pointed out all the stuff that seemed good about the tree and its fruit and suggested that God was probably wrong, and they should go ahead and try it and see how things turn out.

That right there, is the essence of what Christians call sin - doing what we want to do, instead of what God has commanded.

Adam and Eve intentionally rebelled against God by eating the fruit. They knew what it was, they knew what God had said, they knew what they were doing and they did it anyway.

And miraculously, instead of instantly snuffing them out right then and there on the spot, God said, "You've done something wrong. And there will be consequences that you can't foresee or fix." In fact their first born son would go on to commit the world's first murder, against his own brother – their whole lives would change, but God wasn't through. He also promised that one day He would take care of everything they had broken.

The Bible has essentially one plot line: the story of God making good on that promise. He chose a man, Abraham, and grew him into a family that eventually formed a nation, Israel. And then, into that nation, God sent His own Son. His Son, who Scripture tells us had created the world and all that is in it – the Creator entered the creation to fix what no one else could.

That Son, that Creator, that Fixer, is Jesus. And Jesus Christ is God. Christians believe in a triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit – all three have always existed, always will exist, and yet all three are one.

And this Son, this Christ, took on human flesh and became a man. Much like the mystery of the trinity, Christians also believe in this miraculous unity that Jesus was fully God and fully man at the same time.

He was born in Bethlehem to Mary and raised by her and Joseph in Egypt and later in the small backwater city of Nazareth. Jesus grew up in a blue-collar home, the son of a construction worker, and He became one Himself. However you might picture Jesus one thing is certain, He didn't have silky hair, a feminine complexion, and a bit of a glow – He had sweat stains on his tunic and the calloused hands of a man who has spent many years using tools.

And when God's perfect timing had come, He presented Himself to the nation as the promised Messiah – that's the Hebrew word for Savior; Christ is the Greek word. Messiah and Christ mean the same thing; they just come from different languages. So, Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah, the Christ. And for the next three years He went around doing miracles to prove His claim but also preaching a message of what God wanted us to know.

And then, again, in God's perfect timing, His message was rejected by the people in religious and political power and He was put to death for being politically inconvenient. Well, that was their motive, but God had said the true function of His death would be to make a covering for our sin.

This is the plan God had in mind all along that no one had predicted, that no one had foreseen. They knew God had promised something would happen, but no one knew it would look like this. No one knew that this is how God would make mercy possible, and satisfy justice at the same time.

You see, God is holy and He is just. That means if we do what is wrong, if we rebel against Him and break His holy laws, there should be a punishment. If there is a crime, a rebellion, an infraction, whatever you want to call it, if a law or rule is ignored, justice demands a consequence. That's what justice is, consequences for wrong.

So, God couldn't just forgive us for all our wrongdoing. That wouldn't be just. So Jesus, who had no sin of His own, stepped in to take our place – He would suffer for our sins – justice would be done. In a radical display of mercy, He would take our guilt and trade us for His innocence.

Our sin was punished, but He took the fall. That's what happened on the cross.

And then, His body was placed in a grave. It was wrapped in linen and sprinkled with some herbs, it was a hasty job, but they wanted to get something done before the sun set. They planned to come back in a few days and do it better.

But when they came back, they were shocked to discover, the tomb was empty. God had allowed Jesus to bear our sins, to bleed and die for our sins, to taste the death and burial that entered His perfect world because of sin. And then, God raised Him up from the dead proving that He accepted Christ's work, He accepted the sacrifice. He allowed Jesus to bear our sins and give us His innocence instead.

And that's what we celebrate on Easter, on Resurrection Sunday. We celebrate the fact that the sins we know we have committed, the things that eat at us from the inside, the things that bring us guilt and shame, as well as all the things we feel ought to be OK but aren't, and even the things we're doing wrong in total ignorance, are all forgiven in Christ *if* we will just come to Him and receive that forgiveness, if we will agree with Him that we have sinned and ask for His help in living in a new way that pleases Him.

This is the ultimate act of love according to John, one of Jesus' disciples. John not only wrote one of the biographies of Jesus' life that we call the Gospels, he also went on to write several letters to individuals and churches that are included in our Bible. We're going through one of them right now, the book of 1 John.

We pick things up where we left off last week and find that the passage we've come to is rather appropriate to consider on a day like today. If you have your Bible open, please read with me

**1 John 4:9** In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. **10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

We see here that Jesus' life and death were intended by God to be a message to us - a message of what God's love is, what it looks like, and what affect it should have on us.

The first thing we have to notice here, and that we can never lose sight of, is that God manifested His love toward us. He started all of this. He is the Great Initiator. Starting all the way back in the Garden of Eden with not immediately wiping out Adam and Eve, God has always been patient with us. He comes to us before we come to Him - He is the one who manifests love to us, we don't bring anything to Him to get His attention.

Doesn't John go on to say it's not that we loved God, but that He loved us? We didn't induce God's love. We didn't earn it. He gave it. His love toward us is gratuitous.

And if you want a proof of that - think about the world Jesus came into - a world so full of self-centeredness that no one was even willing to give up a room for a pregnant lady, so Mary gave birth in a stable! Let that settle in a bit. We put signs up on the Metro reminding

people that giving up your seat for pregnant ladies and the elderly is the right thing to do. We have to remind people because it doesn't come naturally to everyone. So no, God didn't wait for us to love Him, He manifested His love toward us. He started. He initiated.

**1 John 4:9** In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world,

Take note of that: He didn't send us a political leader, or a professor, not a doctor, or a tech guru, He sent His Son. That needs to speak to us. That needs to tell us something about the nature of the world and our place in it.

Our greatest challenge isn't the economy, or ISIS or radical Islam, or the GOP establishment or the Democratic elites. We're not going to fix the world with another precision airstrike, government bailout, or election. The problems that we are fixed on in our newsfeeds and nightly broadcasts are really just symptoms of a much greater disease.

Our greatest problem is the fact that we have offended God. We've been in a war on terror for sixteen grueling years, but we've been at war with God since the dawn of creation. There were illnesses and economic woes in Jesus' day. There were earthquakes and other natural disasters. There were wars and insurgencies. All the problems that exist today existed then – they might have looked a little different, but they were all there. And God didn't send us a solution to any of them – He sent us His Son the ultimate solution to all of them.

And He did it to help us see that the problem we have is much deeper and it has far greater consequences than the things we get so caught up in each day.

As John points out – without Christ, we are dead men walking. We are, as the Scriptures teach, “dead in our sins and trespasses” (Eph 2:1). We seem to enjoy a little freedom here on earth, we seem to be able to do what we want sometimes, but from God's perspective it's like an inmate saying, “Well, I can exercise, I can read a book, I can watch TV” – it's a petty form of freedom and a miniscule sliver of the potential for life.

The truth is, without Christ in you, you are as good as dead. You have no idea how long you'll last – maybe you'll make it a long time and live past 100. How many of those years are you going to be healthy enough, strong enough, energetic enough, and have enough money to actually do all the things that sound so exciting to you? How long do you have to really, what you call, 'live?'

And that's assuming of course that no tragedy suddenly strikes. That nothing goes wrong. Can you guarantee that? Let me ask again – how long will this 'life' you say you have last without Christ? And what will you face when it is over?

God wants to give you life. Abundant life. A life of sustainable peace and joy that transcends the pain and difficulty around you. “God has sent His only begotten Son into the

world, that we might live through Him.” But in order for that happen we’ve got to confront this thing called sin.

**1 John 4:10** In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

Propitiation. That’s a word you don’t hear every day, huh? Another way to say it is: atoning sacrifice. Once again, not a very helpful term. They’re almost foreign words to us. Microsoft Word wanted to correct one of my misspellings to propagation instead of propitiation. It’s not a popular word in the English language today and we don’t understand it or atonement because our culture doesn’t think in these terms any more.

Propitiation means to appease and render favorable, it’s a way of talking about a sacrifice that makes penance. But again, I know these are still foreign sounding words to some of us. Why should I have to appease anyone, why should I have to gain favor? We’re all equal – I’m as good as you are, right? Why should I make penance? I haven’t done anything wrong. Nothing *really* wrong anyway.

But as we said earlier, that’s not the way God sees it. And that’s why He had to send His Son to save us, it’s because we’re so lost we don’t even realize we need a Savior at times. We can be so oblivious to God that we don’t even realize He’s there much less that we have offended Him. And it’s not because He’s hiding, it’s because we’re not paying attention.

How many of you have almost gotten into an accident because you were paying attention to your phone instead of driving? Ever bumped into anything while you were walking and paying attention to your tablet or phone? We get sucked into what we’re doing and we lose sight of the world around us. We do that with God all the time. He’s there, but we’re busy.

And that’s why He took the first step – that’s why He didn’t wait for us to love Him; He manifests His love to us. And He sent His Son to be the propitiation – the covering - for our sins.

(During the sermon I inserted some comments here about the need to root sin out of our lives and compared it to pulling an elephant’s tusk – sanctification isn’t always easy or fun, but it’s necessary. A link to the video that inspired that comment can be found below. It was Episode Three of the PBS show Operation Wild.)<sup>1</sup>

**1 John 4:11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Here’s another funny little word, but one we’re a bit more familiar with: ought. “**We also ought to love one another.**” Once we understand what God’s love is all about, once we

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.amazon.com/Episode-One/dp/B010SE6T3Y/ref=sr\\_1\\_104?s=instant-video&ie=UTF8&qid=1458168909&sr=1-104&refinements=p\\_n\\_ways\\_to\\_watch%3A12007865011](http://www.amazon.com/Episode-One/dp/B010SE6T3Y/ref=sr_1_104?s=instant-video&ie=UTF8&qid=1458168909&sr=1-104&refinements=p_n_ways_to_watch%3A12007865011)

understand the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and how it impacts us, we also ought to love one another.

Do you find it interesting that we need to be told that? I do. It reminds me of just how bad sin is. It reminds us of great the pull toward selfishness is in our own lives. After telling us all that God has done for us, John has to remind us that we have a moral obligation to love others.

We looked at the topic of love last week and we'll be taking it up again next week, but statements like this one show us that maybe we don't know as much about love as we think we do. How can you tell someone they 'ought' to love someone else, how can you say you have an obligation to love? That doesn't fit with our modern notions of what love is.

But that's because our modern notions are wrong. We don't know love by the butterflies in our stomach, or by the sweatiness of our palms or the pounding of our hearts, [10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son \*to be\* the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.](#)

Moms understand this a little better than most. You don't feel very loving when the baby is crying at 3 AM, but you get up anyway, you make yourself go and show love, and then, perhaps around 3:20 when the baby is fed and changed and you look down at that tiny human being that carries half of you, maybe you feel a surge of love. Or, maybe you just pass out there in chair and wake up again at 4:30...

Friends, that care of a mother for her child is one of closest ways we can come to understanding what love really is. It's not easy. It's not all feelings. It's not always done for people who say thank you. But we don't do it for feelings or compliments; we do it, when we do it right, *because God so loved us.*

We should hope to be a pipe with God's love being poured into us at the top and then coming out of us at the bottom. Our concern should be that we not add any corrosion of our own to the water as it flows through, and perhaps, if God should please, we might be warmed or cooled by the temperature of what's passing along.

We need to demonstrate the love of God to others. We need to show a love that moves first. A love that initiates. A love that is willing to suffer. A love that seeks the good of another, even if it costs you. Friends, if all your spirituality causes you to do is feel something for yourself or contemplate God and spiritual thoughts, it's broken. It's supposed to flow out of us in response to others.

One of the reasons we went with the name The City Gates Church is because we wanted to emphasize the idea that we come in to exalt God, to worship Him and focus on the love that we have received, but then we go out and we engage the world by reflecting that love to the people He puts in our path.

So on this Resurrection Sunday, in the shadow of the Cross and in light of the empty tomb - let me ask – how far are you willing to go for others knowing that God is your strength and your supply? How much love has He shown to you, and how much does He want you to show to others?

Friends, Easter isn't about Marshmallow Peeps and chocolate bunnies, it's not about colored eggs and pretty dresses – it's about love and the lengths that God would go to show it to you.

John Stott was right when he said, “No greater gift of God is conceivable because no greater gift was possible. This was God's indescribable gift.”

And it's given to you, freely, if you will simply receive it.

The resurrection tells us that there's a huge reset button on life – it's possible to get a do-over, starting right now because God sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

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