Easter 5 1 John 3:18-24
May 2, 2021 153-168-167/351-147, vv. 4 & 5

Easter Living – We Live in God's Love
I. We are confident of God's love.
II. We reflect God's love in our daily lives.

Dear Christian friends,

When couples come for **pre-marital counseling** I always ask them two questions. The first one is, "WHY do you want to get married?" **Of course** they answer, "BECAUSE WE LOVE each other." Then I ask them, "WHAT DO YOU MEAN when you say you love each other?" Then the hemming and hawing begins! They look at each other STRUGGLING to find the **right words**.

It can be hard to explain WHAT love is. AS CHRISTIANS we are called to live **lives of love** – love FOR GOD and for each other. The **10 Commandments** can be summed up with that **one word** – love. We have Jesus' command to ***"love one another"*** AS HE has loved us.

Today we look more closely **at love** – GOD'S love for us and OUR LOVE for God and each other. Easter living means WE LIVE IN GOD'S LOVE. **Living in God's love** 1)we are confident of **God's love** and 2)we reflect **God's love** in our daily lives.

I. We are confident of God's love.

"Dear children, let us love not only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth." God doesn't love us WITH JUST words. Oh, words are a part of our lives of love. **With words** we express our love. **Every day** HUSBANDS and wives need to hear each other say, "I love you." **Every day** CHILDREN and parents need to hear each other say, "I love you." **Every day** we need to hear GOD SAY, "I love you." But love dare never stop WITH JUST WORDS! Words of love that are not backed up with CONCRETE ACTS of love are meaningless.

God loves us – NOT JUST with words but ***"in action and truth."*** God shows us that love is not just a FUZZY FEELING or an **emotion**. Love is a NOTHING-HELD-BACK giving of oneself to another person. But God's love is EVEN MORE than that. **God's love** is not based on the OBJECT of His love but **simply** ON WHO God is. God doesn't love us **because we** are SO CUTE and **adorable** but just because He is SO LOVING. **God's love** doesn't ask if a person DESERVES His love or worry if a person will TAKE ADVANTAGE of His love. **God's love** doesn't bother with "WHAT'S IN IT for Me?" or "What's it going to COST Me?" or "I'm BUSY!" **God's love** sees a person – sees a NEED – and it goes into action. THAT'S the love God has for us.

God loves us WITH WORDS – He tells us **over and over**, "I love you." God also loves us ***"in action and truth."*** In love God GAVE us His own **Son to be** our Savior. John reminds us that God ***"knows everything."*** God knows ALL our sins – **all the times** we've ignored and defied His commandments. But God didn't say, "I CAN'T LOVE them **after what they've done** to Me." It's the exact opposite! God said, "I LOVE them. I MUST HELP them. I must save them **from themselves**." Because of GOD'S KIND of love we have Jesus. LOOK AGAIN at that life of perfect obedience Jesus lived **in our place**. Stand again at the cross and watch Jesus sacrifice His innocent life **to pay** for all our sins. Peer again into Jesus' empty grave and hear Him say, ***"Because I live, you shall live also."*** Come to Holy Communion and RECEIVE THE PROOF of **God's love** for you – Jesus' true body and blood given into death for the forgiveness of all our sins. THAT'S HOW MUCH God loves you and me! **For Jesus' sake** God has forgiven all our sins. **In Jesus** God has made you and me His dear children – promised us eternal life in heaven when we die.

Easter living is BEING CONFIDENT of God's love. Our relationship with God is built on GOD'S LOVE for us. Our faith is **not based** on our FEELINGS but on the FACTS of the **gospel**. John writes, ***"This is how …we will set our hearts at rest in his presence: If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts."***

Our hearts often do condemn us. "How can you SAY YOU'RE A CHRISTIAN after what you've just done?!" Our hearts know all those UNSPOKEN WORDS of spite – **anger** – selfishness – jealousy – **hatred** that have lurked in our minds – the grudges we've **quietly nursed**. Our HEARTS ARE RIGHT **in condemning** us for that! OUR CONFIDENCE is that God has overruled our hearts! ***"God is greater than our hearts."*** God doesn't deny or **excuse** our sins – He punished Jesus in our place. God doesn't owe us **any help** but IN LOVE God promises to hear and **answer all** our prayers. God **doesn't owe** us eternal life in heaven **because** we've BEEN SUCH GOOD people. We aren't! But IN LOVE – trusting in Jesus – God has promised us eternal life in heaven. I don't know why or how God CAN LOVE US so much. It doesn't make ANY SENSE after the **way we've treated** Him. But the PROOF of **God's love** for us is undeniable. We have Jesus' cross and **empty grave**. Easter living is BEING CONFIDENT of God's love and then…

II. We reflect God's love in our daily lives.

Our love FOR GOD should not be ***"only with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth."*** I don't know **any** Christian who would say he **doesn't** love God. But let's be careful that our love for God is NOT JUST WORDS! Through Isaiah God NAILED the Jews, ***"These people honor Me with their lips but their hearts are far from Me."*** EVERY DAY we should be telling GOD **we love** Him. But our WORDS of love must be backed up with LIVES of love. **If** I SAY I **love God** but don't have time for Him – or I basically ignore Him in my daily life - what am I REALLY SAYING?

We show our love for God BY THE ROLE His Word has in our lives – by LETTING GOD'S WORD guide and shape our lives. Think back to how the Catechism explains the 10 Commandments. The explanation to **every** commandment begins, "We **should fear** and LOVE God" – love God NOT JUST WITH WORDS but ***"in action and truth"*** – with a love that PUTS GOD FIRST in our hearts and lives and **schedules**. Real love for God does not use God's name to curse or swear – does not despise God's Word or worship as **boring** and **irrelevant**. **Real love** for God makes us honor and obey our moms and dads not ONE SPECIAL DAY a year but every day. IN REAL LOVE for God our big concern is "**What** does GOD WANT ME to do?" **In love for God** WHAT I THINK or feel – what OTHERS **are doing** – that doesn't overrule what GOD TELLS me to do.

Easter living is REFLECTING **God's love** in our love FOR OTHER people. **Here too** we must be careful ***"not to love with word or with our tongue, but also in action and truth."*** We learn from God HOW TO LOVE each other. God doesn't just TOLERATE or **put up** with us. He loves us. REFLECTING **God's love** is not carrying grudges but ***"forgiving each other JUST AS in Christ God forgave you."*** We can't always FORGET THE WRONGS others have done to us but we won't let that CONTROL us or determine how **we treat** them. **If** I'm having a HARD TIME **forgiving** someone then I need to go back to HOW GOD has forgiven me – to HOW MUCH and HOW OFTEN God has forgiven me. Jesus said, ***"If you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*** To refuse to forgive someone – to carry a grudge - that JEOPARDIZES **our relationship** with God and MAKES A MOCKERY of **God's love**. Our relationship with God is based on **God's** FAITHFUL, FORGIVING love. Our relationships with other people are built on THAT SAME **faithful, forgiving** love.

Easter living is REFLECTING **God's love** BY GIVING OURSELVES to other people. Love exposes us to being HURT and TAKEN ADVANTAGE of. That happens - but it shouldn't stop us from loving. It doesn't stop God from loving us! **Christian love** PUTS THE NEEDS OF OTHERS ahead of our own.

Today people will help out if they FEEL like it – if they HAVE NOTHING BETTER to do – if they get noticed and appreciated. That's not Christian love but SELFISHNESS and LAZINESS. **Christian love** sees a need and PITCHES in – like Lydia in that reading from Acts. **She** didn't wait to be **asked** – she VOLUNTEERED - looked for ways to help. Love's big concern is BEING HELPFUL **not** is it CONVENIENT for me.

That's the love GOD HAS SHOWN us. That's the love we are to REFLECT in our daily lives. God **in particular** applies His love to marriage. ***"Husbands, love your wives JUST AS Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her."*** Think HOW MUCH STRONGER and HEALTHIER **marriages** and **families** will be when this SELF-GIVING – self-DENYING – self-SACRIFICING love is practiced **by all** in the family. When husbands stop worrying what their **wives can do** for them and concentrate instead on what THEY CAN DO for their wives – what a difference that will make! When wives stop counting all the things they do that NOBODY NOTICES and so BECOME RESENTFUL but instead see all that AS OPPORTUNITIES to show their love for their husbands and children – what a difference that will make! When children stop seeing their parents AS WALLETS to be picked – as OLD FOGIES who **don't understand** anything - and instead think of how they CAN LOVE, honor and obey their parents as gifts **from God** – what a difference that will make! It BOGGLES THE MIND to think of **that love** put into practice!

I'd like to close with some verses from Romans 12. After reminding the Roman Christians of GOD'S GREAT LOVE for them Paul wrote, ***"Do not just pretend to love others. Be devoted to one another with brotherly love. Think of others as deserving more honor than yourselves. Have the same respect for one another. Do not be arrogant, but associate with the humble. Do not think too highly of yourselves. As far as it depends on you, live in peace with everyone."*** That's Easter living – LIVING IN GOD'S LOVE – reflecting God's love in our **daily lives**. Amen.

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