

# Lovin' You

On Sunday we continued our sermon series called "Eight EPIC Bible Passages." Tonight we'll talk about the fifth epic passage – First John chapter 4.

1. Warm up question: Sunday was Valentine's Day. So tell us about a special someone you love – a spouse, family member, friend, or pet. What makes them so special?
2. Read First John 4:7-21. Verse 8 is one of the most famous verses in the Bible – three simple words: "God is love." Let's think about what that means.
  - a. Suppose the sentence was reversed to say, "Love is God." Would that change the meaning? How?
  - b. As structured, John's statement is meant to describe the essences of God's personality. Suppose someone tried to describe the essence of your personality in a single word. What might they say? And how do you feel about that? Example: Sue is \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. Plato's term for God – the Unmoved Mover – captures the essence of how many ancient people saw God. To them, God was a powerful being, full of wisdom, holy, exalted, self-contained, so distant as to be supremely insulated from being disturbed, hurt, or in any way moved by the trivial events of human life. Suppose that's how you saw God. How might it change your relationship with God? How might it change you?
3. According to theologian Amos Wilder, the statement "God is love" means "God is supremely relational." In other words, God craves loving connection with others just as passionately as we do – which makes sense since the Bible teaches that we are created in God's image. To remind us of the power of the human longing for love, Jeff told about a time he fell in love with someone who did not reciprocate.
  - a. Tell us about a time you loved someone who did not reciprocate. Who was it? How did it feel?
  - b. Jeff said, "Love makes you vulnerable; it means you can hurt. When we say 'God is love,' we're saying God is vulnerable and can be hurt by our unrequited love." Do you think God feels the same kind of emotional pain from relationships (or lack of relationship) as we do? Does God need us as much as we need God?
  - c. Tell us about a relationship in your life that has given you great delight. Do you think God takes the same kind of delight in relationships as we do?
  - d. Re-read First John 4:9-10 and Luke 19:10. Think of the stories of Jesus that you're familiar with. Remind us of one of those stories and what that story tells us about how God feels about us?

4. In verse 11, John says, “Beloved, if God loves us that much, we also ought to love one another.” In verse 7, John says, “Because love is from God, everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.” In other words, if the defining characteristic of God is love, it follows that all who genuinely embrace God will also exude exceptional love.
- Benedictine monasteries were devoted to hospitality. The Benedictine Rule required monks to be ready to greet anyone who came to their door (night or day) with, “Thanks be to God. Your blessing, please.” By contrast, 20<sup>th</sup> century author Dorothy Parker always answered her phone with, “What fresh hell is this?” Think about someone who interrupted you this week. What happened? Did your response come closer to the example of the Benedictines or to Dorothy Parker?
  - Does it matter how we treat people around us? Why?
  - Tell us about a loving thing (large or small) someone has done for you recently. How did that affect you?
  - In verse 19, John says, “We love God because God first loved us.” In “Masters of Love,” Emily Smith says, “That’s how kindness works. There’s a great deal of evidence showing that the more someone receives or witnesses kindness, the more they will be kind themselves, which leads to upward spirals of love and generosity in a relationship.” How would you rate the level of lovingkindness you show those closest to you – your family? Excellent, good, average, barely ok, terrible?
5. In verse 17, John says, “[When] love has been perfected among us . . . , we [will] have boldness on the Day of Judgment, because as God is, so are we in this world.” But that’s precisely what worries us! We fear Judgment Day precisely because we often fall so far short in showing perfect love. In response, John offers one more thought – verse 18, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.”
- What do you think verse 18 means?
  - Jeff told a story about a time he experienced perfect love from his Grandma – a love that transcended the punishment he feared. Have you ever experienced that kind of love? What happened?
  - Jeff invited us to re-imagine Judgment Day unfolding like a time here on earth when we experienced perfect love. Do you think it’s possible Judgment Day will actually be like that for you? Why or why not?
  - After tonight’s conversation, do you feel any better about Judgment Day? Why or why not?