1 John 4:7-15 Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us.

Introduction: whatever ails the world, its ultimate deficit is a loss of love. We live and move and have our being in a cruel, harsh, love-less environment.

**Love here is the word *agape* meaning “the quality of having a warm regard for; to show a genuine interest in another; to cherish, have affection for; to highly esteem with fondness of heart.”**

**What if** before we engaged in one conversation in our day—one human interaction—what if we sat at the fountain of God’s love and drank it in to the depths? What if we dug wells into his life-giving word such that we were satisfied, satiated—every thirst of the heart and desire of the flesh slaked in his life-giving presence? Can you imagine what a difference that would make in our conversations? Can you imagine how couples, communities, and countries would be different if before we engaged in one activity, or one conversation—people could drink deeply of *agape* love of God?

The world is suffering from a lack of God’s love expressed in love toward each other.

1 Cor 13:8 “Love never fails.”

Ultimately, our spiritual gifts will pass away, either when Jesus returns for you or you go home to be with Jesus.

Eventually, we will all fail to live up to expectations: someone else’s or our own.

Eventually, our health will fail us. No matter how much you exercise, stay in sheep, eat healthy—at some point something that is out of your control will get you. Beyond the help of medicine or God’s will to heal—we will all die of something. Remember Lazarus? Jesus resurrected him from the dead. Yeah, but even Lazarus died again. You may receive a miracle a day but we all have a shelf life.

Eventually someone is going to let you down. A parent can abandon a child; coaches cut us from teams; friends disavow and disown us; a spouse can leave or betray us.

At some point, your favorite team is going to disappoint you.

Even the Sun has a shelf life. Sure, it’s estimated shelf life is 7-8 billion years.

The world will stop spinning and die a heat death in a cold and otherwise indifferent universe.

**Ultimately, everything we trust in will fail us.** But Love never fails.

**John the apostle is going to tell us why it can’t fail.**

**1. God’s love makes it possible to love one another (4:7-8). What makes it possible for people to express their love for others? John tells us…**

“Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

* He addresses the “Beloved”—the dear friends. If love should be expressed anywhere it should be seen in the church.
* “Let us” is a hortatory clause—a grammatical exhortation. An exhortation is a strong appeal.
* “Because love comes from God”—God is the source of love and everyone who has been born by the Spirit of God knows God and has his love.
* You show me a frozen heart, calloused and unloving toward others—and I’ll show you a person that does not know Jesus.

The people who know God through Christ and have been born anew by the Spirit show evidence of the love of God in their lives toward others.

What does it mean to say that “God is love?” This phrase has to do with a defining characteristic. Now, there are many attributes that are characteristic of God. **Ex. What is a defining characteristic?** New York city is defined by its “east-coastness” 4 of the 5 Burroughs (Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan, Statten Island, Long Island) are islands; a city of skyscrapers with the Empire State building. Seattle is harbor town surrounded by snow capped mountain ranges (Olympian range to the west; Cascade range to the east, with Mt Rainier looming over the city like a sentinel). It’s rainy, damp, earthy; I think of Pike’s Place Market and Pioneer Square and ferry boats across the harbor.

What about a circle? The defining characteristic of a circle is that it is a round shape that has no sides nor angles.

**In the same way, God has certain defining Characteristics**

God is *eternal* meaning that he does not have a beginning nor does he have an end.

God is *necessary and self-existing* meaning that his life or existence isn’t dependent on something external to him. The world, the universe exists *contingently*—our existence and emergence is dependent on God who sustains the world by his powerful Word—Christ. But God’s existence is such that he exists necessarily and self-existing.

God is *Sovereign*—meaning that he is absolutely free to do whatever he decides in the counsel of his own will and according to his nature.

God is *just*—his judgments are impartial and always without prejudice. Every action he takes he does so justifiably.

God is *personal*—God is a mind with unfathomable knowledge, understanding, wisdom, and self-reflection. God is a relational and personable being.

God is *powerful*—God is maximally powerful. Whatever state of affairs God decides to bring into existence he has the capacity to do so.

But in addition to all these magnificent and glorious attributes, John reminds us that a defining characteristic of God is *love!*

He is the very definition of *agape love*.

God so loved the World—the people who are lost and fallen and in need of his great heart.

**2. God loved us first, sacrificially (4:9-11, 19). So if God is defined by the quality of love, what is that love like?**

9 God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10 Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another…19 We love because he first loved us.

* **God’s initiative in extending his love to us.** Though we were born into the world spiritually dead, cut off and exiled from the family of God—God demonstrated his love in this—that while we were still sinners, enemies of the cross—Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:8). God sent his one and only Son from eternity to die that we might live.

We love because he first loved us.

* **As an atoning sacrifice Jesus is able to once and for all address our sinfulness.**

Sin is a debt we could not pay—Jesus pays the debt we owe.

Sin is a defeat, a downfall of the human image bearer—Jesus wins the victory we could never obtain in our own strength or righteousness.

Sin demands divine justice and punishment—Jesus bears the stripes and wears the brambles and takes the nails and the lance.

Sin is defeated—Jesus defies the boulder and rolls away the stone resurrected from the grave.

God’s love takes the initiative to seek and to save that which was lost. And all who believe in the crucified, resurrected Son of God have eternal life with Jesus.

The quality of God’s love is that it is sacrificial, selfless, it is “others centered.”

**3. God’s love is visible in the lives of those who know Him (4:12-16). If love is defining characteristic of God; and sacrificial love defines his love toward us; then how is that love seen in the world?**

12 No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent his Son as the world’s Savior. 15 Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God—God remains in him and he in God. 16 And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

* **God is unseen (12a)—**he is spirit not flesh, he is immortal not mortal. So in order to see this God who is love, that love which is sacrificial in nature—we must see it played out in the lives of mortal men and women.
* **God dwells in us and his love is made complete in us (12b)**—in other words—that unseen God has take hold of the believer and the work of love must begin in as we are brought toward wholeness, completion, maturity.
* **Believer’s have received new birth by the Holy (13**)—God now dwells in your heart by the Holy Spirit. We are indwelt by the God who is love.
* **Believers make the good confession (14-15)**—that Jesus Christ Savior and Lord.
* **Believers show evidence that God dwells in them because they remain/dwell in God (16).**

If God is immortal and unseen—then it stands to reason that the only way you could see his eternal selfless love is if it was embodied in a human life.

John 1:14 “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

God’s eternal Word who was with God and who was God—Christ—is made visible in the human life of Jesus of Nazareth. A perfect embodiment of his selfless love.

Now we, who believe in the Word—the God who unseen, have been indwelt by the Spirit, have made the good confession that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord of all—we also embody this love for others.

Jesus said in John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

**4. God’s love is the basis of our confident hope (4:17-18). So if God is love and the chief characteristic of His love is a sacrificial ethic; If believers embody that love in the world—how should that affect our outlook?**

17 In this, love is made complete with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is, so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears is not complete in love.

* **The believer can be confident on the day of Judgment** (17). As God is love, and God’s love takes up residence in Christ and now the believer—we are God’s expression of love to the world.
* **The effect of this lavish grace is that we do not walk in fear of judgment** (18)**; or fear of personal loss; or the fear of punishment.** No, the believer walks in a confident hope.

**God’s love is perfect**—meaning it doesn’t have any deficiencies, it has no vulnerabilities, it isn’t susceptible to defeat. Where God’s love overflows in the life of the believer it will drive out the fear of judgment. It will defeat the enemies of our soul; those forces set against us to defeat our faith and defeat our confession.

**A life that is characterized and defined by fear, anxiety and trepidation—is a life where a person has an undeveloped, immature knowledge and experience of just how much they are loved by God.**

**Illus. When I was a kid my Dad’s best friend Jim Harold had these barking demons from hell (his dogs).** They terrified me. They were chained between the end of the driveway and Jim’s front porch. I was really little, we’d pull up in my dad’s baby blue Ford F-150 and I’d freeze in the seat with terror. Dad would walk around, take me out of the truck and throw me up on his shoulders. He’d walk and the whole way there these demons in dog fur would be all over him jumping up, nipping at my heals. At no time did I doubt my Father’s competence to get me to the door. At no time did was I worried that he would just throw me into the snarling jaws of my enemies.

We are secure in the love and the competence of the one who holds us.

**Paul said, “What could possible drag you out of the loving, powerful hands of God?”**

Romans 8:31-35 If God is for us, who can be against us? 32He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? 33Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

I ask you, “What could possibly come between you and the God who holds you and who demonstrates his love for you?”

**5. God’s love is proven in our love for others (4:20-21).**

20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and yet hates his brother or sister, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And we have this command from him: The one who loves God must also love his brother and sister.

Anyone who claims to have received the love and grace of God in their hearts—but whose life is not characterized by the love of God towards others is a false believer.

God’s love is shown and made visible in the lives of those who know him.

**Who do we love? The Bible commands us to love four people:**

* We love God supremely above all.
* We love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Jesus was asked, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus answered, “The Samaritan.” The person you most revile.
* We love those who love us.
* We love those who hate us.

﻿**Illus.**  In 2007 wearing jeans, a t-shirt, and a Washington National baseball cap, a young musician opened his violin case, took out his violin and began playing in a Washington, DC, bus station. Playing 6 classical pieces (one by Bach that is widely considered the greatest classical piece ever written) for nearly 45 minutes he made a total of $32.17. He went largely ignored and unnoticed, except for one out of 1,000 people who hurried past him that day recognized that he was famous violinist Joshua Bell. Just three days earlier, Bell had filled Boston’s Symphony Hall at $100 a seat playing a Stradivarius worth 3.5 million dollars. Two weeks after the bus station performance, he played to standing room only in Bethesda, Maryland making 1,000 a minute for his talents. Joshua Bell is one of the best payed talents in the world but in the subway, he barely made enough to pay for lunch and top off his gas tank for the drive home. No one expected it that day. To see such a luminary standing where homeless musicians usually played. No one expected to see such majesty brought so low—within reach. And hardly anyone noticed that greatness was among them.

And many people will have the same experience with Jesus on the day of judgment. Some day people will look back and realize “that was Jesus wearing those ragged clothes—that was Jesus in disguise and I missed him. God’s glory on displayed through such ingloriousness. God’s majesty embodied in such earthenware. Jesus said it this way…

Matthew 25:31“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angelswith him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32All the nationswill be gathered before him, and he will separate them one from another, just as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on the left. 34Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35“‘For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; 36I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you? 39When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?’

40“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ 41“Then he will also say to those on the left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! 42For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink; 43I was a stranger and you didn’t take me in; I was naked and you didn’t clothe me, sick and in prison and you didn’t take care of me.’

44“Then they too will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or without clothes, or sick, or in prison, and not help you?’ 45“Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me. 46“And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The defining characteristic of the invisible God of heaven is selfless love. And that otherwise unseen and inaccessible reality is visible in the embodied life of Jesus of Nazareth. That selfless love is to define the people who name Jesus as Lord.