

Series: ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS...

Text: 1 John 4:7-16

Title: "To Love Each Other"

Introduction: MERRY CHRISTMAS EVERYBODY! WELCOME to BMZ! Glad you're with us TODAY for "**ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS...**" Now, you and I MIGHT KNOW what WE WANT for CHRISTMAS, but ... YOU GUESSED IT ... WE are going to TALK about what JESUS WANTS FROM US and FOR US as we CONSIDER CHRISTMAS.

Have you all CAUGHT NEWS lately? Have you HEARD what ALL is HAPPENING? More mass SHOOTINGS. HOSTAGES. BREAK INS. FIGHTING over EVERYTHING. Hurricanes. FLOODING. TORNADOES. WARS. THREATS of WAR.

Let me ask: WHAT is YOUR REACTION when YOU HEAR THESE things? "*I'm just GLAD it was NOT ME*" / "*Whatever. ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER BAD THING happened*" / "*GOD, HOW do you want me to PRAY and HOW do you want ME to get INVOLVED*"?

You KNOW what I BELIEVE? I believe this WORLD is HURTING and LOST and it will be UP to YOU and ME to be INFLUENCE and MAKE a DIFFERENCE! And I believe the ONLY THING that will MAKE a DIFFERENCE in our LOST and HURTING WORLD is ... JESUS! There is NO LEGISLATION / POLICY / POLITICAL LEADER who is going to make a HAIRS BIT of DIFFERENCE!

The ONLY ONE who can CHANGE the WORLD is the ONE WHO CREATED the WORLD. The WORD made into BODILY FORM (John 1)! And, as HIS FOLLOWERS we have been TAUGHT HOW to DO OUR PART IN this WORLD.

NOW, when JESUS talks about CHANGING the WORLD, HE is NOT talking about The WORLD as a WHOLE. According to GOD'S WORD, the WORLD ITSELF is NOT GOING to CHANGE for the BETTER BEFORE JESUS COMES. HE SAID the SIGNS of HIM COMING AGAIN / RETURNING, WILL BE: The WORLD is getting WORSE!

When JESUS talks about CHANGING the WORLD, HE talks about GOING INTO ALL the PLACES of the WORLD (no borders), ALL PEOPLE, and MAKING DISCIPLES. Changing the WORLD is ONE AT A TIME ... THEN ... JESUS gives us a STRATEGY for HOW to CHANGE the WORLD ONE at a TIME! Ready? LOVE THEM!

Does NOT SOUND like a WORLD CHANGING STRATEGY, but JESUS SAYS it IS! PROBLEM: Because MOST of US have been HURT in our LIVES, LOVE is NOT a NATURAL FIRST RESPONSE. Our FIRST RESPONSE is TAKE CARE of ME and MINE. **We do NOT get EXCITED about GOING and SHOWING LOVE / DOING something KIND FOR PEOPLE we do NOT KNOW, do NOT KNOW WELL, do NOT LIKE, etc.**

WE NATURALLY simply LOOK OUT for OURSELVES. BUT that is NOT how GOD PLANNED US to LIVE.

Merry Christmas Everyone! This MORNING let's ASK JESUS what HE wants for His BIRTHDAY. We PICK it UP in 1st JOHN 4. At the beginning of Chapter 4, JOHN gives WARNING about FALSE PROPHETS and HOW to DISCERN IF they are FALSE. He says IF they do NOT BELIEVE JESUS CAME as a REAL PERSON, they are NOT a TRUE PROPHET. They are SERVING the ENEMY, NOT JESUS.

Then, he CLARIFIES WHO are TRUE FOLLOWERS of JESUS or CHILDREN of GOD. **1 JOHN 4:7-8 = ⁷Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love**

comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ¹ It is WRITTEN NUMEROUS TIMES in the OLD and NEW Testament, and REPEATED HERE, that GOD IS LOVE...

#1 = God Is LOVE

You know what HIT ME again RECENTLY? I'm LIKE My DAD. He's been GONE for 10 YEARS, and I CONTINUE to become MORE and MORE LIKE HIM. The WAY I RESPOND to DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES. How I HANDLE THINGS ... I SEE my DAD. In MINISTRY, I believe I'm ACTING and REACTING MORE like my DAD DID in MINISTRY. As a DAD, I HEAR the WORDS of MY DAD (and Mom) COMING OUT of MY MOUTH.

Do you KNOW WHY I'm LIKE My DAD? I SPENT a LOT of TIME AROUND HIM, LISTENING and LEARNING. NOT ONLY did I SPEND TIME with HIM, I'm FROM HIM ... I was BORN FROM HIM. I have HIS BLOOD in MY VEINS! Listen, HE was SHORT and BALD, but I'M HIS MINI-ME!

If it's NOT BAD ENOUGH I'm turning OUT like my DAD, I'm NOTICING MORE and MORE that EACH of my DAUGHTERS have some THINGS IN THEM like THEIR DAD! Like, SARAH will SOMETIMES just LOOK at ME ... like, THAT is YOU! Do you know WHY my DAUGHTERS sometimes ACT like ME? They spent TIME with ME, and they are BORN from MY BLOOD ... it is IN THEM!

So, IF JESUS says the WORLD NEEDS us to LOVE ... WHERE does that LOVE COME FROM? Verse 7 (John) = ***“LOVE COMES from GOD”***

And the ONLY WAY PEOPLE / The World will EXPERIENCE GOD'S LOVE is for HIS KIDS to LOVE LIKE their HEAVENLY FATHER! According to JESUS through JOHN, IF you are CAPABLE of LOVING OTHERS with a CHRIST-LIKE, UNCONDITIONAL LOVE, it is BECAUSE you are a CHILD of GOD / BORN from ABOVE / BORN AGAIN / SURRENDERED to JESUS and FILLED with HIS SPIRIT (His SPIRIT RUNNING THROUGH your VEINS), so you have *“SPIRIT of JESUS”* FRUIT, which INCLUDES LOVE!

Now, when JESUS talked about LOVING ONE ANOTHER, He talked about LOVING our NEIGHBOR (can't choose ... sworn enemy?), LOVING your ENEMIES, PRAYING for THOSE who PERSECUTE YOU. This LOVE is UNCONDITIONAL. It COMES from the FATHER. And ... THIS is a FAIR TEST ... IF you LOVE in THIS MANNER, THEN you are a CHILD of GOD and you “KNOW” GOD. IF you can NOT LOVE in THIS MANNER, you DO NOT KNOW GOD. STOP FOOLING YOURSELF and ASK JESUS to START FILLING YOURSELF ... with HIS SPIRIT!

Have you ever THOUGHT ABOUT your FIRST REACTION to OTHER PEOPLE? Our FIRST REACTION to OTHERS is WHAT is IN OUR HEARTS. Is our FIRST REACTION to LOVE THEM or to CRITICIZE THEM. IF our FIRST REACTION comes from WHAT is in our HEARTS, we NEED JESUS to FILL us with LOVE for OTHERS ... SEEING OTHER people HOW HE SEES THEM.

Listen, it is DIFFICULT to LOVE in a WORLD FILLED of HATEFUL / CRITICAL / HARSH PEOPLE. But REMEMBER, as John DID, this is JESUS' LAST COMMANDMENT ... LOVE ONE ANOTHER as CHRIST has LOVED YOU. NO CHOICE for FOLLOWERS / DISCIPLES.

Like CHRIST LOVED ME? HOW MUCH did HE LOVE ME? ***1 JOHN 4:9-10 = ⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we***

might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. ²

THAT is OUR BLOODLINE! IF we are BORN AGAIN and we are a CHILD of GOD, then THIS is the KIND of LOVE we SPEND TIME AROUND and WE'VE EXPERIENCED IT ... AND this is what SHOULD be COURSING THROUGH our VEINS! REAL LOVE!

God's LOVE is EXTREME and UNCONDITIONAL. EVIDENCE:

#2 = God SENT His SON

In the OLD TESTAMENT (pre-Jesus in a manger), the HISTORY of The HEBREW people, WE see GOD ATTEMPTING to be IN RELATIONSHIP with His CHOSEN People. It WORKS for a TIME, BUT then The Hebrew People THINK they can HANDLE LIFE without GOD, and they TURN AWAY from GOD. Their LIVES get MESSED UP and GOD COMES to the RESCUE ... REPEAT!

FINALLY, GOD carries OUT His ETERNAL PLAN of SENDING His OWN SON to be FULLY HUMAN so PEOPLE will BETTER KNOW GOD and the LEVEL of GOD'S LOVE for THEM. Through JESUS we EXPERIENCE WHO GOD IS. Jesus said IF we KNOW HIM (Jesus), we KNOW The FATHER. And, THROUGH JESUS' BIRTH, LIFE, and DEATH, God SHOWS US HOW MUCH He LOVES US (John 3:16).

DON'T MISS Verse 10 ... ***"This is REAL LOVE – NOT that WE LOVED GOD (people kept turning their BACKS on God), but that HE LOVED US and SENT His SON as a SACRIFICE to TAKE AWAY our SINS."***

God LOVES US even WHEN we are STILL His ENEMIES. Jesus' SACRIFICE (Death on a Cross) is to TAKE AWAY our SINS. He DIED FOR US while WE were STILL SINNERS! IF we are SINNERS and GOD is HOLY, then we are ENEMIES of GOD. GOD LOVED us enough to SEND His SON to DIE for US WHILE WE were HIS ENEMIES! WHY does JESUS SAY we must LOVE our ENEMIES? Because THAT is GOD'S / JESUS' NATURE. IT is PROOF we are HIS DISCIPLES.

GOD is LOVE and JESUS LOVED US ... FIRST! Now, HOW would JESUS LIKE US to RESPOND? ***1 JOHN 4:11-12 = ¹¹ Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. ¹² No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us. ³***

People can NOT SEE GOD, but they can SEE GOD'S CHILDREN ... IF we ARE God's CHILDREN, then ...

#3 = God LIVES In US

There are MANY of YOU who NEVER MET My DAD. But THIS MORNING you got to SEE SOME of WHO HE WAS because I'M PREACHING. There are PEOPLE out there who will MEET MY DAUGHTERS and NEVER MEET ME, but THEY will KNOW ME.

GOD DESIRES for PEOPLE to KNOW HIM, BUT PEOPLE can NOT SEE GOD.

You will STRUGGLE to EXPLAIN GOD to ANYONE ... to SHARE the ESSENCE of WHO GOD IS. TOO MANY so-called "CHRISTIANS" attempt to SHARE GOD through WORDS / PROTESTS / STANDS / RIGHTS / ARGUMENTS / POSTS. IF THESE are YOUR STRATEGIES to SHARE GOD with THIS WORLD, YOU will FAIL. Jesus TAUGHT the ONLY WAY to SHOW PEOPLE you are HIS FOLLOWERS and WHO GOD IS ... ***"LOVE ONE ANOTHER"***, NOT like the WORLD UNDERSTANDS LOVE, but ***"LIKE I (Jesus) HAVE LOVED YOU, you MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER."***

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). <http://www.tyndale.com/translation> [1 in 4:9-10]. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

² Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). <http://www.tyndale.com/translation> [1 in 4:11-12]. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Listen, IF we DO NOT continue to DISCOVER HOW (through His Spirit) to LOVE EACH OTHER, we are NOT ONLY STABBING other PEOPLE in the BACK, BUT WE ALSO STAB GOD in the BACK.

JESUS SACRIFICED Himself at CHRISTMAS and at EASTER. EASTER on a CROSS and CHRISTMAS when HE CHOSE to GIVE UP His RIGHTS to HIMSELF as KING of KINGS and LORD of LORDS and be BORN as a HUMAN BABY in a LOWLY MANGER. GOD GAVE His SON ... What is His RETURN on INVESTMENT with YOU?

ALL JESUS wants for CHRISTMAS is for US to LOVE EACH OTHER. WILL WE?

When I was a KID, we LIVED in the COUNTRY and had APPLE TREES around our HOUSE and in the BACK of our PROPERTY. When my MOM was READY to make APPLESAUCE, she would SEND me to the BACK of the PROPERTY TREES to PICK. Those TREES were LOADED! And I could NOT PICK them ALL. I'd PICK and PICK and LOOK UP and think, "*WHERE are they ALL COMING FROM?*"

This CHRISTMAS SEASON is LIKE that TREE. As we LOOK for OPPORTUNITIES to LOVE ONE ANOTHER and LOVE the LEAST and the LOST ... there are NUMEROUS OPPORTUNITIES. When you GO SHOPPING, FIND WAYS to LOVE OTHERS ... to BLESS THEM. Make The DAY BETTER for OTHER SHOPPERS!

PLENTY of PEOPLE need some JOY in their LIVES. Get CREATIVE and BRING some JOY! We have OPPORTUNITIES LOCALLY to BLESS people through our FOOD PANTRY and GIVING TREES (Locally). *1 JOHN 4:13-16 = ¹³ And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. ¹⁴ Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ All who declare that Jesus is the Son of God have God living in them, and they live in God. ¹⁶ We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. ⁴*

We're reminded to CONTINUE to GROW in our FAITH and SHARE it with OTHERS! We LOVE ONE ANOTHER, as JESUS LOVES US. We get to GO into ALL the WORLD and LOVE PEOPLE through our SPECIAL OFFERING at CHRISTMAS. We SUPPORT ORPHANAGES in SE ASIA (Burma / Cambodia) with our GIVING ... MATCH GIFTED!

SEE CATALOG! WATCH!

Let's Pray!

Next Steps: *Memorize 1 John 4:9-10*
Read 1 John 4
Invite someone to Worship with you

Hosting (Closing)

HEY, it has been a GREAT DAY here at BMZ... Glad you've been here with us!
In a moment, we are going to RECEIVE the OFFERING so please take this time to finish COMPLETING any information

- Or NEXT STEPS on your CONNECTION CARD (**FULLY FILLED OUT!!**)
- AND when our ushers come around to RECEIVE our OFFERING
- You can drop that card in the offering basket.

IF you are a First-Time Guest with us today

• We are so glad you joined us ... And we have a GIFT for you.
It's this book "**UNSHAKABLE**" and it's at the BACK TABLE / By the DOORS...

- all you need to do is HIT "**SEND**" your COMPLETED Connection Card

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As our ushers GET READY to come forward

- I just want to remind you ... STEWARDSHIP is DISCIPLESHIP ... we RECEIVE an OFFERING EVERY Sunday BECAUSE it's BIBLICAL ... AND it HELPS us GROW in our FAITH!
- STEWARDSHIP VERSE ... 1 JOHN 4:11 =¹¹ *Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.*
- FIRST of our EARNINGS go back to the ONE who Blessed us in the first place! That's why WE/I do Automated Giving! I get paid ... the TITHE comes OUT FIRST!
- God's plan for BUILDING His Church was through TITHING and GIVING of the FOLLOWERS ... Share the GOOD NEWS! To REFRESH OTHERS!
- As Developing Followers of Jesus Christ, WE need to KNOW what the BIBLE says about GIVING ... NOT just what we THINK it should say.
- **MONEY is a HEART ISSUE.** And GOD wants what is BEST for your HEART! Listen, if GOD LOVES US so much that HE is willing to GIVE UP His OWN SON FOR US, WHY would GOD LEAD us ASTRAY in FINANCES?! USHERS ...
- Next Week: **ALL I WANT for CHRISTMAS... A LIFETIME / ETERNITY of FAITH!**

"Truth without Grace is Fundamentalism (Brutality). Grace without Truth is Sentimentalism (Hypocrisy)."

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