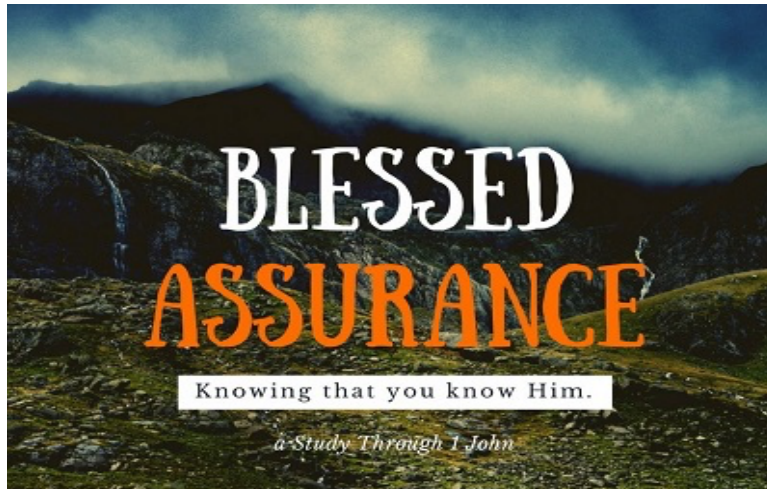


Love Does



Bro. Kory Cunningham
1 John 3:11-24

This week I got to check off one of my bucket list things that I have wanted to do for a very, very long time. My sister-in-law was getting married in Northern California so we booked flights to go out there. I told Katie since we are going to Northern California and I am performing a wedding, we are going to add some days on this because there is a place in California that I have wanted to visit basically all of my adult life. That place is Yosemite National Park. She agreed and on Monday we made the trek from Northern California to Yosemite. It was about a six hour drive, a lot longer than we thought. The boys were troopers. Evie Kate flew home with Katie's parents so we just had the three boys. So when we get to Yosemite, we go to the valley floor and spent all night in the valley, and the next morning we wake up, I walk outside, and I cannot believe my eyes. I am an outdoorsy guy. I love national parks. I love going and seeing outdoor things. This is perhaps the most beautiful place in all of the world. I walk out and I am mesmerized. I cannot believe my eyes. I cannot fathom that we are actually here and get to spend three days in Yosemite. I am like a kid in a candy store. This is the most exciting week of my life. So, when we go to get breakfast I start asking every single person, I am asking the guy sweeping the floor, "What do I need to see? What are the

best hikes? What are the best trails?" We walk through the line, I am paying for our breakfast, and I ask the guy who is taking the money the same thing. I ask every local person who is working there because I am thinking they have the inside scoop. They know what I have to see. They would respond with things like, "Oh well, Yosemite Falls is good. You should do Mist Trail. You want to see Half Dome. You should do this trail or this hike, it is pretty good." That was their reaction and it was not at all how I thought they should be reacting. I am thinking they should be jumping up and down and saying... *You are not going to believe this... take this hike! When you get to this point and look at it, you will just die!* That is what I was expecting because they are living in my dream world, Yosemite National Park. This is as good as it gets. They live there! Every morning they wake up and they see what I am looking at right now, but for them it was common. It was as normal as could be. Their sense of excitement and wonder was sort of lost because they are around it all of the time. They see it day in and day out.

When I saw their reaction, the Lord began to convict me a little bit to wonder if that is not how I sometimes am when it comes to the gospel. Perhaps that is where you are sometimes when it comes to the gospel. I mean, if you have been a Christian for a while, you know that story when Jesus redeemed you from your sin. You got forgiveness and new life and eternity with the God of the universe. You have reconciliation. You have a family now. You are part of the bride of Christ. You are part of the redemption story. You saw all of that wonder and grandeur and it changed your life. You were excited! You were like me at Yosemite for a few moments, but maybe this morning it is just church. It is Sunday morning and this is that thing we do. We kind of mumble through the songs or yawn a little bit because we are around it all of the time. We see it all of the time. It has become normal and commonplace instead of extraordinary and epic. I just want to ask this morning, are you more like the workers at Yosemite who are like yeah, this is cool? Or, are you more like I was this week when it comes to the things of the Lord — you still cannot get over them? You still look at the mountain of God's love and it just blows you away! You want to tell people and be excited about how great God is.

See, what I think John is going to do this morning is compel us to love each other. I think what he is going to do is try to get us to love each other by making sure we don't forget about the wonder of God's love. God has loved us, God has given His life for us, so that is our motivation for loving each other. I pray this morning that we would get a sense of wonder just like I did this week. When I looked out and saw what I saw, I wanted to go hike and experience everything I could. It caused me to move and do. My prayer this morning is when you see the love of God it causes you to move and do. It causes you to want to love your brothers and sisters in Christ like God has loved you. We will read the first verse together and then just keep your Bibles open and we will walk through the rest of the text verse by verse.

Scripture

"For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

John starts out with giving us a command. We have the message. We have a word. We have a command. What is it that we have heard from the beginning? What exactly is the beginning? I mean, John is referencing the beginning, so what is the command from the beginning? He doesn't really say, but I think it could be argued it is all of the way back to the garden because the next verse we are going to see talks about Cain and Abel who were in the garden. From the beginning, it was how things were supposed to be. When God created the world, He created you to love Him and to love each other — that was our default position. When God created mankind, He created us to love one another, to be sacrificial with one another, that you would look at your brother and your sister and want to love them like God is loving you. That is how God created humanity to respond to each other.

You have some other beginnings like the beginning of the Law. You have the Ten Commandments and half of them are about loving God, the other half is about loving each other. Here is how you love one another: you

don't murder, you don't steal, and you don't lie. Then we see the beginning of the gospel. When Jesus came what did He tell the disciples? Love one another because by this the world is going to know that you are mine. It is by the way you love each other. So, we have the garden beginning, the Law beginning, and the gospel beginning. We have all of these with the same message, this overarching theme of the Bible — love God and love each other. It is a huge theme throughout Scripture and John is reminding us of that — you have heard it from the beginning. Here is the command. You should love one another.

How are you doing with that command? It is a very simple command. Love one another. He is not talking about loving the world, loving the outsiders. That is a command from Scripture, but right now he is dealing with us, the church. How are you loving people within this body? How are you loving other believers in Christ? Can you really say you are loving other brothers and sisters in Christ? Or, would you say you don't really know and are kind of ignoring us and don't really engage anyone? How are you doing with your love? John is going to walk us through because he wants us to love one another! This is beginning stuff. This is creation stuff. This is the things that God wants us to do, to love one another.

In order to get us to love each other, John is going to tell us what not to do. The first thing he is going to say is don't be like Cain, that is what we see in verse 12, "We should not be like Cain." When you are loving, don't be like Cain. What was wrong with Cain? He tells us in the rest of verse 12, "...who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous." You have heard the saying "Don't raise Cain," and it comes from this story of Cain and Abel, the first brothers in the Bible after the fall. Adam and Eve sinned against God and the garden is wrecked. It is cursed with sin now. Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve's sons, go to bring a sacrifice before God. Abel brings a right sacrifice, an animal, and Cain brings some grain. He is a farmer so he brings his grain before the Lord, but it is not an acceptable sacrifice. God rejects Cain's sacrifice and He accepts Abel's sacrifice. He tells Cain what he is doing is not good and he actually has sin that is

creeping into his heart. Instead of repenting before the Lord and making it right, instead of celebrating his brother and repenting for his own lack, what does he do? He looks at his brother and he wants what his brother has. He sees Abel as being accepted before the Lord because of his sacrifice. He sees that and is jealous. He is angry. He says I want to have a right sacrifice, I want to be accepted before God, I want what Abel has, so the motivation to go and kill his brother was jealousy. He doesn't love Abel and he doesn't want to serve him. He wants what Abel has, so he plans to murder him so that there will be no competition. He thinks he will have to be accepted because he has gotten rid of his brother. So we see this love that Cain has was love that was all about self. He loved himself. When he looked at his brother he didn't think, how can I serve you, how can I engage you, how can I lay down my life for you; he saw how can I use you to get what I want. It caused jealousy so he tried to take it through taking the life of his own brother. God intended us to love Him and love each other perfectly. You have the fall and with the first two brothers Cain murdering his brother Abel. Why? It is because he was not filled with God's love. In fact, John says he was of the evil one. So, he was siding with the serpent. He was siding with Satan. Instead of having God's love, he had selfish love within his own heart. He was all about him and it led him to jealousy and murder.

So, just looking at that, is that a mirror of the way you love? Think about the body of Christ. Think about the people in this room. When you interact with people, do you act to celebrate them, get excited about them, serve them, lay your life down for them, and to learn from them? Or, do you only look at others in this body and feel jealousy towards them? You see they have a perfect marriage — why can I not have what they have? Instead of celebrating a relationship they are in and asking for advice, you hate them for it because you wish you had what they have. Maybe from the outside, it looks like they are doing better than you, and instead of being excited, you are angry, jealous, and bitter. Maybe you don't take a knife and kill them, but you certainly wish they were dead because then your life would seem a little bit better. When you look at so and so it looks like they have it

all and it looks like you don't, and you want it all so you want what they have.

See, that is the world's love. This love this side of the garden, this is love that we inherited through sin. It is love that loves self above all. If you are not born again of God, this is how we, by default, love. We love ourselves and we look around and are jealous of everyone else, so we don't serve and love. Instead, we want and we take, and we manipulate situations so that we are lifted up. That is sort of the natural order. That is why John is going to say in verse 13, "Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you." The world is also in line with Cain. What did Cain do? His deeds were evil, his brother's were righteous, so he hated him and murdered him. In that scenario, in the world system, we have a world that has evil deeds and those who look at us as this bright light that tells them maybe what they are doing is not ok. Maybe there is an actual thing that they should be doing and they know that they are not doing that. They know they fall short of that. Instead of celebrating you and saying, I am excited for you, your life looks great, they are probably going to hate you for it. So don't be surprised when the world hates you because they are in line with Cain and you are in line with Abel. Remember, it didn't go well for Abel; Abel got killed. It didn't go well for Jesus; Jesus got killed. So don't be surprised when the world hates us for the lives that we live because sometimes our righteous deeds shed lights on evil deeds and that causes jealousy, anger, and hate.

Then John says this, "We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever doesn't love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." He is saying your love reveals life. The way you love reveals if you have life or if you don't have life. He says if you are hating and you are jealous and it is leading you to wish people were dead, then you can be sure you don't have eternal life in you. That is his argument. If you are not loving the body of Christ, if you are instead jealous and in contempt with the body of Christ, then you can be sure you don't have eternal life. Because those who are born of God do

what? Love the family of God. That is his logic. If you are born of God, and God loves you and you love God, then the natural response is you are going to love the body of Christ. So, first, don't be like Cain. How did Cain love? It was all about himself. It led to jealousy and it led to wishing others were dead and even murdering his brother. Don't love like that. How are we supposed to love? Instead of like Cain, selfish love, love like Jesus — that was a sacrificial love. That is going to be his argument. Don't love like Cain, instead love like Jesus. We are going to see that in verse 16 in just a moment.

Before we talk about this, let us talk about love for just a second because love is sort of a cultural buzz word. We want to love. We are excited about love. As we were leaving Yosemite, there is a big stop sign and on the sign, there is a big sticker slapped on it that said, "Vote for Love." We want to do that! We want to vote for love. We have sayings in our culture like love is love. Let's be loving. Let's just love everyone. In a cultural sense, love is basically accepting everyone for whatever they want to do and never pointing out wrong in anyone else. That is basically what love is to our culture. It is tolerance. Celebrate everyone for everything they want to do for whatever reason and never say anything negative about anyone else. Hate is the opposite of that. Hate is actually telling someone no, I actually think you are wrong. That is hate.

So culturally, love is you do you and I will do me and let's be happy. Let's apply this to a family because I don't think it is love. Katie and I are parents. We have four kids, so let's apply that to our kids. I am going to love my kids in a true love sense, culturally. So, I am going to tell my kids whatever you want to do I am going to celebrate it. You do you and I am going to be happy for you. Whatever you want, I will celebrate that. I am not going to ever say you are wrong. I am never going to try and adjust your behavior. Well, you know that is not going to go well if you are a parent, right? Number one, bedtimes are now out of the window. There is no bedtime. Crider will never go to sleep and he will always look like a zombie because he is not going to go to bed. He is going to say he doesn't need a bedtime. "Ok, that is cool, whatever you think. You are your own

person and I am not going to judge or tell you what you need to do, so you just do whatever you want." When it comes to breakfast time, they come into the kitchen, "Hey, what do you guys want for breakfast?" "Umm, the candy bowl." "Ok, here you go. Do you want to brush your teeth?" "No." "Do you want to take a bath?" "No." "Do you want to go to school?" "No." "Do you want to play video games today?" "YEP!" "Ok, I am not going to say anything. I am not going to judge you. You just do whatever you want to do." Now, would that be loving as a parent? Absolutely not! It would destroy their lives very quickly. Their teeth would rot out. People would not be able to get around them because of the stench. Part of loving them is correcting them and pointing out things — you can't do this; you must do this because life depends on it. So love is not just celebrating everything and everyone. No, love is actually being able to have truth. Truth and love both together is what the Bible will call love.

Now, John is even going to get a little deeper. He is not just going to say love is an attitude towards people; he is actually going to say what DC Talk coined in a song that I love called, "Love is a Verb." Love is a verb; it is action. It does something and here is what we see love is in verse 16, "By this we know love..." John is going to define it for us. In case you are fuzzy about love, it is not just a Hallmark card — we have seen it, we have engaged it, we have touched it, and we have been changed by it. Here is what love is, "...that he laid down His life for us." That is how John defines love. Again, it is a verb; it is action. Just think about that. Love is that Jesus laid down His life for us. Imagine that. The God of all creation became part of creation. He humbled Himself. He left Heaven, His throne room, He came and was not born in a castle; He was born in a stable with animals and livestock. He didn't have palace guards around Him. There were shepherds that came and visited Him. Jesus humbled Himself and became a man and He lived life just like you and I. He fought temptation just like you and I. He was hungry. He was thirsty. He was tired. All of those emotions that you and I have, Jesus, God in flesh, came and endured those for us because He knew we had a need. We had a need of redemption so He came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. That is what love is, and it was that love that led

Him to endure a cross, one of the worst forms of punishment to death that is known to mankind. He suffered on a cross. He bled and He died. He was beaten. He was crucified. Why? Because we needed redemption. We needed to be reconciled back to the Father. He gave Himself, He emptied Himself, He poured His life out for us! He gave the ultimate sacrifice for you and I and that is what John says love is. It is a little four letter word but it is so much more than that. It is so much deeper. It is agape love, and that is what Christ did for us.

So, what do we do with that? John connects the two — here is what Jesus did and here is what you are to do. Just look at how the verse connects. It says, “and.” So, Jesus died for us “...**and** we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” Whoa! That is big stuff. That is a big statement. John connects the dots. He says here is love, you know it, you felt it, and you have been redeemed by it if you are a Christian. God gave His life for you, that is what love looks like. That is what it is. If you have felt that and know it and God’s love is in your heart, you go do the same. You give your life for the sake of the brothers and the sisters in Christ. That is what you are to do, just like Jesus did. It was not a Cain love that was all about himself, jealousy, and wishing people dead. No, it was a sacrificial love that looked at others and wanted their best interest, to put their interest above your own. In humility, you serve other. You meet the needs of others. You give of your resources to help the brothers and sisters in Christ. It is beholding God’s love that leads you to love one another well.

Then he gives us a little example of this in an illustration of how this cannot be. He says this in verse 17, “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?” He gives an example to show us what love is — it is Christ giving His life for you; you go do the same. Now, I want to give you a crazy scenario. Imagine if a brother or a sister had many worldly goods. They had food, money, clothes, possessions, a house, and shelter. Imagine if a brother or a sister had all of those things and then there was another brother or sister who didn’t have food, who needed clothes, who needed shelter, and needed a little bit of money, and you have a bank full

of money. You look at that brother or sister and say, "No, I have to keep my stuff and I can't give to them." John says how can that be? How could that scenario work logically if that person knows the love of God? God left Heaven to die on a cross to save you, so how could you, who has felt that love and experienced that love, not also be willing to sacrifice a little bit for somebody else? How could you not be willing to sacrifice some of your resources to help a brother or a sister in need?

One of the biggest resources that cost you is your time. That is one of the biggest resources that we lack. We all lack time. We are busy, too busy to help, too busy to reach out, and too busy to serve. So we hoard our time, we spend it on ourselves, and we withhold serving our brothers and sisters in Christ. What John says is this in verse 18, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." That is a powerful verse. John says don't love in talk and words. I am sure John heard it all of the time, people saying they love people, but not actually loving people. He says I don't care what you say, what we want is gospel love. It DOES. It MOVES. It is an action. It is a verb. It is a love that Jesus loved us with. He didn't just say for God so loved the world...no, it is AND He gave His only Son! There is an action to that. So, it is not just *saying*, "I love the body of Christ," it is how do you put that in *action*? What are you *doing* to actually serve the brothers and sisters in Christ? I think to actually do this there are three things that must happen in your life for you to serve other people.

First, you have to use your eyes to see. You have to see the needs that are going on in this body to love like John is talking about. You have to open your eyes to the needs of the brothers and sisters in the church. You see them! But then also, you have a heart and your heart has to open up. John says don't close your heart but open your heart up, open your heart up so that you actually have compassion. You have love and you want to go and serve them. Then, with an open heart, it moves to your hands. You actually go and meet that need. That is what gospel love looks like. You see it, you feel it, it moves you to compassion, and then you go and meet that need.

See, one of the joys of being a pastor at this church is getting to see this work at a 10,000-foot elevation. It is incredible to get to see the way you guys love one another. It sometimes just blows me away. There are times that, as a pastor, we try to do pastoral care, we try to check on people and serve people, but there are a lot of you. Sometimes I will make a phone call that is a week late. I remember I was calling an individual whose father had passed away. We had some things going on and I was actually out of town and missed the visitation and the funeral. I didn't get to call him until about a week later after his father had passed away. I felt like a failure as a pastor. I called and just said, "Look, I know I missed the funeral and the visitation. I am sorry that I am just now calling you! I have been thinking about you and I have been praying about you, but I just now got to call you." Do you know what the guy said? He said, "Pastor, I appreciate you calling me, but here is what I want you to know. I want you to know how well this church has loved me. I have had people who have visited me, I have had food brought to me, and I have had so many calls, texts, and cards. I just want you to know that I appreciate your call, I do, but I was well taken care of because this body has loved me so well!" That is just one story of one million. It is like any time I call or visit someone they tell me about all of the other people who have called and visited them because we as a church love one another. I think it is part of the DNA of Hardin. We love each other because hopefully we know the gospel, we have felt the gospel, and we see it. So, I get to see this all of the time and it is one of the joys of watching you guys love one another.

Now, I just want to pause for a moment here because I think this is the crucial verse in this text. This is what John has been thrusting out. He wants us to love like Jesus, and it is not just in word, it is in deed and in truth. It is serving each other. It is giving of ourselves, our time, our energy, our resources, and our prayers to actually serve other people. So, I just want to ask the question, how do we actually practically do this? How do you practically love the body of Christ? This is the 9:15 service. There are several hundred people in here. Just look around; there are a lot of us. Imagine if this week every person in here had a need. Here is a reality check. You cannot meet everyone's need in this room and guess what?

There are two more services! There is a service before and a service after. Imagine if all of them had a crisis this week and fifteen hundred people had a need! You cannot meet it; it is impossible. But there is some good news there because Jesus can and He does. Right? He is the Savior. He is God. We are not. So we are not saying for you to love *everyone* in this kind of way, where you are noticing needs, you are using your resources, and then you are meeting those needs. One of the things we say at Hardin is, as we grow larger, we have to also grow smaller. This is very important for us to get our mind around. Maybe you came from a church that had twenty-five people on a Sunday morning where you could look around and say if anybody has a need I have got you. You can't do that at Hardin. It is impossible. What we have to do at Hardin is to find our people. This is really important. As we grow larger, we have to grow smaller. So, step one in loving people like John is calling you to love is you have to find your people. You have to find some people in this body that you have genuine friendship with, you have a genuine discipleship relationship with where you are in each other's' lives, you know each other, you are talking about life, and things are happening. Then you hear of needs they have and you meet that need. You can't know a need if you don't know somebody, and you cannot know somebody just by coming to a really large gathering like this. It is really hard so we have to find our people. We have to find some folks that you know in this body where you can say, "I got you. I am going to serve you. I am going to meet your needs. I am going to pray for you. If you need something then you let me know." Then you love those people extremely well. If we all do that in smaller, little knit communities, we see that the love John is talking about can take place.

So how do you do this? Well, tonight at 5:00 we have community fellowships. That would be a great place to start. If you know zero people in this congregation, I urge you to come tonight, put a nametag on, and go meet some people. Just say, "I need a friend. What is your name? Ok Bob, let's be buddies!" Then you just follow Bob around the rest of the night and you have a friend! Get to know someone! A lot of this happens organically. You have been coming for a while, you have met some people, you know some folks, and then now you find yourself texting them, calling them,

serving them, and looking out for them. If they are in the hospital, you are going to be there before we are because you love them! But for some of us, you have been coming for a while and it has not happened naturally. You still don't know anybody. So, we have some systems in place for you. One of the great ways to find some people in this body to really connect with deeply is to serve on a team. Cook a meal on Wednesday nights. I guarantee you will get to know those people on the cooking team. Or greet people as they come in. You will get to know the greeters. Serve in the Farm. Be a teacher to a small group in the Farm and then you are serving kids and teaching them the gospel, but you are also be getting peers to know and communicate with. You start praying with those teachers and texting those teachers throughout the week. Then, all of a sudden, they have a need or you have a need and you get to gospel love them. You get to actually meet those needs and care for them. Maybe it is going to Sunday school. Just walk in, sit down, and start talking to somebody. It might take you a few weeks to actually get friendship in there, but I promise you, if you are in a Sunday school, you are going to start hearing prayer requests. You are going to start hearing needs. You are going to start hearing about tragedies that are happening so you get to help real people with real issues and really have gospel love and community with those people. Maybe it is a small group. Maybe you meet in your home, maybe you meet here, but it is a small group of people that you say these are the ones I am going to gospel love. Now, we love everybody! I am not saying just ignore people when you come to worship. No, we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, but to truly do this kind of love you need to have some genuine friendship within this body so you see a need that you can actually minister to. That is where we see the body of Christ working together, ministering together, which is what Ephesians says actually builds up the church. So, find your people and then start serving them well like John is talking about.

John is going to tell us when we start loving each other in a dynamic way it actually gives us confidence before the Lord. I love this! Here is what he says in the next verse, verses 19–21, "By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him; for whenever our heart

condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything. Beloved, if your heart doesn't condemn us, we have confidence before God." I think John is saying he wants us to have confidence before God, but often we feel condemned before God. Our hearts condemn us. We know our thoughts last night, we know that we still have desires for things that we should not, we know that we still mess up, and we are not pursuing Christ perfectly. Sometimes we come before the Lord saying, God, I am just a failure! So we don't have confident hearts. We need to be reassured that we know the Lord. What does John say? Here is what reassures you, here is how you know you are in the truth — it is that you love the body of Christ. If you love the body of Christ well, you can know you are in Christ. Yes, I still desire sometimes those things of my old past, but God is greater than my heart. I remember the gospel. Jesus died for that. I have been cleansed of that and I have been made new so I have confidence before God because I have love for God and love for His people and that comes from the Spirit. That is not something of my flesh. That is not something of me.

So, John says you can have confidence before the Lord. Confidence is a big deal. Think about in athletics. You can just see when a player goes on the court and his or her confidence is gone. What happens? They miss shots. They miss dribbles. Nothing is clicking. But when somebody goes out there with confidence and then they hit that first three point shot, what happens? They light it up the rest of the game. Confidence is such a huge issue, and what John says is I want you to have confidence before the Lord. Why? So you are not shrinking back in shame and not living a loud life for Jesus. Instead, be confident so that you can live a life for Christ and be bold in coming before the Lord with prayers. Here is what John says about our confidence when we come before God, verse 22, "...and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do what pleases Him." As we have confidence before the Lord, it leads us to bold prayers. We actually pray to the Lord for things and it says whatever we ask for we receive. That is pretty cool. So right now, whatever kind of car you really want, just pray it and it is going to be in the parking lot when you leave. There is your verse! Claim it! You got it!

NO! That is not what he is saying. He is connecting that what we pray about is in conjunction with how we keep His commands and the way we love others. There is this connection. In others words, as we walk with the Lord and do what pleases Him, we begin to pray the kind of prayers that God wants us to pray. We pray for things like this...*God help me be patient with so and so. Father, help me to overcome this sin. Help me to fight this temptation right now. Help me to have a brokenness for the lost. Please save my coworker.* Those are the kind of prayers with confidence that God wants to answer because you are walking and you are pleasing God with your life...*Come before me and pray them and you will see that they will be answered. I will give you peace. I will give you patience. I will give you boldness.*

Then, John says in verse 23, "And this is His commandment..." So what are the commandments? Is it talking about the Ten Commandments? What are the commandments that we are supposed to be doing? "...that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He commanded us." Here is the command — believe in Jesus. What does the belief in Jesus do? It leads to love for one another. So these are not burdensome commands. This is Christianity. We believe in the Lord and we love the bride of Christ. As we do these, verse 24 says, "Whoever keeps His commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us." So, if you are believing in Jesus and loving the body, you can have confidence that God is in you and you are in God. You can have confidence because you have the Holy Spirit living inside of you.

How do we know we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us? I mean, there is not a test. When I was in youth ministry, I dreamed of a tester for the Holy Spirit. That would be awesome! There is not a DNA test for the Holy Spirit. How do you know? It is sort of subjective. Well, John gives an objective test. Here is how you know you have the Holy Spirit: you love the brothers and sisters in Christ. You love them like this — you serve them, you give your life for the sake of them. That is how you know. Why is that

a telltale sign? You know you have God's love in you because it is pouring out through you in the way you are loving each other.

See, for me this week, when I was in Yosemite, I was mesmerized by everything around me. I couldn't get enough of it, but for everyone else it was commonplace because they were used to it. Here is what I don't want this morning; I don't want the love of God to just be normal to us. I want it to be extraordinary that we gaze at the love of God and it so overwhelms us that it leads us to do something. It leads us to love one another like Christ has loved us, not just in word, not just in talk, but in deed and in truth. So, here is the question. How are you loving? How are you loving the body of Christ this morning?