



LOVE

ADVENT | Week 4

Ask any 5th grader you can find and have them finish this sentence, “God is _____.” Nine out of 10 will say, “love.”

You can find the origin of this sentence in the first letter that the Gospel writer John wrote. It says this,

“God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:8-10, ESV).

Notice that John writes, “in this is love...” twice. He wants us to look into what he is describing so that we can rightly see what “love” really means.

The first part of love’s meaning is seen in God sending His only Son into the world. That is what we celebrate on Christmas. The Son of God stepped out of eternity into history. Jesus entered the world as one of us. He became one of us. God became man. He gave Himself to us. You can’t truly know what love means unless you know and believe the Christmas story.

The second part of John’s teaching on love comes in verse 10, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Not only did God give Himself to us in giving us His Son, but He also gave Himself for us in sending His Son to be the *sacrifice for our sin*.

Christmas and the cross come together to show us what it means that, “God is love.” As we peer into the wooden manger this season, may we be reminded of the wooden cross as well.

Because, “in this is love...”

In the Midst of Love

“Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!
The Lord has taken away the judgments against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil.
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
“Fear not, O Zion;
let not your hands grow weak.
The Lord your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.”

Zephaniah 3:14-17 (ESV)

Have you ever been in the room when a new parent holds their baby for the first time? Or have you ever seen a groom's face when the bridal march begins to

play and he sees his bride for the first time? If you've experienced either of these events, you've been in the presence of true love.

There's no way to explain or prepare someone for how love feels. An expectant mother might try to imagine what it will be like to hold her baby in her arms. But until you've experienced that moment, there's really no way to understand the immediate and unconditional love between mother and child. A young couple might ask how they will know if they're truly in love, but we all know the only answer that makes any sense is just that, "when you know, you know."

Just like a sudden flash of light heightens our awareness of darkness, walking through a period of pain or suffering intensifies our recognition of love. When the world around us is oppressive and difficult, we can more clearly see and feel the love of God wrapped around us like a blanket. While it may not change our circumstances, we find peace and comfort knowing we are in the presence of our loving Father.

Zephaniah 3 is a window into what it will look and feel like to be fully restored to our Lord God. This passage helps us understand how God's great love provides a path to salvation from our deserved fate, and restores us to the perfect love we can find only in the presence of our Holy Father.

For more than three chapters, Zephaniah reads like the script for an epic battle scene where the enemy will be literally wiped from the face of the earth. Zephaniah prophesied of the Lord's coming judgement of sin. He specifically calls out the nations of Judah and Israel and gives them a warning to turn from their idolatrous ways before the Lord's wrath falls upon them. He urges them to seek the Lord and to seek righteousness and humility (Zeph. 2:3).

But in the middle of chapter 3, the narrative shifts to a theme of restoration and salvation for the people of Israel and all whose hope and trust is in the Lord. After the storm of judgement, Zephaniah's tone turns to one of rejoicing and even exuberance. "Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel!" (Zeph. 3:1, NIV). The Lord has literally turned their mourning into dancing (Ps. 30:11) and wiped away all their wrongs. He cleans the slate, grants a full pardon, and best of all, He now resides in their midst. They no longer have any reason to fear or mourn because the Lord Himself is their Champion, the Warrior who stands among them as King, Protector, and Savior.

"... He is more than the King who protects them; He is also the Father who dearly loves them."

But He is more than the King who protects them; He is also the Father who dearly loves them. While He is the mighty warrior who will save them, in verse 17 he goes on to describe a scene that puts all the greatest love stories to shame: "He will rejoice

over you with gladness; He will quiet you by His love; He will exult over you with loud singing.”

The original Hebrew name for Emmanuel literally translates, “God with us.” This was the name prophesied in the Old Testament for the coming Messiah. The birth of Jesus in Bethlehem literally put God right in our midst. The gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost keeps God in the midst of all believers for all time (Acts 2:1-4).

Rejoice, oh brothers and sisters in Christ! The Lord your God is in your midst, and He has rescued you; He sings over you; and takes great delight in you. We are in the presence of the greatest love that has ever been or ever will be, and it is perfect, redemptive, and directed right at us. *O come, O come Emmanuel.*

Further Reflection | Individual Study Questions

1. How has the Lord’s presence “in the midst” of your life been evident?
2. What should be your response to God’s great love for you?
3. Have you ever been quieted by the Lord’s love? In contrast, have you ever felt the exuberance or loudness of His love over you (see v. 17)?

Further Reflection | Family Study Questions

1. How do you most often experience the love of the Lord?
2. As a family, how can you carve out time to reflect and discuss specific evidences of the Lord’s presence in your lives?
3. Would your daily life look different if you truly believed the Lord was in your midst?

Notes:

Year: _____

Year: _____

Year: _____

