

Complete Joy: Loving Like Jesus

1 John 2:3-17; 3:11-24 (NIV)

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. ⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹ But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them. ¹² I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. ¹³ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁴ I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. ¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. ¹⁸ For this is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. ¹⁹ Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. ²⁰ Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you. ²¹ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ²² Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him. ²³ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ²⁴ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? ²⁵ Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth. ²⁶ This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁷ If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²⁸ Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God ²⁹ and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him. ³⁰ And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ³¹ The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us.

The Apostle John wrote this letter to make our joy - his and all believers, including us - complete. It began with loving fellowship – the fellowship we have with God because he is our atoning sacrifice who has purified us from all unrighteousness and the fellowship we have with one another as God joins us together as people who believe that he is our atoning sacrifice. But John didn't stop writing there. While loving fellowship, what else goes to make our joy complete?

"But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." (chapter 2 verses 5-6) Another piece in making our joy complete is living as Jesus did. Part of that is fellowship as we touched on the fact that Jesus gathered with people, broke bread with them.

But the phrase living like Jesus can feel too broad to apply. So, John specifies, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth." (chapter 3 verses 16-18) Loving like Jesus is not just saying it, but doing it. Jesus laid down his life so that we would belong to him, have fellowship with him, having our sins atoned for, paid in full by him with nothing else owed. To make our joy complete, we are to love others just like Jesus loved us, loving not just with words. Words are important. They stick with you. They can lift us up. But our words and actions have to go hand in hand.

Often at a funeral you hear someone coming up to the bereaved and tell them, "If there's anything you need, you just let me know." It's a well-meaning offer. They want to do something to alleviate this person's suffering, but they have no idea how to do that. To love like Jesus and make our joy complete is to get more specific. Don't just leave a blank check offer that you know this person will never cash. Offer to sit with them. Offer to take them out to lunch or to bring lunch to them, eat with them. Offer to mow their lawn. If you're handy, offer to take a look at any projects they have around the house. Follow up. Maybe even wait a couple of weeks after the funeral and make any of these offers again because by that time most of the other support that came in for the funeral have gone home. That person's life has drastically changed and they're going to be struggling with just living day to day. They may just want company. And if they do take you up on the offer, let them know that you're happy to be there having a meal with them, sharing some jokes, listening about how they're feeling (even as it makes you uncomfortable because you can't fix it), or just sitting with them so that they're not alone. You don't need to fix their grief. They need someone to love them not just with words or offers that are well-meaning but not actionable but with actions. Being there, letting them talk, sharing your life with them, this is fellowship and this is loving like Jesus loved. Even as it hurts, it brings us joy to be with people. It makes God's purpose realized in our lives to love them with actions like Jesus did. They in turn have joy with someone loving them like Jesus did.

Loving like Jesus also means making sure that our love is directed to the right places. “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” (chapter 2 verses 15-16) When we use the word “love,” are we talking about how we, with our actions, put others ahead of ourselves or that we follow and pursue what pleases us? When we say that we love someone, is that because we serve them ahead of ourselves or is it because we are being served? Do we love with the expectation of receiving something from them for myself or do we do things for them expecting nothing in return and not being upset when nothing is return? When we love to get our way, to get what we crave, we are loving the world and not God. Our love is misdirected. In the end, pursuing that love will leave us empty, not complete, because it will pass away one day.

Then there is our complete failure to love. “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness.” (chapter 2 verse 9) Is there someone you hate? Why do you hate them? Is it because they’ve wronged you, cheated on you, insulted you? Is it because they stole your moment, disagreed with you? Do we hate someone because they did something good and that put your actions, your efforts, to shame – like how Cain hated Abel? Do I hate this person because they show me that my goodness is inadequate, lacking and so I hate them for it, picking them apart in my head, nitpicking all of their words and actions, to make me feel a little superior, a little better?

So many times and in so many ways we don’t love like Jesus did. There are times that I say that I love someone but I don’t carry my words through with the actions. There are times when I direct my love to the wrong places, loving the world, what I crave, instead of God. And there are times when I hate. Sometimes I wish I didn’t, and other times I embrace it and stew on it. This leaves us in such a messy, spiritually dangerous place, stumbling around in darkness, losing our way, distancing ourselves from our fellowship with God and others. When we hate a brother or sister, we remain in the death of our sins, on a path to hell, so far away from complete joy. Even scarier, “Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.” (chapter 3 verse 15) Who of us can actually love as Christ loved us? Have this complete joy that John writes for us to have?

John wrote this not to make us despair, but so that we would not sin and thus make our joy complete. “I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning...I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.” (chapter 2 verses 12-13b, 14c) Remember the fellowship you have and love. Remember that Christ is your atoning sacrifice, the one who make complete satisfaction of God’s justice for all the times that we failed to love with action, loved the world instead of God, and hated another person. This is what God tells us when we see our lack of love, truths that we have known since the beginning of our Christian lives.

This Word of God lives in you. It brings us out of stumbling in darkness and right back into fellowship with God when we recall that Christ loved when we did not. He loved not just the people who were nice to him, not just the people who supported him, not just the people who would do things for him, but he also loved those who hated him, those who conspired against him, those who lied about him, those wanted to get rid of him. After their plot succeeded and Jesus died on the cross, he rose again, overcoming death itself, overcoming our lack of love, overcoming the evil one, crushing Satan’s head. We share and love the fellowship that we have with our risen Lord. Because of our fellowship by faith in Christ as our atoning sacrifice, we have overcome and won the victory that he won. This truth is even greater than our hearts which try to condemn us for all our failures to love like Jesus did. Christ’s victory renews our strength, our fellowship with God, and thus makes us strong to love like Jesus loved us.

So, how does loving like Jesus make our joy complete? Well, if you noticed, loving like Jesus sets the expectation that we don’t love in order to be loved back. Because, sadly, the world will still hate us. “Do not be surprised, my brothers and sisters, if the world hates you.” (chapter 3 verse 13) Yet Jesus’ love changes what we expect to happen as we love. Our love is made complete when we love first as Christ loved us, when we love with words and actions, when we love like Jesus by laying down our lives in service to others, showing them God’s love for them. They get to know God’s love when we love them like Jesus. This leads to bringing them into the same fellowship that we love, this same forgiveness, this same eternal life. Loving like Jesus is evidence that we have passed over from death to life. It quiets the accusations of the devil that condemn us for our hate and our misguided love. Loving like Jesus gives us fulfilment in God’s purpose for our lives. On top of all of these things, loving like Jesus outlasts every other kind of love that can be expressed because only God and his love lasts forever.

You have heard from the beginning to love like Jesus, to love as God loved us. This makes our joy complete because it redefines our expectations of love, gives us purpose, and goes to bring people into this same fellowship with God. With Jesus’ love on our minds and hearts, we love like Jesus with words and actions, loving God instead of the passing away world, loving those that we are tempted to hate. Loving like Jesus goes to make our joy complete. Amen.