

## Untangling Christmas

### Week 1: Love

#### 1 John 4:9-10

Raise your hand if you're like me and that video stresses you out! The thought of untangling all of those Christmas lights raises my anxiety levels. I can't do it! I would go out and just buy new ones. So I was shocked to learn last week that there are actually people who enjoy untangling Christmas lights. Anyone in here?

If you enjoy untangling Christmas lights, there is a British supermarket that may have a job for you! Every year around Christmastime, Tesco hires a seasonal employee at their stores whose only job is to untangle Christmas lights that customers bring in. So, while they do their shopping, this person sits in a booth and untangles their lights. It sounds horrible to me, but some of you may be sitting there thinking, "That's my dream job!"

Lights aren't the only thing to get tangled up this time of year. With all the events and get togethers, our calendars can get all discombobulated. It can be hard keeping track of everything we have to do. Presents we still need to buy. What food we need to bring to the party. Wrapping. All of that stuff.

And then there's the relational dynamics of this time of year. Everyone brings in different expectations and traditions. And as your family grows, those become harder and harder to manage and it can create tension.

The Christmas season has a way of getting tangled up with all of these things, sometimes to the point where it's easy for us to completely forget what it's all about...Jesus, the light of the world. And so, for the next few weeks, we want to help you untangle Christmas. We want to set our hearts and minds on the love, hope, joy, and peace that Jesus brings us. The things that Christmas is truly all about.

And, today, we're BRIEFLY looking at the first one: **Love**. So, if you have a Bible, or a Bible app that you like to use, turn with me to 1 John 4:9-10.

We live in a world that is a little confused about love. Most people think that love is a feeling. If you get those warm fuzzies, then it must be love, if not, then follow your heart to something, or someone, else because love is something you know when you feel it. But, most of us have lived long enough to know how fickle our feelings can be.

A lot of people also confuse love with lust. That it must be this constant state of desire and passion and, if that goes away, then maybe it's not true love. Or, if it's felt for someone else, then maybe that's actually the person we're "supposed to be with."

And, all of this confusion around love can also make us confused about God's love, too. I think, at some point in life, all of us wonder, *Does God really love me?* I know I've been there. When

life gets hard, or I feel like I've just messed up one too many times, I wonder, *God, do you still love me?"*

And, the truth is, you can believe in God, go to church, and have some understanding of his love, but there will be times when that belief will be tested by the trials of life. You lose someone you love. A child walks away from the faith. Your job gets cut. The diagnosis comes back positive. It's in these moments when we wrestle with God and wonder, *If God really loves me, then why is this happening?*

We get love so tangled up with our emotions around these things that we forget all the ways God has shown us His love. In our text today, the Apostle John writes words that help us untangle God's love and understand it more clearly. And he does it by pointing back to the Christmas story. Look at it with me...(READ 1 John 4:9-10)

Jesus, God in flesh, came to this world to show us exactly how much God loves us and what that love looks like. You see, **Love is more than an emotion, it's an action.** Love is most clearly seen in action. So the reason we know God loves us is not just because of something he said, but because of something he did. God showed you the fullness of his love by sending Jesus.

That's why we celebrate Christmas. It's the moment when God gave us the greatest gift the world has ever known. The gift of His Son was a gift of His love for us, so that we may find life in Him. It's a gift so beautiful that it caused the Apostle Paul to write, **"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2. Cor. 9:15).**

But, why is this gift so great? Why did God even have to send His Son and give us this gift? In our text, John says that Jesus was an "atoning sacrifice for our sins." The heart of the Christian faith is that God loves us so much that He sent Jesus to do **for us** what we could not do for ourselves.

All of us have these things in our life that separate us from a holy and perfect God. We have habits we can't break. Thoughts and emotions we can't hide. Fears that won't go away. Regrets we can't let go of. Things we've said that we can't take back. All of us have sin in our life that separates us from God.

But God loves us so much that, throughout history, he has made ways for us to be in a right relationship with Him. In the Old Testament, priests would perform sacrifices that would atone for the sins of the people. They would cover them up so they could be at peace with God again.

But, the good news of the Christmas story is that God so loved the world that He sent his Son to be the perfect sacrifice for us that would not only cover our sin, but completely remove it from us. Jesus lived a perfect, sinless life and died on the cross to satisfy God's wrath over our sin and reconcile us back to Him.

For those of us who sometimes get love tangled up with our emotions or circumstances and wonder if God truly loves us, Paul says this in Romans 5:8, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Love is more than an emotion, it's an action. And the reason you can know that God loves you is not just because of something he said, it's because of something he did for you. You see, there is nothing you can do to earn God's gift of grace. You cannot work hard enough. You cannot be good enough. The only thing you can do is what you do on Christmas morning. Take the gift you've received and unwrap it.

I don't know where you are this morning. What you believe or what you're feeling. The questions you have about God's love for you and all the ways your heart and mind are tangled up around it. All I know is that, at its core, the Christmas account is the greatest love story ever told.

It's Almighty God coming down into this crazy world as a fragile baby. God becoming innocent and vulnerable. Becoming someone that could be, and would be, hurt. And why would God do this? Because he loves you. Because he desires you.

As we close out this morning, we want to give you a moment to **reflect** on that love and **respond** to it...(set up communion, offering, prayer, worship)