

## The Spirit of Truth and Love

### 1 John 4:1-21

When Theo was born he arrived late, 10 days late to be precise.

It was a week after the due date that our obstetrician  
said "I think he's a big big boy, and for want of a better word, he's a bit stuck"  
And so we were booked in for cesarean section.

Heading to the hospital we were very confident with our doctor

We met the anesthetist before the surgery who we were very pleased with  
So we headed into the theatre fully assured of our team.

And so I was surprised to meet a totally different doctor

once we rolled Jas through the door.

He was a much older man and he didn't introduce himself  
but he came over and started to reassure us and talk about the procedure  
and I'm thinking "Who are you? And where's our guy?  
Are you sure you're in the right room? What are you doing here?"

Anyway, a few seconds afterwards our guy walks into the room

and he explains once more, because I had forgotten,  
that the hospital had a policy having two surgeons on for every procedure,  
and that the older man was actually a very distinguished obstetrician,  
in fact his own mentor and teacher back when he was learning his specialty.  
And so my "Who are you?" very quickly became  
"Oh! Honored to meet you. Thanks for being here!"

We have a similar "who are you and what are you doing here?"

moment at the end of last week's passage in 1 John.

The final verse of chapter three reads like this: 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.

It's the first time that John mentions the Holy Spirit in this letter,  
and when I was reading through the letter in preparation for this series  
the first thought I had when reading *this* verse was to think  
"What's he doing here? There's been no mention of him before!  
What's he doing in the room?"

Well, we know by now that John is writing to help us know

both the truth about Jesus and the importance of love.

Now in 1 John 4 he explains how the *Holy Spirit* is vital for both.

If we, as Christ's followers, have determined that we will

(1) not forsake the truth, and (2) put love into practice,

then we *must* allow the Holy Spirit to do his work,

and we *must* have a clear picture of how he *caries out* his work.

And it's in today's passage, Ch 4, that we're provided with that picture.

Our passage begins with a depiction of the world that might be new for some people.  
 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.  
 John states it plainly: this is not a merely physical world;  
 there is a spiritual dimension to our universe  
 where spiritual beings are in operation!

And how do they operate?

Well, the movies lead us straight to ghosts and demonic possession and so on,  
 Popular culture tells us that spirits have the goal of frightening us—  
 It's their job to go *boo!* and our job to go *ahh!*—  
 but John has in mind more subtle manifestations;  
 he associates evil spirits with false teaching:  
 test the spirits he says because many false prophets have gone into the world.  
 An evil spirit's agenda is not to scare us but to mislead us—  
 to feed us lies about God—  
 and to do this they don't need to go bump in the night,  
 all they need to do is influence a spiritual teacher to say something false.

This means is that we can locate an evil spirit by listening carefully to what we hear.  
 From v2 John has some examples of the types of things we might listen for:  
 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus  
 Christ has come in the flesh is from God,<sup>3</sup> but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is  
 not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even  
 now is already in the world.

So a teacher who maintains that Jesus is the Christ, that  
 Jesus is God's King who came down from heaven to live with us,  
 that's an example of a message the Holy Spirit would want to teach us.  
 But a teacher who dismisses Jesus as being something less than that,  
 then that's the product of spiritual forces that are nothing less than evil.

Now, it's not popular to say that other religions are lies made up by evil spirits,  
 but that's the conclusion that John leaves us with,  
 and it's not just John who says this but Paul in 1 Cor 10 and 1 Tim 4.  
 Religious messages that downplay or deny the divine role of Jesus,  
 they're driven by a very evil force.  
 Part of the truth that we must hold on to is that Jesus is the only way.

But listening to what's said about Jesus isn't the only spiritual test to apply.  
 John has a bit more to say about discerning good from evil from v5  
 Speaking about false teachers he describes them as being from the world and  
 therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.  
 Teachings that come out of the spiritual darkness  
 might not only dismiss Jesus,  
 but they may also affirm what's popular in the world!

Now we live in an age and a place where there is still some Christian influence,

so there will still be some things that the world and the Bible agree on,  
 but we are starting to see the some remarkable differences  
 between historic Christian teaching and what the world values, aren't we?  
 If a message is easily digested by the world at large then we should ask  
*"Now why has that message has gone down so well?"*  
*Is it because it's simply feeding back to the world what it wants to hear?"*  
 The shared ground between Christian values and worldly values is shrinking,  
 and so messages seeking to please both should be scrutinized very carefully!

In the end I think surest test of all is found in verse 6  
 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us;  
 but whoever is not from God does not listen to us.  
 We started our time in this letter by considering why it is  
 that John sees *his* message as the one his friends ought to listen to.  
 And what we learnt in those opening verses of ch 1  
 is that John's authority comes from being an Apostle;  
 he was one who knew Jesus, and heard Jesus  
 and saw Jesus conducting his ministry, he saw Jesus raised from the dead,  
 and so it's John's message that becomes the benchmark.

And the apostolic message, which comes to us today in the form of the NT,  
 Not only describes who Jesus is  
 but it also describes how Christians should live.  
 And *depending on the age we live in,*  
 It will be different aspects of this message that will be challenged.

In John's time the message about the true identity of Jesus was challenged,  
 but in our day, one big challenge is the message about sexuality.  
 The teaching of Jesus and his apostles is pretty clear,  
 sex is a gift to be enjoyed in marriage between a man and a woman,  
 but what message does the world send us?  
 The world tells us sex can be enjoyed in an increasing number of ways.

I once spoke to a young woman who had no problem believing Jesus was God,  
 But who also believed the traditional sexual boundaries were no longer applicable,  
 and when I asked how she reconciled this decision with the Bible,  
 her response was to say "the church will change it's mind in time"  
 because as she saw it, the world's point of view was the dominant one.

And she's not the only one from within the church  
 who wants to leave the door open for this kind of thinking  
 I remember reading a book written by a Church of England priest  
 who suggested that "we should always be listening to what the Spirit might  
 be saying in this present age". Well, sure, the Holy Spirit is certainly active,  
 but *never in contradiction* to what he has said in the past.

And how has he spoken in the past? Through the teaching of the Apostles.  
Look how John ends verse 6,  
he's just been speaking about the importance of listening to the Apostles,  
and then he says This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.

I'm astounded how in some churches they can say the words of the Nicene creed  
"We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic church",  
and then deny the Apostolic teaching in the sermon  
because the Holy Spirit has changed his mind.  
If he's always changing his mind then he's not much of a source of truth.

I received a lift in Mark and Emily's new car the other day  
There in the middle of the dashboard, a computer screen with GPS,  
showing a map which guides the way; they'll never lose their way again!

And the Holy Spirit wants to guide us, through the words of the Apostles of the NT,  
and this guidance will not only help us distinguish true religions from false,  
but also true Christianities from deceptive ones,  
teachings of the Holy Spirit from teachings that come from darker places.

And, as we've heard for a number of weeks now,  
one thing that the Holy Spirit wants to teach us is the importance of love.

Verses 7-21 form a frustrating section for me  
because I like my concepts presented in linear order.  
But what John has for us here is a tapestry of statements and ideas  
that loop around and repeat themselves.

There is some power and beauty in hearing things repeated and tossed around,  
but I thought what I'd do  
is to just pull out three of the threads that John has woven together here  
to see how some of it fits together,  
with the first thread simply being the idea that  
God is love and that he has loved us.

This thread pops through in verses 8, 16, 19 just to name just three places,  
but the main verses which explore this idea of God's love are vs 9 and 10 This  
is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we  
might live through him. <sup>10</sup> This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent  
his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

If you've been coming to church for a while  
you may have often heard the death of Christ spoken of as an example of love.  
Christ loved us so much  
that he was willing to die as a means of washing away our sins  
But in this example the focus isn't on Christ's willingness to suffer,

but on the Father's willingness to send him. John says it twice  
he sent his Son into the world ... he sent his son as an atoning sacrifice.

When someone you love is in need, you send help, don't you?

I'm sure you've been watching the ongoing attempts to save those boys trapped in a cave in Thailand. It seems to me the people of that country are stopping at nothing to try and get them out. The country sends help, no matter what the cost, because it loves its children. And so it is with our Father in heaven, he sends help in form of his Son, because he loves us.

And it's the God who loves who lives in us. This is the second thread I'm pulling out: John says numerous times that God lives in us. Vs 12, 13, 15, 16.  
The key verse for me is verse 7, where John speaks of being born of God. That's Holy Spirit language,  
we are born of God when the Spirit comes and dwells within us,  
—meaning God is living in us—  
and when someone comes and lives with you can expect your life to change.

Some of you may know that there are three adults who live in our house.  
Since moving to our current place, Jasmine's sister Stephanie has been living with us, and it makes a difference when someone else moves in, a positive difference I might add. Stephanie is a much better cook than either of us, it makes raising a child much easier to have another adult around, and Steph is very generous with the use of her car.

And so when the Holy Spirit moves in, things can become different; there's a discernable change.  
For John's readers, and for us, it's the change from hate to love.  
This is the third thread to pull out; the idea that as God dwells in us we take on his characteristics, particularly the characteristic of love.  
V11 is just one place since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.  
And we love one another with the same type of love that God has shown us.

Do you watch movies about love? I know there is one very popular film that's a few years old now called *Love Actually*.  
It's set at Christmas time in London, and I know a few people who make a point of watching it at every Christmas. It's one of those movies that has—I don't know—nine different story lines interwoven together. (John would have loved it!), and they each tell a different story about love.

One story is about love between friends, another is a story about love between children, there's a story about unrequited (or unreturned) love, but one of the most moving is a story about a woman who has a crush on her co-worker, and the co-worker asks her out! But just at the moment when she is about to share a moment of intimacy with this man, her phone rings, and it's her brother who is in a mental institution, and so she makes the decision to leave

and attend to her brother. It's a picture of the love that exists between siblings, and not only that, but the love of providing something for the sibling who is in need.

And it's a picture of the kind of love  
that marks out relationships between spiritual brothers and sisters;  
a sacrificial love based on God's love for us,  
a love empowered by the Holy Spirit as he lives in us.

And so friends, we must allow the Holy Spirit to do his work.  
Imagine if I said to the doctor in the delivery room,  
"that's ok, stand back, let me get on with it!" What foolishness, once we  
recognize who he is and what he's there for then we say "Over to you!"  
And the Holy Spirit will work in the way that he knows is best;  
through the message of the Apostles,  
and by leading those he dwells within to love one another.  
Let's not resist his work: Bibles open, hearts open .

Lets pray.