

Loving?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, please do have a seat and a very good morning to you. As I said, I've been on a Christians in Sport camp all week. I felt 30.

Felt unfit. Hands up here if you've done a bleep test. Do you remember doing that at school? The fitness test called the bleep test. There's a fitness test that we do, and we did it at Christians in Sport on the last day of the camp.

Leaders in, campers in, everybody in. Ross and Daniel beat me. And I'd love to say that that didn't bother me, but I'd be absolutely lying.

I am not 16 anymore. I'm 30. Here we go. If you have a Bible, why don't you turn to 1 John chapter 2. We're in it verses 3 to 14 this morning. 1 John, one of the books of the Bible, quite easy to find.

If you go to Revelation right at the back of your Bibles and flick back a few, you'll find it there. So 1 John chapter 2, verses 3 to 14.

[1 : 0 0] Why don't we pause just before we begin and let's pray together. Let's pray. Father God, we've just been singing about the deepness of your love for us.

That all-excelling, costly, sacrificial love. And so we ask now that you would come and you would move that truth from our lips down to our hearts.

That as we turn to look at your words now, your spirit would come and would help us to learn and would help us to love the Lord Jesus and the truth about him. And so it's in his name that we pray.

Amen. So before diving into this passage this morning, why don't we just take a minute just to remind ourselves of the situation into which John is writing this letter.

So John is writing to a very unsettled church congregation. Unsettled because they've witnessed a lot of people leave their church. Now I wonder at this side of the room, I wonder if I could ask you just to stand up for a minute.

[2 : 0 6] And I want you to turn and I want you to face the rest of the church. Now imagine John and I, first thing on Monday morning, we get an email from these guys collectively. And it says that they are resigning their memberships and they're leaving the church.

So we're courteous. We ask them why. Why are they leaving the church? Maybe they've got a job somewhere else in the country. Maybe they're moving away. Maybe they've got a job somewhere else in the city and they just want to go and be part of a local church.

Why are they leaving? And we get an email back and it says, actually we're leaving because, and it's got nothing to do with relocation. But we're leaving because you guys are actually holding us back in our Christian walk.

You guys are the spiritual kindergarten. And to be honest, we pity you really. And we've moved on to greater things. In the email that comes back to us, they use phrases like, we've got an inside track on hearing from God that the rest of you don't have.

We don't struggle with sin like the rest of you do. In fact, we've written a book called Ten Ways to Avoid Sin. Here's a signed copy of it. We know God.

[3 : 17] You don't. And so with a superiority complex in the minds, they wave goodbye to the church and out of the door they head.

And they move into Burrowmure High School, just across the road there, and they start meeting, calling themselves the true Brunsfield Evangelical Church. You can sit down now.

But that is the situation into which John is writing. That's what's gone on in the church behind the scenes of this letter. Now question, if you were one of the ones that were staying in the church and you witnessed all of this go on in front of you, you heard what they were saying about the rest of you, what is the question that would be front and centre in your mind?

What's the question? So if I were sitting in the pew, the question in my mind would be, are they right? Are they right?

As I sit in the pew each Sunday morning, as I come to meet with my fellow believers during the week in a small group or whatever it is, how do I know that I'm right and they are wrong?

[4 : 35] How do I know that I'm backing the right team and have not just completely misunderstood this Christian thing? Maybe there is a natural higher progression from the gospel that I'm missing out on.

The question, front and centre of their minds, would be, how do I know that I know God? How do I know when I witness this going on, how do I know that my faith is the real deal?

You see, that is the question that's in the pews behind this letter. It is a massively unsettling time for this church family. Confidence shaking, certainty bruised, assurance flagging and probably lacking.

How do I know, how can I be sure that I'm a genuine, bona fide, real deal Christian? Now, before our daughter Chloe was born, Alex and I had a good spring clean of her flat, we needed to make room for her room and one of the things that we found when we were going through all lots of clothes and throwing stuff out, I found my old watch.

I found the watch that my dad had given me as a skinny 17 year old. I thought I'd lost it, I was absolutely delighted that I found it. But the thing is, when my dad, I remember when my dad gave me it as a 17 year old, I'll be honest, I didn't think it was a big deal.

[5 : 57] Thanks dad. But now as a 30 year old, when I come to find this watch, I'm intrigued. I want to know how this watch works, I want to know the mechanics of it. I want to know if it's the real deal.

So I'm a 21st century man, I googled it, and lo and behold, what came up to test if your church, sorry, test if your watch is the real deal, what you look for is the word Swiss made on your watch.

Tiny, tiny little letters, Swiss made. That's what separates a true watch from a false watch. That's how you know you've got the real deal and not just a pretender to the watch world. And lo and behold, I looked at my watch and there it was, Swiss made, tiny little letters.

And I felt good because my dad hadn't slipped me a fake. But you see, that is what John is trying to do in this section this morning.

You see, these people that are still in this church, the comments from this group have left them massively unsure about their faith. Is it the real deal? And what John is doing this morning is he's writing to them and he's saying, when I look at your lives, when I see how you behave, when I see your faith in action, you've got no need to question your faith.

[7 : 17] You have got Swiss made rent all over your lives. This is all about assurance this morning. And we've got to ask, how does John know that? Is he just kind of hopefully saying that to kind of cheer them up?

How does he know that for sure? Answer, because their knowing is showing. Their knowing is showing. Their Christian lives are displaying certain traits that those who are the pretenders aren't showing.

And what John is doing all the way through this section and through this letter as a whole, he's got a dual aim in mind. He's seeking to unmask and expose the pretenders and at the same time he's seeking to give great reassurance to the rest of the church.

And the proof of the pudding this morning in our verses that John identifies is that they obey Jesus. They obey Jesus.

And most particularly what they do is that they love the fellow brothers and sisters in the church. Their knowing is showing. Look at what he says about obedience to Jesus verses 3 to 6.

[8 : 33] John writes this, we know that we have come to know him. Do you see that phrase there? We know. We know that we have come to know them if we keep his commands. Whoever says I know him but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in that person.

But if anyone obeys his words love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know that we are in him. Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.

So the logic there if you follow it is quite simple isn't it? You claim to know God you do as he says. You claim to be living in the truth then you'll follow the one who is the truth Jesus Christ.

You see true love for God says John shows itself not in mystical experience not in theological talk not in sentimental language but true love shows itself in nitty gritty self denying all encompassing obedience to what God has said.

Look with me notice the speech marks around I know him at verse 4. Notice the phrases like whoever says or whoever claims at verse 4 and 6.

[9 : 51] If that's what you're hearing out of someone's mouth I imagine that's the precise claim that this group are making. If that's what you hear out their mouth but you see something completely different in action then you know you're dealing with a fake.

What does he say? He's a liar. A strong language isn't it? He's a liar in whom the truth does not reside. You listen to him you obey. You talk the talk you back it up with the walk.

That's how you'll know. That's how you know. You know God. I used to live down in Bristol for a few years and I had a friend down in Bristol who used to work for UCCF the University College Christian Fellowship and he told me this story one time about an American student mission team and they went up to the north of England somewhere I think it was Durham and they were intent on sharing the good news of the gospel all around campus and the guys from UCCF once the American team were back in America they phoned them and they asked for some feedback.

How had it gone? And amazingly the American team reported that revival had hit Durham. All around the campus people were becoming Christians and the guys from UCCF looked at each other they heard this and they thought somebody's forgot to tell me it's not what they were seeing happen in front of them and do you know what had happened?

The American mission team had gone around campus with a religious identification survey so all it said was which religion would you describe yourself as? Now you can picture that can't you?

[11 : 29] Hindu Sikh Muslim Christian you can imagine what most people think so the report had gone around when they got back to America that revival had hit but actually the guys in Durham knew that was a very different thing they ticked the Christian box but I dare say not all of those who ticked the Christian box would actually be committed followers of the Lord Jesus now the question how would you identify the true followers committed to the Lord Jesus?

Well you'd look for something akin to what John is outlining here would you not? Obedience a heart inclination and a desire that wants to go with God that wants to obey his commands not live like the world lives somebody who is seeking to glorify God every day in their lives they're saying no to the desires of the world they're saying no to themselves and they're saying yes to God and his commands someone who is seeking to walk in the light and not persisting to walk in the darkness obedience that's how you'll know a Swiss made real deal believer really simple if you know him you'll obey and you see John as we move on here John doesn't leave them to figure out what that's going to look like in their situation remember this church situation that's going he tells them exactly what obedience will look like and he sharpens his focus it was quite general in that first section wasn't it?

if you love him you'll obey now he focuses right in this is a sharp end of this section here what is it going to look like? well love is the commandment that John's got in view here and I think particularly in thinking of that verse from John 13 that John read for us earlier he's thinking of this a new commandment I give to you love one another as I have loved you so you must love one another by this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another so let's read verses 7 to 11 let's see how he works that one out John writes this dear friends I am not writing to you a new command but an old one which you have had since the beginning this old command is the message you have heard 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 anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in darkness anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light and there is nothing in them to make them stumble 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 so these people who have who have waved cheerio to the church this group here who are claiming to walk in the light but want nothing to do with this church family who they don't get on with

John makes it crystal clear that that doesn't add up that's not how it works you cannot claim to walk in the light and yet walk in the darkness you cannot claim to love God and love his people and then have no regard for God's children and see the strong language that John uses there at verse 11 it's a strong word isn't it it's one that we tell our children not to use hate and I think as John watches this scene unfolds in this church he sees that as the true reason that these people have left because to be honest they can't be bothered with the rest of you you're holding them back and John is saying if that's what's truly going on in somebody's life if that's what's going on in their heart then that's a telltale sign that they are not people who know God they're walking in the darkness and not in the light you see true light true knowledge of God a true heart that knows God will be marked by a radical love for others and I think that's what he means by this whole old commandment new commandment language it's a little bit confusing at first isn't it but the command to love God and others like we've sung it's always been part of the DNA of God's family isn't it but now in the Lord

Jesus not only did he call it a new command but actually he invested in it such a deeper and richer meaning and he embodied it and the definition of love now is cross shaped and it's this love that is to mark the Christian community and so here it's a big challenge to all of us isn't it we need to see the link the inseparable link between our relationship with God and our relationship with others you want to put it another way I'm quite simple this is how I understand it my this way relationship should be the same as these way relationships you cannot separate your relationship with God and your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ the two are interconnected like Frank Sinatra said love and marriage they go together but that's what he's saying the gospel joins us together and the gospel compels us to love one another as Christ has loved us do you see we are connected in Christ as a church family the gospel has connected us in Christ therefore we care for one another we love one another we stick with one another we support one another why?

[17 : 09] because Jesus loves you and it's really as simple as that isn't it if you love him then you'll obey so there it is plain and simple from John those who walk in the darkness will be those who don't obey God's commands and who hate the brothers that's what you'll see in front of you that's how you'll know someone who truly knows God that's how you'll know him so what about these guys who've stayed in the church because it's been quite general up to this point hasn't it if this then this if this then this how does he diagnose these guys who are left in the church well at this section verses 12 to 14 we get a cascade of reassurance and confidence are they the real deal remember that's the question we're asking are they the real deal you bet they're the real deal says John and I think what he's doing here is pulling a lot of the strands together from this first section that we've been looking at over the first few weeks this is the real Swiss made section of this passage verses 12 to 14 let's read it together and see how this works out

John writes this 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 am writing to you young men because you have overcome the evil one 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 now here's what I think John is trying to do here we've got three groups of people in this little section here you'll notice that we've got children we've got fathers we've got young men and he addresses them twice doesn't he now that's quite unusual and I think when we see that in our Bibles when we see repetition when we see authors trying to do stuff like that it's we've got to hit the pause button why is he doing that why does he mention it twice does one not suffice well here's what I think he is doing here he's talking to the family of faith and the reason he does this is because what he's about to say here is something that they need to stop and think about and grasp this is important he's talking to the family of faith so by children

I think he's thinking of new Christians children in the faith by young men I think he's addressing those who are developed in the faith by fathers I think he's thinking of those seasoned and mature in their faith so he's writing to the family of God now if you're struggling to picture what that looks like just look around is that not true of the family here do we not have people who've been Christians for maybe two months maybe you've been a Christian for two years maybe you've been a Christian for two decades it's the family of God isn't it and just look at with me because I think what we need to see is who he's addressing but more importantly what is he saying to them and look with me at some of the statements he makes to these groups your sins have been forgiven on account of his name you know him who is from the beginning you have overcome the evil one you know the father you know him who is from the beginning the word of God lives in you you have overcome the evil one now just think about that for a minute remember the situation he's writing to this group of Christians who've remained in this church who are unsettled who are questioning their faith who are questioning whether they can really trust the apostles gospel message that they've heard do we know God well look what he's saying he says to the family of faith regardless of whether you've been a Christian ten years ten minutes one year because your trust is in Jesus you've confessed your sins you're walking in the light you're loving your brothers and sisters you are the real deal you have it all forgiveness fellowship with God his word living in you victory over the evil one wonderful truths are they not imagine what it must have been like for that church family and then John writes this what wonderful assurance the benefits the truths of what it means to abide in Christ your life says John is tied up with his and these truths these glorious truths are yours because you are in Christ don't let anyone tell you that the gospel is not enough and what he's doing here is he's saying here is the test of what it looks like to live in the light and not in darkness and these guys over here the guys who have left they've failed you've passed you're the real deal what a wonderful assurance these words must have been

I don't think we can fully understand it what wonderful assurance can you feel the confidence draining back into this church you've watched all this happen but what does this mean for us well I think just as we come to close this morning there's two applications that I want us to take away from this passage now I like the letter C I don't know why but both of these applications begin with the letter C there's a challenge in this passage and there's a great comfort in this passage firstly the challenge John is telling this group of Christians that he's confident that the real deal why?

because their knowing is showing and it begs the question doesn't it? is our knowing showing? with people who look in at our lives people from outside the church as they look at our lives would they see do they see a living faith in the Lord Jesus?

[23 : 24] are we people who are striving to be not those who just tick the Christian box but actually those whose hearts tick with the sound of the gospel? are we those who live lives radically that are cross shaped?

are we radical in our obedience to the Lord even when it doesn't make sense? even when we add it up it doesn't make sense even when it doesn't look pretty even when it costs us are we those who are staking it all to follow Jesus?

and notice that word that he uses there at verse 6 abide and I ask myself as I read this and prepared for this week am I one who is making every effort to abide in Christ?

Christ now what does that look like? would you want to know something that I found out this week? I don't know whether I'm coming ridiculously late to the party here or not but I found out what HMB stands for does anyone know what HMB stands for?

put your hands up right so I am coming late to the party here right every day is a school day it's great so I never knew what HMB stood for but it stands for his master's voice doesn't it?

[24 : 42] and again googled it what does it mean? well here's the logo it's the dog and the gramophone and the story goes that the dog's name is Nipper it's a great name it has to be said and the story goes that Nipper's owner Mark died and his brother Francis from Mark inherited three things he inherited the dog he inherited the gramophone and he inherited some recordings of Mark when he used to sing and Francis noticed that when he put the recordings on on the gramophone the dog would drop everything and would come and sit and listen he just loved being there and that's where HMB comes from I didn't know that but it's a great illustration isn't it?

because let's ask ourselves this morning are we listening to the master's voice? is there a loving relationship there of obedience?

if when there's all the noises in life when it comes down to the crunch of it where would you want to be? are you somebody who wants to be right at the master's feet?

listening to the master's voice? are you reading your bible to hear what God is saying in his words? are you exposing yourself to his voice at every single given opportunity?

because in order to obey we need to know what he's saying don't we? you see the people who have left this church they're like dogs who are running after novelties even though they claim to be listening to the master John knows that they're not because if they were they'd be obeying what he was saying I know that you are listening to the master's voice because not only are you there listening to it but you're obeying him are we those who are abiding in Jesus?

[26 : 38] are we making every effort to abide in him? is our knowing showing? and I think especially let's kick it up a gear especially in the way that we are with one another are we those who demonstrate this radical love to each other that Jesus spoke about?

would the world looking in at us would they see us as the real deal by the way that we love and we care for one another by the way that we stick with one another through thick and thin by the way that we encourage one another you know I was challenged this week do I play it safe with the way I love?

when somebody in this family when they rub you up the wrong way what's your reaction? do you run a mile? or do you stick with them? do you love them? do you pray for them?

do you care for them? and do you love them again? simply because they are your brother and sister in Christ you know when was the last time on a Sunday morning you spoke to somebody who was not like you?

you spoke to them and the primary motivation for you speaking to them was simply that you wanted to love them and encourage them and to spur them on John knows that this church they walk in the light because they listen and they obey their loving is showing so there's the first scene second scene and we'll finish with this see the comfort that these verses are to us John is writing to this church and he's saying no matter what's being said over here you've got everything in Jesus what the departed are claiming let's be honest it looks quite impressive doesn't it?

[28 : 14] victory over sin new insights into God higher spiritual knowledge of God victory over sin I mean that sounds impressive and I bet those who stayed they looked at their own lives having hearing all this they looked at their own lives and they felt seriously deflated I long for that and I wonder if that's true in your own life as well do you feel that in your Christian life?

let's take it on a global sense first do you look at the church in Edinburgh? do you look at the 2% of this population that goes to an evangelical church under the scent of the gospel?

and then do you look at the size of the city? do you look at the size of the nation of Scotland? and you think boy we are seriously not impressed do you look then at your own life and you still struggle with sin?

you are so aware of it in your life you know where you want to be in your Christian walk but you can never seem to get there and you think to yourself why can I not just shrug this one off?

I wonder if you feel like that do you feel deflated in your faith? let me ask you a simple question are you more aware or are you less aware of your sin since you became a Christian? I don't know if you're like me I am massively more aware of my sin of my shortcomings now that I'm a Christian than I was before and we can feel deflated but I think the assurance in this passage is if you feel like that then that is what it looks like to be in the light because you see this isn't about us being perfect this is about Jesus this isn't about me this is about him this isn't about my kingdom this is about his kingdom and Christ is all we need he is all sufficient he is all powerful it is all about him because Jesus he isn't just a good start in your Christian walk actually he's the every breath of your Christian walk we have everything in him forgiveness fellowship with God his spirit living in us final victory all in him because we abide in Christ now maybe you're here this morning and actually you're not abiding in Jesus well can I just point out to you from this passage lovingly that actually outside of him there is no assurance there is no forgiveness there is no final victory and you need to repent you need to stop and you need to turn and you need to start walking towards him you need to put your faith in him and you need to follow

[31 : 01] Jesus but if you are trusting in him this morning then see the wonderful assurance that we have from these verses and see to it that you never move on from the glorious gospel of Christ Charles Spurgeon one of my heroes he said this we hope to understand the truth better but we shall never discover better truth let me ask you honestly as we come to a close does Jesus does the gospel does it still thrill your heart does Jesus still move your heart to sing have you grown cold in your affection for him in your understanding of the gospel are you tempted to move on to seemingly greater things have you become distracted by something else and allowed it to push the gospel from the centre of your life well can I encourage you as we close we never move on from the gospel we never move on from the gospel but we do gaze deeper into it it is glorious not that we are glorious but that he is glorious now we're going to stand in just a second and finish by singing all glory be to Christ let me just read some of the lyrics to you and then we'll stand to sing this together all glory be to Christ our king all glory be to Christ his rule and reign will ever sing all glory be to Christ his will be done his kingdom come on earth as is above who is himself our daily bread praise him the lord of love all glory be to Christ our king all glory be to Christ his rule and reign will ever sing all glory be to Christ amen amen let's pray together oh father god we are so thankful so thankful for our time together this morning as we've gazed at the glorious gospel as we've gazed at the glorious Christ and it's our prayer this week that you would help us to be those who live and love as those who truly treasure

Jesus Christ in our lives may we seek your kingdom first so help us lord to be ever looking to him and his victory and to find our identity in him this week we pray amen peace rem■ and amen why and so and so you ah