GOD IS LOVE

1 John 4:14-16

Key Verse: 4:16

“And so we know and rely on/believe the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.”

Thank God for his divine command, “Since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” In this divine command, we see the solemn Christian duty to love and also God’s vision for us to mold us into men and women of love who truly form the body of Christ. This can be accomplished through our obedience to his command in his love. Truly obedience is God’s way and his wisdom for us. In today’s passage, John leads us to another mountain range of God sending his Son to be the Saviour of the world after the mountain range of sending his one and only Son into the world to be an atoning sacrifice. Then he comes back to the great statement that God is love. He wants us to somehow grasp the love of God and live in it until the day of judgment.

**First, the Saviour of the world (14-15).** Verse 14 says, “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.” What a strong and great testimony! At that time, the world was a Roman world and Caesar was regarded as the saviour of the world. But Apostle John and other apostles observed and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. Here is the only time John used the word “Saviour” in his epistle, which is very meaningful. As we studied, John used the expression “he sent” or “the Father sent” three times: in 4:9, “He sent his one and only Son into the world”, in 4:10, “He sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice” and here in 4:15, “The Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world.” All these three, “one and only Son”, “atoning sacrifice” and “the Saviour of the world” together give us a complete message regarding his Son whom God sent. God’s one and only Son whom God sent is the Saviour of the world through the sacrifice of atonement for our sins. It is good to know that all the animal sacrifices in the Old Testament were done in the tabernacle or temple. But this sacrifice of God’s own Son for the atonement was made in real society in the Roman world. He was crucified and killed on the cross at the place of the Skull (called Golgotha) by the hands or Romans manipulated by the Jewish religious leaders. Thus, he was cut off from the land of the living (Isa 53:8). In this way, Jesus became the atoning sacrifice for our sins and is the Saviour of the world.

What kind of Saviour is he? First of all, he is the Saviour who saves people from their sins and all the consequences of sin including eternal punishment. The fundamental problem of mankind is the sin problem as written in 4:10, “He sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins”, in 2:2, “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world”, and in 3:5, “You know that he appeared so that he might take away our sins.” The name “Jesus” was given before his birth through an angel’s announcement to Joseph: “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). In John 1:29, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” Again, we should remember that he became our Savour through his death and resurrection to save people from their sins. Romans 4:25 says, “He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

We cannot deny that there are many problems in the world, such as health, climate, race, poverty, etc., but it is important to recognize again and again that the fundamental problem of the world is sin. We all know that nowadays coronavirus is the global concern. It threatens the lives of people and we are to do our best to keep our health. Yet the people of the world should know that physical illness caused by virus or other plagues leads people in the worst case to physical death, but sin to eternal death. How easy it is to lose this point as believers!

Throughout the Bible God sends warnings to his people in the form of sword, famine or plagues in hopes of leading them to repentance whenever they turn away from God. For example, God says in Jeremiah 24:10, “I will send the sword, famine and plague against them until they are destroyed from the land I gave to them and their ancestors.” And in Ezekiel 6:12, “One who is far away will die of the plague, and one who is near will fall by the sword, and anyone who survives and is spared will die of famine. So will I pour out my wrath on them.” And in Ezekiel 14:21, “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments—sword and famine and wild beasts and plague—to kill its men and their animals!” Here the judgment by wild beasts is added. Interestingly, it is written in Revelation 6:7-8, “When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, ‘Come!’ I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.” All these four judgments are written here in Revelation. We see God’s pattern of warning and judgment so that people may know that such things are from God. Notably, Jesus also said concerning the signs of the end of the age in Luke 21:10-11, “Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.” Certainly, the sword stands for war. And Jesus said to religious leaders in Matthew 16:3, “You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” When we think of that time, the Son of God came and lived on the earth, especially three years of his public life shown to the people in the Judean society. We believe that the time of each generation is specific. When we think of our time, it is really specific with the rapid unprecedent change of scientific technology and moral revolution into globalization, particularly for the last 20 or 30 years. Can you imagine what will bring such change without the fear of God, as time passes by? How important it is to interpret especially the present time! We should really pray and see what is happening in light of God’s word of truth. God’s purpose of sending the sword, famine and plagues is that people may repent of their sins and turn to Jesus the Saviour, who can save them from their sins. We should be more and more convinced that Jesus the Saviour of the world is the only hope for the people of this world and have a clear focus on leading people to this Saviour at this time of unusual troubles.

We can think more of his saving work. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.” Even now, he saves us from anything and any bondage, interceding for us as we come to God through him. Also, according to Galatians 1:4, Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. And Colossians 1:13 says, “For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” So, Christ Jesus is our Saviour who saves us from our sins and also from the present evil age and from the dominion of darkness, that is, the kingdom of Satan. According to 1 John 5:19, the whole world is under the control of the evil one. But Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world. The title, “the Saviour of the world” is written two times in the Bible, the one other time in John 4:42, “They said to the woman, ‘We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.’” In each generation, he is the Saviour of the world; he is so when the end time is coming closer, and this kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ as he returns to the earth. Praise God for this Saviour.

Then verse 15 says, “If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.” Here, “acknowledge” is “confess” in many other translations. This word ‘confess’ really means assenting, expressing my agreement, saying my ‘Amen’ to that which is said to me. What a confession it is to say that Jesus is the Son of God! In Mark 15:39, “And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died he said, ‘Surely this man was he Son of God.’” In making such a confession, the centurion must have put his life in great jeopardy in the Roman world. Apostle John wrote the purpose of writing John’s gospel in 20:30-31, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have eternal life in his name.” It is the same kind of confession that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. And it is the same confession as saying, “He is the Saviour of the world.” The Son of God is the Saviour of the world. Those who make such a confession are in God and God in them, meaning they are true believers. We see that John tests the believers this way or that way to make sure that they are true Christians who live in God and in whom God lives. They are those who obey God’s commands, those who confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh, those who love one another, and those who confess that Jesus is the Saviour of the world and he is the Son of God. This kind of confession definitely affects how they live in the world.

**Second, God is love (16).** Verse 16 says, “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us...” In other translations, “And we have known and believe the love God has for us” or “And we have come to know and believe the love God has for us.” Here, we can think of the relation “know” and “believe” or knowledge and belief. We start with faith and then we experience or know the truthfulness of what we have believed. Peter said in John 6:69, “We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.” However, what we know or experience is very limited. Our knowledge of God grows through our faith. So here, John wrote, “And so we know and believe the love God has for us.” Surely John knew God’s love. However, he did not say, “We know the love God has for us”, but he said, “We know and believe the love God has for us.” It says, “…the love God has for us.” This love is written in present tense.

And then John says, “God is love.” He repeats this great statement after saying this in 4:8, “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” Certainly, John had enough reason to reiterate this statement. As God is infinite, so is his love. After saying, “God is love” in verse 8, John said in verse 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. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.” As we thought of, this is the essence of God’s love. How great this love is! Who can fathom this love fully? In this love of God, I have been saved from eternal condemnation. In this love, now I have fellowship with God through his Son Jesus Christ. Yet, I should grow more and more in knowing this love of God.

You know that you were the object of God’s wrath because of our sins, but in his love, you have become the object of his love being a child of God. For this, God sacrificed his one and only Son. We have been justified being made righteous through his Son Christ Jesus. And God’s love does not stop there. God sanctifies his children. We remember Jesus’ prayer for his disciples, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (Jn 17:17). His sanctifying love can be related to his disciplining love. The author of Hebrews wrote in 12:7-11, “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined…then you are illegitimate children and not true sons…God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” When we think of the Israelites, God brought them out of the land of slavery with his mighty power. No one but God could deliver them from the bandage of Pharaoh that lasted 430 years. Certainly, it was out of God’s love for them. Yet, God’s love did not stop there. God trained them in the wilderness, for they were full of slave mentality with groaning and grumbling whenever they faced hardship, although they had come out of Egypt crossing the Red Sea. They had to be trained to be holy people of God. Reflecting on God’s training for the past 40 years, Moses said to the new generation in Deuteronomy 8:2-4, “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.” It is really surprising that among the first generation of 600,000 who were eligible to fight, only Joshua and Caleb, who kept their faith in God’s promise and overcame the unbelieving atmosphere and pleased God, entered the promised land along with the new generation. In light of this, the author of Hebrews says in 3:12, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” and in 4:11, “Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.” The recipients of the book of Hebrews had gone through severe persecutions, but they endured sufferings. Yet, they were in danger of giving up their faith in Christ Jesus. So, the author of Hebrews remined them of how they struggled living a life of faith: Sometimes they were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times they sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of their property, because they had better and lasting possessions (10:32-34). Then he encouraged them with these words, “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.’ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believed and are saved” (10:35-39). And when we read Hebrews 11, we see there are two kinds of victors of life, one having visible victory and another, invisible victory; in 11:33-39, “who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith.” We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses. Undoubtedly, they could live such a life of faith and victory, because they deeply believed in God’s love for them.

Apostle Paul in Acts 14:22, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” and in 2 Timothy 3:12, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Who could understand John’s suffering at that time? The church of God was in a great persecution under the rule of Roman Empire. He himself was exiled into the island of Patmos in his old age. Who could understand his suffering and God’s love through it for him? Certainly, God loved John very much from the beginning to the end. Who could understand Job’s suffering and God’s love for him? Suddenly, he lost all his wealth and then all his children, and then he was afflicted with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. No one could encourage him, his wife or his friends. But in Job 19:25 he confesses, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth.” And he said in 23:10, “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” Finally, Job said in 42:5, “My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore, I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” God’s love was true to him and bore such fruit in Job’s life. We may have many things in life we cannot understand. Why me? Why such suffering only to me? Why one agony after another? In any life circumstance, John wants us to believe that God is love. In God’s sanctifying and discipling love, we can be molded more and more to be like our Lord Jesus. Romans 5:3-4 says, “…suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” What a grace it is to grow in Christ-like characters! We are again reminded of Romans 8:28, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” The good of those who love him is ultimately to be like his Son Christ Jesus our Lord.

Then John continues in verse 16, “Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.” How can we live in love? We have no true love in us. Again, love comes from God. He does not want anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:10). And the risen Christ said to Paul in Acts 26:18, “…so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.” We can only participate in God’s love that saves perishing souls and sanctifies and refines them as God’s holy children. We see this love in Joseph who truly loved his brothers leading them to repentance so that they could receive God’s grace of forgiveness and be established as twelve tribes of Israel in God’s great purpose for them. When we think of our lives, everything is the expression of God’s love. Living one more day with our loved ones, and having something to eat and a place to reside and even breathe. So, Paul says in 1 Timothy 6:8, “If we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” Because of God’s love, we can be. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Again, thank God who is love. As Paul prayed for the believers in Ephesus, may we grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of God in Christ Jesus (Eph 3:18).

Then in verse 17, “In this way, love is made complete among us so that will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.” Most people will be greatly fearful on the day of judgment. Who can have confidence on the day of judgment? God wants us to live in this world as Jesus did. He is our Saviour to the end of our lives until the day of judgment. 1 Corinthians 1:8 says, “He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And Jude verse 24 says, “To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.” With faith in our Savour Jesus may we live like our Lord Jesus.

We praise God the Father for sending his Son to be our Saviour and the Savour of the world. Thank and praise God who is love. May we live in his love and grow in it and share this love with others who live in this world of trouble with no real hope.