

Theme: Faith in Exile

Title: The Mark of a Christian - I John 3:11-24

Aim: With God's love in our hearts, we must choose to love.

Intro: The word love is certainly greatly overused, isn't it? Used to express an affinity for pizza or an obsession w/Taylor Swift or football or the Red Sox. We can say "I love you, man!" & "I love Christmas." One needs to be careful not to say "I love you" too soon in a young relationship, but it certainly ought to be said often in a marriage & family relationship - more than it is. As a noun, love is defined as "an intense feeling of deep affection, a great interest & pleasure in something." We know, however, that love is more than a feeling. Feelings come & go, true love endures. Love is a choice we make, moment by moment, day by day. It's a choice we act upon. Love is something you do. Theme: Faith in exile. We who are followers of Christ are exiles in a world not our own, not our home. And the one attribute that should mark our lives more than anything else is love, especially agape love – self-sacrificing, selfless, giving love. I John 3:11-24 [READ]. I) **Love is the mark of the Christian.** God has put His love in our hearts & w/that being so, we must choose to love. John had already stated that the true Christian should be different, no longer practicing sinning (having sin as one's lifestyle), but making a practice of righteousness, doing things we ought to do, right living according to God's holy standard. If you don't make a practice of righteousness, you're not of God, but are lost. Then John, almost subtly, puts love at the top of the list of things righteous. If you don't love your brother (bro/sis in Christ), then you are not of God. Then he wrote, in essence, "You've heard this before." Surely he was remembering the words & the heart & the actions of Jesus. The primary commandments were to love God w/all heart, soul, mind & strength & love your neighbor as yourself. The verb form of the word love means to "welcome,

entertain, be fond of , to love dearly” (Strong’s). The phrase “love one-another” means to love reciprocally, mutually. It’s a 2-way street. However, it can only be checked on one side. We may wish that others would love us as we love them, but all we can control is “me.” I can & must choose to love, no matter what others say/do. John gave a negative example of this principle in the person of Cain. Cain was the 1st born of Adam & Eve. His brother Abel was not all that much younger than he. They were brought up in the same household, taught to worship God & work hard. As young men they both brought an offering to God from the fruit of their labor – Cain an offering from what he had grown, & Abel from the flock he tended. It seems that Cain was just going through the motions; his heart was not in it; but Abel’s worship came from his heart. We’re that God had regard for Abel & his offering but not for Cain & his offering. Why? Because he did not believe as Abel did. Cain wanted God’s blessings w/out his obedience of faith. He was jealous of his brother Abel & lured him by pretense into a field & killed him, putting him to death by violence. The “dad joke” of that story begins w/a question: “How long did Cain hate his brother?” Answer: “As long as he was Abel.” Cain made a choice not to love his brother & that choice devolved into murder. Then John warns his readers/us that the world hates us. What is meant by “world” in this context is “the ungodly multitude; the whole mass of men alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ.” Cain was jealous of & hated his brother because Abel was righteous & his righteousness exposed Cain’s unrighteousness. The world will hate us for the same reason. Light exposes darkness & darkness doesn’t like it. We’ll be labeled as “goody 2-shoes” (whatever that means), as “holier than thou.” In the midst of the world’s hatred & rejection, 1st of Christ & then of us, we must remember who we are & be who we are. “We have passed out of death into life.” Reconciled to God thru the atoning work of Christ, justified by

faith in Christ, we have peace w/God. We have been regenerated – made alive in Christ, resurrected w/Christ to new life. But note what John says about how we know this: “because we love the brothers (sisters). The identifying mark of the believer is love. If you do not love you abide in death. If you hate your brother, you are a murderer. No murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We who are in Christ do have eternal life abiding in us. The Holy Spirit w/in us is the guarantee of/down payment on eternal life. Check yourself: does God’s love abide in you? Is His love flowing thru you? II) **Love is something you do**. How do we recognize love? By what we see someone do. Jesus is the perfect example. We know love, John wrote, because we see what Jesus did for us. He laid down His life for us. It’s interesting that John didn’t use the normal word for “life” here – Zoe. Instead, he used the word “psyche,” from which we get the word psyche. Jesus didn’t just give up His body or breathe. He gave His whole being for us, holding nothing back. He laid aside His life, casting it aside like a garment, in order to purchase our salvation. John wrote, “that’s how we show true love.” “We ought to lay down our lives for the brothers (sisters).” Giving ourselves up for the sake of others, counting our lives as nothing in order to give to others. We can say we love but how do we show it? John gives a good example. If you have the means to help someone in need & don’t do it, “how does God’s love abide in” you? “The world’s goods” here means “that by which life is sustained, resources, wealth.” I don’t think that means giving to every street beggar we run across. We have to be discerning, led by the Holy Spirit, but we must follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit w/in. But even giving of our wealth is not necessarily love in action. Paul reminds us that we can do that w/out love (I Cor.13). Love involves the heart directed by God, but it can’t be just words. “Let us not love in word or talk (only – easy to say) but in deed & in truth.” And yes, we are to love our enemies, but if we don’t love our

bro/sis in Christ, how can we say we are Christian? Choose love. III)
There's assurance w/true love. John said, "we shall know that we are of the truth & reassure our heart before God" if God's love is w/in our hearts & flowing thru us to others. We may struggle w/condemnation & lack of assurance of salvation at times because we fail again & again, & the world's hatred begins to weigh down upon us. What if the world is right & I am a hate-monger, hypocrite? Sometimes our hearts condemn us – "I'm no good, such a failure." Maybe we have failed to love at some point, a matter about which we should confess & repent. John says, "No! God knows better than your heart (or the world)." He assures us w/the truth & we can have confidence before Him & get back to being a channel of His love to others. Pray about it! Ask God to love others through you & then let that be your aim. That's His commandment, to believe in Christ & to love one another. If we want to please God that's what we must do. Then it will be evident that we abide in God & God abides in us. We know God abides in us because He has put His Spirit in us. Do you love God? The primary way that will be seen & the primary evidence that the Holy Spirit is at work w/in us is our love for one another. And that is a primary witness to the world – "Behold, how they love one another." Love is the mark of a Christian. As exiles in this world that's not our own, we need each other. We need one another's love. We need to love one another. It means denying ourselves at times & putting each other 1st. Mark my words: as time draws nearer to Christ's coming, we're going to need one another's love more & more. It will take faith – faith in exile.