

# BELPRES CHURCH

**Sermon Title: Marked**

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**Scripture:**

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**1 John 4: 7-12**

<sup>7</sup>Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

**Transcript:**

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So Holy Spirit, help us to experience your love through your word in a way that makes us different. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Well, one of my earliest memories is of a birthday cake that my mom made for my fifth birthday. And my mom would make these shaped cakes for me and my siblings, which was really an act of love for her because by her own admission, she wasn't very good at it. It was really hard. Sometimes she'd get halfway through and have to start over. And this particular cake was in the shape of a giraffe and it had black liquorish for its nose and gum drops for its eyes. And it was covered in coconut.

And growing up in eastern Washington, where I'm from, coconut was like the most exotic thing I could think of. Right? Because the four basic food groups in eastern Washington are T-bone steak, flank steak, sirloin steak, and pot roast, and chicken was a vegetable. But coconut... I mean, coconut came from far away places and it just was like the most glamorous thing I'd ever heard of except for maybe sushi, which we referred to as bait. And to this day, every time I taste coconut, I think of my mom and I feel loved by her. Even though she's gone, that cake left a mark, a permanent mark on my brain, my taste buds, my emotions. So that whenever I eat coconut now, I feel loved by my mom. I am marked by her love. And that's what we're going to talk about today. Being marked by Jesus' love.

We are starting a new sermon series called More, about how there's more to following Jesus than just going to church. Now, going to church is a good thing, going to church is part of how we grow spiritually so keep coming to church. That's a good thing, but there's also more. Jesus asks more of us than just going to church, but Jesus also promises more to us; more adventure, more hope, more courage, more peace, more joy. And promises that we can become world changers to a broken world, if we move beyond just going to church to become what the Bible calls a disciple. And a disciple is someone who is becoming like Jesus day by day.

And disciples are a lot of things, but for the purposes of this series, we've boiled it down to six things, six characteristics. Disciples are marked by Jesus' love, which we'll talk about today. Live connected to a multi-generational, multicultural community, are equipped and eager to share the good news of Jesus. They are healers of injustice who live sacrificially and obey Jesus as Lord through prayer and scripture. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, because we can't do this on our own, we can become more and more like those six characteristics.

And there's no particular order to these except for the first one. Everything else flows from being marked by Jesus' love because if it isn't, things just go off the rails. Like if we are eager to share the gospel, but are not marked by Jesus' love, we will be pushy and obnoxious. If we obey Jesus as Lord, but are not marked by his love, we will become up puritanical, legalists, and nobody likes a Puritan. So it all starts with being marked by Jesus' love a supernaturally changed heart, which comes from Jesus' love.

Jesus' love changes us. It makes us brave because as the Bible says, "Perfect love casts out fear." It gives us hope, peace, joy. His love makes us world changers. And in the passage that I just read, the Apostle John kind of talks about what it means to be marked by Jesus' love. In fact, John is often called the apostle of love because he talks about love so often. However, it was not always that way with the apostle of love. Back in the gospels, John and his brother, James, were called the sons of thunder and not because they were weathermen. Do you want to take a guess why they were called the sons of thunder? Because they were always mad all the time. At one point when they don't receive what they consider to be a proper welcome from a certain village, they say to Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and destroy them?" Ladies and gentlemen, you're apostle of love, right?

But something happens to John between the stories in the gospel and this very short letter that he writes, 1 John, where he uses the word love 45 times in just five chapters. 13 times in just the five verses I read. He becomes marked by Jesus' love. So what does that phrase marked by Jesus' love mean? What does that mean to be marked by Jesus' love? Let me parse that phrase.

Let me start with the word marked. First of all, to be marked means you are permanently different. Years ago, I cut my thumb while cleaning our shower. Really deeply, which is why I've resolved never to clean anything again, because it's dangerous. And it was really deep and it took a long time to heal and it left a mark. It left a scar. I am permanently different, like the coconut cake permanently left a mark. When we experience Jesus' love, not as a theology, a lived experience, it leaves a mark, permanent difference on our hearts, our souls, our minds.

Second thing about being marked is it's visible. You can see the scar on my thumb. People should be able to see Jesus' love in us. A mark is visible. John says, "This is how we know what love is. Jesus laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need, but has no pity on them. How can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth." Jesus' love for us is visible on the cross, so our love should be visible by how we treat and care for other people. Jesus said, "By this, everyone will know that you are my church attenders. Everyone will know that you are my disciples if... " If

what? If you obey all the rules, if you're mad at all the things your tribe says to be mad about. No, if you love one another.

A disciple is visibly marked. Marked by what? By Jesus' love, not our culture's definition of love. Jesus defines love because in our culture, love is mostly a feeling, right? "Oh, you're just so amazing. I've just got to have you. You're the wind beneath my wings," kind of stuff. And it's also because kind of love in our culture. "Because you do this thing for me, I love you." Jesus' love is not just a feeling, it is a commitment to seek the good of another person. And it is not a because kind of love, it's a no matter what kind of love.

And we also tend to think of love as kind of this gentle soft emotion, which in some ways it is. The apostle Paul in the love passage in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13, it's read at a lot of weddings, says, "Love is patient, love is kind." Which it is those things, but he goes on to say, "Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth. It always protects." Love does not delight in evil. Love does not delight in bad behavior. Which means when people are behaving badly, love means we confront them because they're hurting themselves or they're hurting someone else. For their own sake, love means we confront.

Love also protects, which means love can be fierce sometimes. Now, we need to be careful because there's a difference between our unrighteous anger, which is all about us and righteous anger, which is about protecting people. And let's just be really honest, we're really super good at convincing ourselves that our anger is righteous, aren't we, when it's not righteous. So we need to be very, very suspicious of our anger and our zeal and our ferocity. That said, however, disciples are healers of injustice, protecting people who need it. Love can be fierce.

Many of us have been inspired by just ordinary Russian citizens showing up in the thousands to protest their dictator's war in the Ukraine. That is very risky in Russia to do that. They are showing a fierce protecting kind of love. When we see racism in our own country or people being taken advantage of, or as parents if we see someone hurting our kids, we seek justice because love protects. And if we are disciples we will be marked by this kind of love, Jesus kind of love, not our culture's love.

Today's text says, "Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." In other words, if we are not marked by Jesus' love, maybe we're going to church, but we are not his disciples, which would explain why some of the meanest, most unloving people sometimes can be found in churches. Ever notice that? That's kind of sad, right? They're going to church, but they're not disciples. And as a result, their lives are smaller. They have damaged relationships all over the place and they're never going to be world changers. You're not a disciple unless you're marked by Jesus' love.

Not perfectly because none of us are, but increasingly and progressively more and more marked by his love.

So then what does that look like? What does it look like to be marked? What would a person marked by Jesus' love be like, how would they behave? What are their characteristics? Well, again, 1 Corinthians 13 shows us. It says, "Love is patient. Love is kind." It doesn't say if you're loving, then you will practice patience. The passage depicts love as a person who is these things. So here's what I'm going to do. I am going to read a portion of 1 Corinthians 13 and I'm going to substitute my name wherever it says the word love. And you substitute your name to see every place it says the word love. You substitute yours, I'll substitute mine. And let's see if this describes you or me. Oh, this is going to be fun. All right, ready? Here we go.

Scott is patient. Oh dear. Houston we have a problem already. We are just three words into this thing and already we have a problem. Okay. Scott is patient. Scott is kind. Kind of. He does not envy, let's just skip that one, or boast. Not too much anyway. He's not proud, or at least in ways people can't see. He does not dishonor others. He's not easily angered. This is just getting awkward for me. He keeps no record of wrongs. Right. Scott does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Mostly. Scott always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. The problem there is the word always. Sometimes, I do those things.

How did you do? I didn't do so well. How did you do? Anyone get an A plus? Anyone nail these perfectly? Every single one.

Yes.

Okay. Josh here in the front row is perfectly loving. So talk to him after the service and maybe you should just...

Now, some of these describe me, not perfectly, but some of these describe me and others don't describe me at all, but I want them to. I'm sort of marked by Jesus' love, but I want to be more marked by his love. And I'm guessing that you do too. So then the question is how do we do that? How do we get there? How do we become marked by Jesus' love? Well, a couple of things.

The first is you got to get to know love. And I don't mean intellectually. In the Bible, the word know usually means not just intellectual, but relational knowledge. As in, get to know a person. John says, "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." In other words, love is not abstract. Love is concrete. Love is historical. Love is a person named Jesus. Look at Jesus, he's exactly what love is.

When someone was hungry, he fed him. When someone was afraid, he comforted them. When someone was sick, he healed them. God didn't send an essay on love to tell us what love is. He came himself in the person of Jesus. So if you want to know what love is, read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Not for intellectual knowledge, but ask the Holy Spirit to help you experience Jesus' love as you read the gospels, as read scripture.

Because, second point, we don't become loving by trying harder. We become loving by being loved. Now, it is helpful and good to try to do loving things, that's a good thing, but what supernaturally changes us is an experience of God's love. John says we love because he first loved us. In other words, we love when we feel loved and we just know this, right? Countless studies have shown that babies that don't get held enough or talked to enough, grow up with all kinds of emotional and social problems because they don't know how to love because they didn't experience love early on. And the problem is that nobody can love us perfectly.

Spouses, friends, they're all going to let us down. So the only place we can feel perfectly loved is by God. But then that's kind of hard, isn't it? Because God is kind of abstract and we can't see him.

So how exactly is it that we experience God's love? Well, there's lots and lots of ways. And we've talked about those in the past, but this passage points to one in particular, that kind of seems almost counterintuitive, where it says, "This is how we know," relationally know, "what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us." And he did that, not because we deserved it or earned it because we didn't. The Bible says, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

And this is really important and it feels counterintuitive, but the more we understand the depth of our sin, not to feel shame, not to feel guilt, but just to know it's there, the more we're going to feel loved by Jesus. See, because if we try to feel loved by ignoring our sins or pretending that it's not that bad so we don't hurt our fragile little self esteems the way our culture tells us to do it, that dog don't hunt because deep down we know. We know that we sin. We know our sin hurts people and we know that if a price isn't paid for that, then there's no justice. So ignoring it or pretending that it's not there doesn't work.

But when we understand that God loved us so much that he came himself in the person of Jesus and died to pay the price for our sins so that justice is served, but mercy wins. He loved you that much. He loved you that much to die for you, well then it begins to start to sink in. And that makes us feel the no matter what kind of love of God, not the because kind of love of everyone else. And it changes us. And it makes us more loving, even to people who seem like they don't deserve love because really in a way, none of us deserve God's love. But he loves us anyway.

And in order to experience that deep, deep love of Jesus, we need one last thing, one third thing. We need time with Jesus to experience that love. If you never spend any time with a friend or a spouse, never spend any time with them at all and then say, "Yeah, I just don't feel loved by that person." Well, of course you don't. You didn't spend any time with them. But that's what we do with Jesus. We spend little or no time cultivating a relationship with him and then say, "Well, I don't feel loved by Jesus." Well, yeah, because we're ignoring him.

I saw a meme recently that said if cats could text, they wouldn't. They would just ignore us, which is why there's no such thing as an emotional support cat. That's not a thing. We need time with Jesus. We can't just keep ignoring him. Time for prayer and leave space for those thoughts that maybe aren't our thoughts. They're Jesus talking to us. Time for worship, which is why going to church matters and I'm really hoping that with COVID numbers dropping, some of those of you online can come back. Online is great when you can't get here and encourage you to join us online when you can't be here, keep doing that, but also encourage you, if you can, to come back here because I believe we experience God in different ways when we worship together in one room, in community. It takes time in worship and prayer, scripture, community to be marked by God's love. There's no instant discipleship formula. It takes time. There's no such thing as McSanctification. So spend time where you ask Jesus to help you experience his love because that's what transforms us.

I recently saw an interview with a man named Jacob who at nine years old, saw his sister die of a snake bite in a field. And that sent him on a decades long path of pain that eventually led him as an adult to start the Greater Church of Lucifer, a worldwide satanic cult. And growing up, Jacob's parents, they didn't pay very much attention to him. So he concluded that he was defective in some way, unlovable, and he said his sister was the only person he ever felt loved by. So her death made him feel completely alone. And he said, "From that point on, God became my enemy." He started to bully kids at school. He fought a lot. He became a very angry person and he saw Satan as a powerful being who hated God as much as he did, which led him to start that cult when he was an adult. And they would brainwash people, manipulate them into doing things they didn't want to do. They hurt lot of people.

And he became a world renowned leader in the Satanist movement. And he said, everybody wanted to spend time with him. Everyone wanted to know him. But he said, he knew that was a fake kind of love because they just wanted something from him. It was a because kind of love. And it made him feel even less loved, that everyone wanted to spend time with him. So he started to work 15 hours a day, became angrier and angrier. It started to destroy his whole marriage, but then he began to notice something. Whenever they'd hold an event, there would always be lots of protestors, shouting, throwing things, death threats.

But sometimes he'd get emails from Christians saying, "Please don't think that the protesters represent all Christians. We love you. We don't like what you're doing. We think there's a better way, but we love you."

And he said that began to break down the walls. And he said, then Jesus started showing up in his dreams, telling him how much he loved him, loved Jacob. And that broke down some more walls. And then one day he drove by a church on his way to the store, just an ordinary day, and he said, "I suddenly felt this intense burning sensation inside. Like if I didn't go inside at that church right away, I would die." So he went inside the church and asked for the pastor. Pastor was out of town, but he called him and they talked for two hours. And at the end, the pastor said, "Well, we've been praying for you, Jacob. Because see, every day we pray that people that drive by our church would feel God's love. And that's the burning sensation you felt that drew you here."

So a couple days later, Jacob went back and this time talked to the pastor in person for four hours, about how much Jesus loved him, died to pay the price for his sins. And Jacob said he was overwhelmed. He didn't know up from down. He said, "It's the first time in my life that I felt intensely, genuinely, powerfully loved by God." And he said, "These simple acts of love from these Christians that helped me experience Jesus' love took me straight to my knees. And I gave my life to Christ because of love."

Well, that was six years ago. And he says, "Now everything is different." He says, "I've been empty and bitter my entire life but now I have genuine hope and peace and courage and joy." And he's becoming a world changer. He's working to undo all the damage he did. He's making amends to the people that he hurt. He's working to get people out of cults, including the one he started so that they can experience God's love too. He repaired his marriage. He's not bitter anymore. Because disciples who were marked by Jesus' love loved Jacob, Jacob is now a disciple marked by Jesus' love helping other people feel Jesus' love.

Now, most of you are not Satanists. Just going out on a limb here. Right? Just taking a guess. But the truth is we choose Satan every day, don't we? We just don't call it that. But when we love our career or our grades or getting things our way and demanding our way, we're choosing Satan. When we keep sinning the sins we sin, we're choosing Satan. And you may think, "Well, Jacob, he faced his choice, Jesus or Satan. That's not a very hard choice." Would you like some chocolate chip cookies or death? I don't know. I'll go with the cookies. It seems like an easy choice, but in doing that, here's what he lost. He had to give up his job. That was his job. That's how he made money. Give up all his social connections. Give up all of his fame. Jesus' love made him willing to give up a lot of things because there is nothing more powerful than Jesus' love. It transforms us and makes us people who transform our world.



So this week, two things, spend time asking Jesus to mark you with his love; worship, scripture. A great opportunity is for the next six Wednesday nights, New Hope Revival and Chinese Covenant are going to be hosting a prayer meeting right here from 7:00 to 9:00. Every Wednesday night for the next six weeks. Wednesday night, prayer from 7:00 to 9:00. And for you Presbyterians in the room, you're hearing me correctly. You might be thinking, "Two hours of praying. How does that happen?" Well, come and see. New Hope and Chinese Covenant can show us how it's done. Or if you don't want to stay two hours, you can come for just 20 minutes if you want. But it's a great way to experience Jesus' presence. So I'd encourage you to do that.

And then second, this week, how can you bring Jesus' love to a place that lacks it? School, family work, because there's nothing more powerful than Jesus' love. His love makes blind people see, lame people walk, dead people rise again. Not correct doctrine, that matters. Not great preaching and music, those things are great. But we're not going to see transformation in ourselves, won't see transformation in our families. Won't see transformation in our church, cities, country, world, until we are filled with, overflowing, swimming in, drowning in the overflowing, never ending, reckless, relentless, no matter what love of God. God loves you. Just take that in. Don't like, "Okay, he's a pastor. He had to say it. He's in church." No, no. God really loves you. God loves you more than you could ask or ever imagine. And that changes everything.

So Jesus, help us to experience that love in a way that makes us different, in a way that marks us with your love, in a way that marks us so clearly the world can see your love through us and are drawn to you. In a way that makes us world changes because, Jesus, we know your love is the only thing that's going to change this world. And we ask this in your name Jesus. Amen.

## **Discussion Questions:**

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*Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.*

### **Icebreaker Question:**

- What toppings would you put on your ideal pizza?

### **Opening Question:**

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

**Scripture Reflection Questions** – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g. traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

**Sermon Reflection Questions** - *Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:*

- Has Jesus' love changed you? In what ways?
- Have you tried reading through 1 Corinthians 13 and replacing the word love with your name like Scott did on Sunday?
- In what way is the mark of Jesus' love in you visible to others? What are some aspects of love where you could use some more practice?

### **Closing Question and Application:**

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

### **Closing Group Prayer:**

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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