

Love is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. We talk about it at Valentine's Day. It's on the songs on the radio as you drove into church this morning. What do you love?

There are simple answers. Maybe you talk about who do you love? You love your kids. You love your mom and dad. You love your spouse. You love your family. What do you love? You love your house. You love your hobbies. You love your time off. You'd love a raise or a vacation. You'd love an eighth day of the week.

But this love can cause a crisis. You are forced to act out of love. You don't look at the price tag and say it's too expensive to treat your spouse's cancer. Yeah, dad can be mean sometimes, but you rush to defend him when a friend starts making fun of him. A soldier dies out of love for his brothers in arms and out of love for his country. These are all examples where love can shine in the midst of a crisis.

We have a different kind of love displayed in our Gospel text today: **“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”** The crisis Jesus talks about is not that people aren't loving, but they are loving the wrong things. They love darkness rather than light.

A T.V. show called *Breaking Bad* follows the life of fictional chemistry high school teacher Walter White is diagnosed with incurable lung cancer. To fund his medical expenses, he uses his chemistry expertise to manufacture illegal drugs. As the series progresses, his exploits get darker and more sinister as he becomes more and more successful in this crime.

His justification for this crime is that he is doing it to provide for his family. But that is all a thin veneer. Finally, in the last episode, he confesses to his wife, “I did it for me. I was good at it. I felt alive.” **“People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”**

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. Love is a powerful force, but anything you love more than God is an idol. You don't need to watch a crime drama to see the darkness in the world all around us. Last month, our region was rattled as a man killed two police officers and one firefighter before taking his own life. Why? Ostensibly out of love for his own children as he was embroiled in a custody battle. Dictators imprison and murder dissidents. Why? Out of love of power and order.

In our own lives, our idols may not make the headlines in the news, but they are powerful forces as misplaced love seeks to drive us into the darkness. Love of family might mean brunch instead of worship Sunday morning because your son forsook the church and better time together with the whole family rather than him sitting home alone. Love of money might look like time away from church or

family because you don't think you have enough saved up. Love of grades can mean your mental health, friendships, and spiritual life suffer because you're worried a B+ will endanger your five year plan to become a lawyer. **“For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”**

We can put a shine on it, but the crisis of love is that even though Christ has come into the world, we still love ourselves and our selfish desires rather than Him. We don't want to admit it, but the truth is “I did it for me. I was good at it. I felt alive.” 3. People love the darkness (v. 19-20).

What do you love? The crisis of love reaches a head as God comes to this world. God asks, “Will you love the light or the darkness?” Rather than putting the burden on mankind, God makes the first move. He shows us love by sending His Son Jesus to be the sacrifice for our sins. We read in the Bible: **“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”** Jesus Christ shows us true love.

In fact, we read this familiar Bible passage in our text today: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** This is the way God loved the world, that He gave His only Son to die for you, that by simply believing in Him, you won't die, but will live eternally.

Jesus gives us a sermon illustration to help teach this point, **“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”** When the Israelites were in the desert, they grumbled and wished they were back in Egypt even though the Lord did the miraculous to free them from captivity. As a punishment, He sent fiery serpents to bite and kill the Israelites. The solution was to have Moses make a bronze serpent and if anyone looked at the snake, he would be healed.

God uses the venom as the antidote. He says, if you love darkness, I'll show you darkness. I will send my Son to die for you, and the sun itself will refuse to shine. If you love idols, I'll give you something to worship. Worship at the foot of this cross, a Roman symbol of crime, guilt, and death. Yet through this cross, all who look upon the Savior and believe in Him will live just as those who viewed the bronze serpent were healed. “When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, My richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.”

The crisis of love ended in Jesus, the Son of God being tortured, killed, and buried. Yet this was an act of true love and Christ paid for your sins and mine. He atoned for not only your sins, but the sins of the whole world. He invites you to see all your worldly accomplishments as secondary in nature to the hope and life you have in the God-man who gave everything for you.

Because He not only shows us the depths of His love in the cross, but He shows us the power of eternal life, as even the ugliest of deaths had no power over Him. Jesus rose from the grave, and shows us that there is more than this life, eternal life starts even now as we trust in Jesus as our Savior, and we live out our callings in the light of God's grace. 2. Through the crisis of the Son's lifting up, God loves the world (v. 14-16).

What do you love? We continue reading, **“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”** This is the crisis: Jesus came not to condemn you, but to save you. He came to call you to walk in His light.

God is still calling us to do good. He is calling us to do what is true. He is calling us to love Him first and foremost, and then the rest will follow suit. **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”** It is in responding to the love of our Lord and Savior that we find that we gain all those things that we have been striving for all along.

It is only through Christ's love that we can love others safely. Apart from the love we receive from Jesus, dating relationships become possessive, marital relationships grow cold, and familial relationships grow estranged, but in following Christ, we find that we often grow closer together. The family that prays together stays together.

Christ's love enhances our love of worldly things by putting them in our proper place. The crisis of love starts to resolve. We go to our sporting events knowing that they are temporary fun, so we can compete without losing our temper at the refs. We go to work with the light of Christ, and we know that our Heavenly Father provides us with every good and perfect gift, so that whether much or little, the Lord will provide for our needs. As students, we study with earnestness knowing that it pleases God to train for our future vocations, but we ultimately leave the results of the tests and projects to the one who loves us and knows what's best for us.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, God's love calls us to the truth. **“But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.”** 1. This crisis brings us from darkness into light (v. 17-18, 21).

We live in a world where love is all around us. We hear about it on the radio, and our movies and television show us the power of love. But we as Christians understand true love through our Savior's birth, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection. God dwells in us to reflect that same love throughout the week.  
**THROUGH THE CRISIS OF GOD'S LOVE, WE ENTER THE LIGHT.**