Title: **VALENTINE’S DAY SERMON**

**Purpose:** To consider the love of God in comparison to Valentine’s Day and what it stands for.

**Text:** 1 John 4:7-21

**Introduction**

As we anticipate Valentine’s Day, let’s consider the history and tradition of this celebration of love, and then consider what the Bible says about love.

The history of Valentine’s Day—and the story of its patron saint—is shrouded in mystery. We do know that February has long been celebrated as a month of romance, and that St. Valentine’s Day, as we know it today, contains vestiges of both Christian and ancient Roman tradition. But who was Saint Valentine, and how did he become associated with this ancient rite?

The Catholic Church recognizes at least three different saints named Valentine or Valentinus, all of whom were martyred.

- One legend contends that Valentine was a priest who served during the third century in Rome. When Emperor Claudius II decided that single men made better soldiers than those with wives and families, he outlawed marriage for young men. Valentine, realizing the injustice of the decree, defied Claudius and continued to perform marriages for young lovers in secret. When Valentine’s actions were discovered, Claudius ordered that he be put to death.

- Other stories suggest that Valentine may have been killed for attempting to help Christians escape harsh Roman prisons, where they were often beaten and tortured.

- According to one legend, an imprisoned Valentine actually sent the first “valentine” greeting himself after he fell in love with a young girl—possibly his jailor’s daughter—who visited him during his confinement. Before his death, it is alleged that he wrote her a letter signed “From your Valentine,” an expression that is still in use today.

Although the truth behind the Valentine legends is murky, the stories all emphasize
his appeal as a sympathetic, heroic and—most importantly—romantic figure. By the Middle Ages, perhaps thanks to this reputation, Valentine would become one of the most popular saints in England and France.

While some believe that Valentine’s Day is celebrated in the middle of February to commemorate the anniversary of Valentine’s death or burial—which probably occurred around A.D. 270—others claim that the Christian church may have decided to place St. Valentine’s feast day in the middle of February in an effort to “Christianize” the pagan celebration of Lupercalia.

Celebrated at the ides of February, or February 15, Lupercalia was a fertility festival dedicated to Faunus, the Roman god of agriculture, as well as to the Roman founders Romulus and Remus. To begin the festival, members of the Luperci, an order of Roman priests, would gather at a sacred cave where the infants Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, were believed to have been cared for by a she-wolf or lupa. The priests would sacrifice a goat, for fertility, and a dog, for purification. They would then strip the goat’s hide into strips, dip them into the sacrificial blood and take to the streets, gently slapping both women and crop fields with the goat hide. Far from being fearful, Roman women welcomed the touch of the hides because it was believed to make them more fertile in the coming year. Later in the day, according to legend, all the young women in the city would place their names in a big urn. The city’s bachelors would each choose a name and become paired for the year with his chosen woman. These matches often ended in marriage.

Lupercalia survived the initial rise of Christianity but was outlawed—as it was deemed “un-Christian”—at the end of the 5th century, when Pope Gelasius declared February 14 St. Valentine’s Day. It was not until much later, however, that the day became definitively associated with love.

During the Middle Ages, it was commonly believed in France and England that February 14 was the beginning of birds’ mating season, which added to the idea that the middle of Valentine’s Day should be a day for romance. Valentine greetings were popular as far back as the Middle Ages, though written Valentine’s didn’t begin to appear until after 1400. The oldest known valentine still in existence today was a poem written in 1415 by Charles, Duke of Orleans, to his wife while he was imprisoned in the Tower of London following his capture at the Battle of Agincourt. (The greeting is now part of the manuscript collection of the British Library in London, England.) Several years later, it is believed that King Henry V hired a
In addition to the United States, Valentine's Day is celebrated in Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom, France and Australia. In Great Britain, Valentine's Day began to be popularly celebrated around the 17th century. By the middle of the 18th, it was common for friends and lovers of all social classes to exchange small tokens of affection or handwritten notes, and by 1900 printed cards began to replace written letters due to improvements in printing technology. Ready-made cards were an easy way for people to express their emotions in a time when direct expression of one’s feelings was discouraged. Cheaper postage rates also contributed to an increase in the popularity of sending Valentine's Day greetings. Americans probably began exchanging hand-made valentines in the early 1700s. In the 1840s, Esther A. Howland began selling the first mass-produced valentines in America. Howland, known as the “Mother of the Valentine,” made elaborate creations with real lace, ribbons and colorful pictures known as “scrap.” Today, according to the Greeting Card Association, an estimated 1 billion Valentine’s Day cards are sent each year, making Valentine’s Day the second largest card-sending holiday of the year. (An estimated 2.6 billion cards are sent for Christmas.) Women purchase approximately 85 percent of all valentines. (http://www.history.com/topics/valentines-day) which is a sad commentary about us men!

Though the history of Valentine’s Day is uncertain, God’s Word is not! It speaks more clearly and more eloquently about love than any story or tradition.

The apostle John wrote in his first epistle, chapter 4, beginning in verse 7 . . .

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 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. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God,
and God in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 John 4:7-21)

Have you ever felt unloved, uncared for, unappreciated, unnoticed, unworthy? All of us have had these feelings at one time or another, and to one degree or another. And unfortunately, there are probably those who, in fact, may actually be unloved, uncared for, unappreciated and unnoticed—at least by people.

But not by God!

John, in his first epistle, tells us some critically important things about love. The first thing is that . . .

I. LOVE COMES FROM GOD, vv.7,8,16,19

We usually think of love that comes from people, and as an emotion or maybe a hormonal response. We speak of “chemistry” and “love at first sight” when we think of romantic love.

But though love is as common and as ancient as the air we breathe, and though we’ve examined and analyzed it in science and art, it remains a mystery.

But God has removed the veil of mystery. We are told in His Word that God is love. Now it’s important to quickly add that God did not say “Love is God!” And yet, that’s how many have interpreted it. “All You Need Is Love” is the title of a classic Beatle’s song, and the philosophy and theology of many.

But God said love is an essential quality of His being. God is God because He is eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, and because He is the source and essence of love.

Everything we think and know about love, including the concept itself, comes from God, who is love.
And when we love, there is at least a seed of God's love in it. The love you have for your family and your friends is a reflection of God's love, much as the light of the moon is a reflection of the sun's light. The moon could not shine if it weren't for the sun. In the same way, we could not love if God had not first radiated love to His creation.

We were created in God's love; we are sustained in God's love; we are saved in God's love; and we are destined to be preserved in God's love for eternity.

Hell is the existence without the love of God! But what is it that drives out the fear of hell? God's perfect love! And that's another critical thing John tells us about love.

II.  PERFECT LOVE DRIVES OUT FEAR, v.18

Because we have a built-in sensitivity to right and wrong, called the conscience, we feel a sense of guilt when we do something we know we shouldn't do, or when we don't do something we know we should do.

That sense of guilt is really a fear of the consequences. Now fear can be a great motivator; it can motivate us to change or to despair.

It can draw us to the One who can help us, or it can cause us to flee from the One we fear. The determining factor is how we view the One we're either attracted to or afraid of.

If we view God's essential nature as anything but love, we will flee in fear. If we view His essential nature as righteousness, we'll fear His judgment. If we view His essential nature as power, we'll fear His sovereignty. If we view His essential nature as knowledge and wisdom, we'll fear being exposed.

But what is there to fear about love!? As Paul wrote,

4 Love is patient, love is kind. . . . it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails. (1 Cor. 13:4-8a)

When we “fail” we fear God’s love will end. But such an understanding of God’s
love is wrong. Indeed, such an understanding of God’s love comes from the Deceiver! And when we believe him or our feelings instead of God, we fall victim to the same trick played on Eve (remember how she and Adam hid in fear, rather than running to God for help!).

God’s love is “perfect” in that it is patient, kind, not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres, and never fails!

Our problem is we imagine God’s love is like our love—imperfect. But it’s not! It’s perfect!

And when we accept that and trust that, we are drawn to Him rather than fleeing from Him—even when we know we’ve done what we shouldn’t, or failed to do what we should; even when we know that what we’ve done or not done offends God—because His perfect love draws us to Himself so He can forgive, heal and restore.

But God’s love does even more! John tells us . . .

### III. GOD’S LOVE PRODUCES LOVE FOR OTHERS, v.19

When the moon is in sight of the sun, it can’t help but reflect the sun’s light—even though it’s a long way off; even though it’s surface is rough and scarred. As long as the sun can “see” the moon and the moon can “see” the sun, it can’t help but reflect the sun’s light.

In the same way, when we see God’s perfect love—in spite of the “distance” our sins have taken us from God, and in spite of our “rough and scarred” lives—when we see and accept God’s perfect love, we can’t help but reflect that love to others!

And that’s the real evidence of knowing God! It’s not what church we attend or how often we attend; it’s not how much we know about the Bible or Christian doctrine; it’s not how often or how passionate we pray that demonstrates that we’re a Christian; it’s reflecting God’s perfect love to others that demonstrates we’ve come to know God’s love.

Jesus said, “**By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.**” (Jn. 13:35) And he further described that love when He said, 12 My
command is this: **Love each other as I have loved you.** 13 **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** (Jn. 15:12-13)

What does it mean to lay down our life? It means to love others as we love ourselves; i.e., care for others as we care for ourselves. It means to love our family, our friends, strangers, even our enemies, because God loved us even when we were “strangers” and “enemies” to Him. And His love makes strangers and enemies, friends and even family!

**Conclusion**

Valentine’s Day is a day to tell others we love them. But what if no one tells you they love you? How do we deal with the feelings, and maybe even the possibility, that we aren’t loved?

- Believe God who said He loved us so much He sent His only Son as proof
- Love others, regardless of their lack of love for us
- When we believe God and love others, we will realize the fullness of God’s love in us

Unfortunately, many people try to deal with their feelings in the opposite way:

- They wait for the feeling that God loves them, while at the same time entertaining doubt about God’s love
- They look for feelings of love for others before they love, while at the same time entertaining feelings of isolation, or worse bitterness and unforgiveness
- But this way of dealing with such feelings actually prevents us from realizing and reflecting God’s love!

The realization and reflection of God’s love for us is what . . .

- Causes marriages to endure and be happy
- Causes parents to truly love and equip their children for life
- Causes people to overlook the faults and failures in strangers and even enemies
  - Proverbs 10:12 *Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers over all wrongs.*
  - 1 Peter 4:8 *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*
I pray that you have come to know God's perfect love for you, and that His love will be reflected to others, not only on Valentine's Day, but every day, so that you will realize the fullness of God’s love.