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**Grace Fellowship Church, Port Jervis, New York**

**October 9, 2022**

**Five Blessings**

**1 John 5:1-5**

**Prayer:** *Father, I want to come before you today as we open up your word. Again, I just thank you for the grace that you've given to us. I thank you for the ability to go back to 1 John and again I just thank you for it. I pray this morning as we open up your book that once again we'd have the privilege of the presence of your Holy Spirit guiding us and directing us once again. And again I pray as I always do this will be of permanent value. And I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we spent most of last year looking at 1 John and this is a letter written towards the end of John's life to believers who, according to Bakers New Testament Commentary: "were generally not recent converts but had been Christians for some time. The writer addresses 'fathers' and 'young men' many of whom have heard the gospel 'from the beginning.' They know the teachings of Christ, obey his commands, and confess his name. They are fully aware of the pernicious attacks of the devil, who appears to them in the form of the antichrist, false prophets, and liars."

And we know that John was a man who was deeply affectionate towards his readers, referring to them often as "dear friend" or "my dear children" but he was also a man given to jarring descriptions of those that he perceived to be enemies of the church. He had no problem calling out and identifying false prophets and antichrists and liars because subtlety was not John's strong suit. His passion for Christ and his kingdom and his desire to demonstrate the love of Christ in practical ways is what marked his letter. We did nineteen different messages covering 1 John 1 chapter 4, so I'm not going to reiterate the past because it's available to anyone who's in interest, it's on Sermonaudio. So what I'd like to do is kind of highlight and review what we spoke about in the first four chapters of 1 John because it's been about six months since we were last into it, and then finish up the book starting at chapter 5.

*This is 1 John 5:1-3 which says: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*

Again these words should sound familiar to us because they echo a theme that John has stated time and time again. 1 John 5:1 states

that faith in Jesus as the Christ is the result of a supernatural miracle of God, and that along with that faith will always come a love for our fellow believers. John declares the only way that you can believe that Jesus is the Christ is if you've been born of God. Quote -- *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God."* And this second birth that he's talking about, it takes us back to a conversation that Jesus had with Nicodemus way back in John's gospel in the third chapter. Here Jesus attempts to explain that exact process to a completely confounded Nicodemus. This is found in *John 3*. He says: *Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Poor Nicodemus. I mean he's one of the leading teachers in all of Israel, he's someone steeped in an Old Testament understanding of who God was, someone touched by God and drawn inexorably to the life that Jesus was. And the very idea of Nicodemus going to Jesus, this itinerant, impoverished man, without any rank, without any privilege, without any education was so appallingly foreign and so incredibly dangerous that Nicodemus could only approach Jesus under the cloak of darkness. He just couldn't wrap his head around

this idea that Jesus was insisting that he be born again. Now for us that's just another way of describing the process of becoming a Christian: You must be born again. I mean for us that's so common a term, it's now even used as is a pejorative. You know, those born agains, those folks that are shoving their faith down your throat all the time? Just imagine for a moment, imagine never having heard the term ever before and being told by Jesus that being born a second time is an absolute necessity. *Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"*

I mean, what would you think if you were confronted with that term for the very first time? It says: *Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'"*

Jesus is not stating an obligation here, he's merely, he's stating a fact. You know, folks misunderstand Jesus suggesting some kind of moral obligation that Nicodemus has to kind of get himself born again. *"You must be born again"* is not a moral command, it is a statement of fact by Jesus that unless God supernaturally births you, you're never going to make sense of anything he's saying. I

mean being born again is something that God alone does and that's what Jesus is acknowledging. Jesus is referring to the absolute inevitability of a supernatural birth as starting the process of entering the kingdom of God, not as something that Nicodemus has to accomplish on his own. I mean if I say to you the only way that you can have life is to be born, I'm not suggesting that's something that you have to accomplish. I'm suggesting that's something that's already been granted to you as privilege. You're here by virtue of the fact that your mother gave birth to you. You had nothing to do with it. When Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again, he's not speaking of an obligation to accomplish that but rather to say the only way you can enter the kingdom of God is by God himself having done that for you. And then Jesus describes to Nicodemus the role that the Holy Spirit plays in opening our eyes to this process of being born again. He says -- this is Jesus: *"The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."* In other words Jesus is saying, Nicodemus, you have as much control over this process as you do over the strength and the direction of the wind. Of course the wind is another word for the Spirit of God which is precisely what Jesus is referring to. It's all supernatural, Nicodemus, and it's all out of your control. And again, that's what John is alluding to when he says in his opening statement of

chapter 5: *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God.* I mean if you believe that Jesus is the Christ, it's only because you've had that happen to you. You have been born again, and you have as much control over that as you do over the wind.

Jesus then goes on to say that a further proof that you've been supernaturally born of God is that you've also been given a supernatural love, not just for the Father, but for every one of his children. *And everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.* I mean there's a supernatural chain of logic that starts with being born again which is also the start of the love that we have for God. I mean you didn't have that love, you didn't have it at all before you were born again because no one does. I mean, think about your friends, think about your neighbors, your colleagues, those -- just think about those who are not born again, what do you think they think about God? I mean whatever it is, I guarantee you, it is not love. It may be fear, it may be hatred. It's much more likely that it's something that God views as even worse than hatred but it's something that is probably the most prevalent reaction that human beings have toward God and that's one of studied indifference.

Well, how can I say that people who aren't born again have no love

for God? I'm not saying it; it's God who's saying it. I mean Jesus told the disciples that their identification with him would mark them out for hatred from the world. *John 15:18: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you."* And then Jesus draws the logical connection between hatred of the Son and hatred of the Father. He says, *"Whoever hates me hates my father also."* And you know, Jesus put it into perspective by telling a story, telling a parable of just how the world hates him and his Father. He told this story in *Mark 12*. He says: *And he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country. When the season came, he sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed. And so with many others: some they beat, and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others."*

I mean Jesus is using a story to tell us how his father perceives the hatred that he receives. What God is saying, this is my world, I mean, I created it, I own it, I sustain it. You all are just tenants and you've been given the task of glorifying me by managing my creation. He says I sent one of my servants which is a reference to the prophets that God sent to Israel, he said, and you wound up beating him, you wound up sending him packing. So I sent you another and you beat him about the head. I sent you another and you killed him. But I didn't stop there. I kept sending you more and more of my servants and again these are prophets, and your response was to beat and to kill them. Until finally I decided to send you the ultimate servant and that was my Son. Surely you're going to respect my son. He says but instead of respect their twisted minds were darkened, as God has said of us, and instead of recognizing and respecting the son, they decided that killing him would leave the father with no heir and somehow magically they would then become the heirs to the vineyard. This is Jesus giving us the picture of how his father sees the world's reaction to his claim as owner of the vineyard. If we murder his son, somehow or other we're going to miraculously become the heirs.

Well, before you think whose thinking would be that twisted, I suggest you just look around you. I mean have you looked at the news lately? I mean have you looked at a paper lately? Have you



noticed the insanity of so many of the decisions of those who are in power today? How antithetical they are to simple common sense and how deeply they are into outright murderous rebellion? Jesus' story of the vineyard workers, it's not describing some bizarre group of anti-God outliers. He's describing your friends, your neighbors, your colleagues, your family. He's describing virtually anyone who is outside the kingdom of God, because there is buried within each one of us this deep resentment towards God and a belief deep down that he has no right whatsoever over my life, my property, my interest, or my future. That's our natural state. And that natural antipathy is miraculously reversed when the Holy Spirit births us into his kingdom. *1 John 5:1: Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him.*

Our text this morning describes three radical changes that accompany being born again. Number one, we believe that Jesus is the Christ; number two, we fall in love with the Father; and number three, we love everyone else that he has birthed in the same manner. We also recognize that being born again is not so much a command as it is a statement of fact, while loving the brethren is both. I mean, it's a fact of the new birth but it's also a command of Jesus. Here's how I put it previously. This is what Jesus said in *John 13*. He says: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you*

*love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall you know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

The first thing that we notice here is Jesus doesn't make this love optional. It's a command. We're under orders to love one another. And you know, the idea of love being a command strikes us as strange because we tend to think of love strictly as something that's emotional. I mean who can demand, who can command an emotion? I mean because we so thoroughly identify with love only as an emotion we think we have the option of loving those we find loveable and avoiding those that we don't. You know, people that frighten us, people that anger us, people that annoy us, people we just can't stand. Surely we don't have to love them. Jesus says that's precisely who he's referring to. This is what he said in Luke 6. He said: *"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same."*

You see, a true mark of a loving church is not how well she loves the lovely and the loveable. Jesus is absolutely unimpressed with that. It's how well she loves those who cannot or will not love her back. That applies to those who are outside the church and it

especially applies to those who are inside. Love the brethren is not an option. And one of the most important functions of the local body is to move folks to learn how to make every effort to love. God does that by taking people with nothing in common but Jesus, gathering them together to show that Jesus Christ in the power of his Holy Spirit can conquer those differences and demonstrate the true power of God, and that power is the love of God. The local body is supposed to showcase that love by demonstrating a supernatural ability to love folks who will not love them back. And the part that we don't understand is that this love is imperative. It's not optional. Christ said you must love one another. And again, we have a very confused idea of what that love is, I mean, as I said, we think of love as a feeling, it's an emotion, it's something that arises from our gut. How in the world can God command a gut reaction if I just can't muster it? The fact is a gut reaction is not what God demands of us in the first place. I've said it before, love is not something you feel; love is something you do. It's not a matter of emotion as much as it is a matter of obedience. I mean we think of love as the end product of a process that starts with acquaintance and then it kind of moves into friendship and it ends up at love and we wonder how in the world am I supposed to love somebody I don't even like? Well, nothing could be farther from God's idea. I mean when John says: *We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love*

*the brothers, he's expecting us to love people we don't necessarily like.*

Of course the greatest example of that love in the New Testament is the story of the good Samaritan, something I just spoke about two weeks ago. How we largely miss the sting of God choosing as his model of what love is a Samaritan, in so doing he picked one of Israel's most despised enemies. And at the time Jesus gave this parable the Jews had elevated hatred for enemies to basically an art form. They detested the Samaritans as a group of half breeds who had intermarried out of the Jewish faith, who had polluted the worship of God and installed a false form of worship. Jewish travelers would routinely go miles and miles out of the way to avoid stepping one foot in Samaritan territory, and they considered detesting them to be a matter of honor. So Jesus selecting a Samaritan as an example is no mere coincidence.

And again, the story occurs in *Luke 10*. This is the story. It says: *And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him -- that's tested Jesus -- saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND,' and 'YOUR NEIGHBOR AS*

*YOURSELF.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."*

You know, the subtle way there Jesus' brilliance once again is on display. If you recall, it says the lawyer tested Jesus by asking him how to obtain eternal life. When Jesus commends him for stating correctly that he has to above all, he has to love God and

love his neighbor, he asked Jesus who is my neighbor, but he asks it in a snide, snarky kind of way. As the scripture says, "*seeking to justify himself.*" And Jesus, knowing these folks detested even saying the word "Samaritan," he boxes him into a corner by asking him at the end of his story, which of these three is his neighbor, knowing that the only answer he can really give is the Samaritan. Well, the man can't bring himself to say those words, can't bring himself to give him that honor, so he says, "*he who showed mercy to him.*"

Well Jesus is defining two very important things here. Number one, he's defining what love is, he's defining it not as what you feel but as what you do. And secondly, he's defining who a neighbor is, I mean, he points out that a neighbor is not somebody who lives in close proximity to you, a neighbor is someone who identifies to you as someone in need. Jesus said to the lawyer, "*So which one of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?*" I mean your neighbor can live down the street or he can live on the other side of the world. What makes him a neighbor is not his location, it is his need. And when God places someone with a need on your heart or into your life, he's asking if you are willing to become his neighbor. I've mentioned before, Mr. Rogers was on to something when he said, "Won't you be my neighbor." He knew that once you've acknowledged someone has your neighbor, you

therefore have an obligation to love that neighbor.

You know, I think of us as a church. God has given us two in particular neighbors, one from India, one from Honduras. They're far a way but they're just as soon next door. Here in this instance of this story Jesus just happens to select for his story a neighbor who's physically unconscious. He selects a person who can contribute nothing by way of his personal response other than the fact that he's needy. And notice the way the Samaritan loves his neighbor. It's not with what he feels, instead it's with what he does. There's absolutely no place in the parable for love to have anything to do with feeling, anything to do with emotion. In fact how the Samaritan felt or how the victim felt was completely immaterial. You know, I've compared the Samaritan to a volunteer emergency medical technician treating an accident victim with a head injury who's belligerent. Does he like the person who's screaming and cursing at him? No. Is he loving the person he's not liking? Absolutely. How does he love him? Does he love him by trying to drum up warm fuzzies or by healing his wounds in spite of his abuse? You see, love is not what you feel, it's what you do. And when Jesus demands of us to love one another, he's demanding actions, he's not demanding feelings. Furthermore God says when feelings cause us to confine our love solely to those people that we find lovely, we're no different than pagans. He

says: *"If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them."* God says big deal.

I mean, I can't overemphasize how important this is to God and how much of it is presented as a non optional commandment. In *John 15* Jesus said: *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another."*

Love is not Christ's suggestion for his people, it is absolutely a non-negotiable demand. And in a sense our text goes even farther this morning, much, much farther than like being "born again," it simply states love for the brethren as a matter of fact for believers. It's part of God's definition for a believer, a description of a born again believer is that, yes, everyone who



*believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.*

And you know, God has given us a place where people themselves become God's primary resource for developing our ability to love people we might not like. That place is called the church. And that ability usually grows through conflict and struggle. I mean after all, if you only love those who love you, what credit is that to you? If you only pursue those relationships that are safe and mutually protective, well don't expect to grow. Even pagans do that. If you're willing to let God grow your capacity to love, then the church is the perfect place for that to happen. Now for many today, that model is the megachurch, but for me it is really just the opposite. I know for a fact that there's some things that large churches can do far better than small churches can do and I thank God for the blessings that they can be but there's some things that small churches can do that big churches can't do as well.

You know, way back I mentioned a friend I hadn't seen for a while, told me that he had gone to a church for two years and recently left it, it was a megachurch. And I said, "What was their response

to your leaving?" And he chuckled, he said, "They had no idea I was there in the first place." I've often said if you walk into this building, I can tell you for better or for worse you will get noticed. I know some large churches make it mandatory for you to belong to a small group. I think that's helpful, but I can also say that if you go to a church on a regular basis and you don't have any relationship with any spiritual authority in that church, if you're not in a position to get to know some of the people and for those people to get to know you, you're not really getting the point of going to church, you're simply attending a service and you can do that from home. I mean you can get far better preaching, singing and worship from a thousand different sources on the Internet and you'd be missing the point of church entirely. You might think pastor X is the greatest Bible teacher you've ever heard but I as your pastor know something that pastor X on You Tube can never know, and that's your name, that's your family, and hopefully that's your spiritual health. You can't get that from You Tube. It frankly misses the whole point of God's intent for the church.

I've often said God -- the church is what God does when he takes a group of people from every nation, tribe and tongue as well as every other walk of life who have absolutely nothing else in common but Jesus and then he puts them all in this salt shaker and he

shakes them all up, and he dumps them out in this place at 25 Sullivan Avenue, in front of the watching world he then says, "Show them how you love one another." Well John goes on to say in our text this morning: *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.* Well, so how do you love God, love his children and obey his commandments through You Tube? I mean one of God's clearest commandments is found in *Hebrews 10:24.* He said: *And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.* How do you consider one another without physically interacting? How do you stir up one another to good works and love through You Tube? I mean, how you obey God's command to not forsake assembling together of yourselves when you don't do it?

I mean it's amazing to me how much this ties into the scripture that we spent this past summer looking at in Ecclesiastes which concludes all things by saying the most important conclusion you can reach about life itself is to simply fear God and obey his commandments. I pointed out that that point is the very point that John is driving home. Again, he's talking about knowing that we're children of God because we do the exact same thing: We fear God, we love him, and we obey his commandments. He's not stating it as

an obligation, he's stating it as an observation. This is what born again believers do. Obedience to us should be as natural as breathing. I've said before, if you're alive, you breathe. You don't think about it, you don't fret about it, you don't consider the act of breathing, "I've got to do this 40,000 times a day," you don't think of it as a burden, instead it's the most natural part of being alive. Well so, too, for a Christian should be works, that is obeying God's commands. They should flow from faith as naturally as breath flows from life. That's what John is saying this morning. He says: *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.* That's why James says: *So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.*

I pointed out how we show we're alive spiritually is through works. I said in the old days nurses would bring a mirror up to the nose and the mouth of dying people to see if they were still alive and if their breath fogged up the mirror they were still breathing, so they were still living. James applies the very same test of life to Christians except instead of holding a mirror up to their noses, he's holding a mirror up to their works to see if they fog up the mirror. Religion produces the opposite. Religion produces dead

people walking. You can take a corpse and you can hook it up to a heart lung machine and force it to breathe but you're not going to create life that way. Breath comes from life, not vice versa. And we walk in those good works because now as new creatures in Christ we have a God-given desire to obey. Again John says in our text this morning: *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.*

Well, you know in the story of good Samaritan Jesus affirms the two most important commands that every one of us is under. "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND,' and 'YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'" Well, how are you supposed to love a God that Jesus tells us plainly we hate? Well, John said one of the first things that happens when we become born again is that we begin for the first time to actually love the Father. That's because the Spirit of Christ now living in us responds as Jesus did by loving his Father. Well, how does that love develop? How does that love grow? Well, by learning who he is, by learning what he has done. This is what we're doing right now.

As John told us in the last chapter, we love because he first loved us, and because we love, we find his commandments are not burdensome. I mean just imagine what it would be like, imagine not

being born again, just simply being in the world with that same natural dislike for God that I spoke of at the beginning and then having the burden of having to live the Christian life. There are I would say hundreds of millions of people who do that. That's what religion does. I mean how burdensome do you think it would be to be a non-believer to have to devote your time, your energy, your money to the cause of Christ to spend time gathering each week to sing praises and pray and to enjoy -- quote, unquote -- "the fellowship of others of like mind." What a burden, what a burdensome command that would be. Why isn't it burdensome to us? Because God has placed in our spirit the Spirit of Christ, and that spirit wants what Christ wants and what Christ wants is to be perfectly obedient to his Father's commands. This is the gift you have received. This is the gift we've been given and with that gift comes the power not just to obey God's commands but to want to obey those commands in the first place. That's the gift. We all know this world is divided into two kingdoms, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. What John wants us to celebrate is the victory that we have gained by being literally pulled out of the kingdom of darkness and be thrust into the kingdom of light. *Colossians 1* says: *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.* And finally John celebrates that victory by telling us: *For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that*

*has overcome the world -- our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

So that's what it all comes down to. Do you believe that Jesus is the son of God? And you know, that's not simply a matter of agreeing with a set of beliefs. It's far, far more. But in this one paragraph God has declared five separate blessings: Number one, you have been born of God; number two, you love the Father; number three, you love the brethren; number four, you obey his commands; and number five, you find them not burdensome. If all of that is true in your life, congratulations, you're not just a believer, you are a victor who has overcome the world. Let's pray.

*Father, I just thank you for this gift that you have given to us. I thank you for the Spirit of Christ that dwells in those who have given their lives to you and those who believe that Jesus is the Christ. I just pray that each and every one of us would not just accept the gift for what it is but accept the gift as the start of a journey where we feel passionate about spreading that gift to others. Empower us, enrich us, give us the ability and the courage to share this gifts, I pray in Jesus name. Amen.*