

You Started it!!
1 John 4:19

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With Ben

We have been reading 1 John and gaining a sense of the person who wrote it. It seems he is very caught up with considering Jesus. He is very conscious of the Lord, very aware of him. That is not something we can take for granted because there are lots of distractions, ideas and

preoccupations. John seems to be able to be in touch with who he is and what matters. I have found when reading through this letter that it is so grounding. It brings you back to the truth that is in Jesus Christ. The meditation, the focus of verse 19 "We love because he first loved us" is this question, "Why are we the way we are?" Why is Christianity the way it is? Where did it all begin? How did it all start?

Because we are by nature very self-conscious, self-obsessed and self-consumed it is very easy to think in terms of, "My walk with God, I came to know the Lord, I invited Jesus into my life, When I became a Christian, How I serve the Lord, What I do in church life, How is my prayer-life, What's my Bible reading like? And how am I perceived amongst God's people? What is my place in the pecking order of the congregation? Our horizons can be very locked into ourselves. But John goes larger and bigger and wider and more glorious.

It's like kids in the playground. I am sure you can remember what it was like; it wasn't that long ago... In the playground (I wish it was only in the playground) people have disputes and arguments and one of the fundamental first instincts tends to be, "Who started it?" It's a fundamental instinct to place the blame where it belongs, to say who is responsible, where did this thing begin! If we can track down the source of the problem then we can get to grips with it and get some justice. John is thinking, "Where did this love come from? Where is the beginning of it, Who is responsible? Who started this? Where is the source?" I love the fact that the Bible starts with, "In the beginning God." Isn't that right? In the beginning God! It's not as if we have to work it out. God declares it and unashamedly makes it known, "It was ME!" "I started it!" This is not a cry for justice or vengeance and retribution or a settling of scores. It is a cry that speaks of better things than the blood of Able. It is the cry of the blood of Jesus Christ that cries out 'mercy'. Where does this grace come from? Where did this mercy begin? Where was its origin, where did it start? We had a lovely walk in the Arthog Estuary on the southern shore of the Mawddach Estuary where there is a river that comes down in cascades all the way down to the bottom. It is an absolute delight just to walk up past all the rock pools to the top and find the source of the river where the water just bubbles out of the ground and find the beginning, the origin of something.

Why is there love in the world? We hear people complaining about all the bad things and all the things that go wrong, trying to hold somebody to account, somebody to blame. What I want to know is, "Where does all the good come from?" Why is the sun so lovely? Why are the clouds so beautiful? Why does food taste so good? Why are the little birds all covered in such incredible plumage? Why is there so much grace? This is our world but are we worthy of all this good? Have we earned it in some way? Have all our efforts somehow shaken the Heavens and made it rain? Where has the beautiful green of the land and the little lambs come from? Where has all the good come from? Why is there so much good in the world? Of all the good in the world, where does the love come from? It's the greatest of all things; there is love in the world. This passage tells us that "God is love" God is here. He is still working, still present in the world granting all these undeserved, unmerited blessings and graces to people who mostly forget about him. Self-occupied, conceited, egotistical, self-centred, grumbling, complaining, violent, ambitious, and yet Jesus said the sun rises on the just and the unjust and the rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. Why is there so much good at work in the world? How has this happened? We can tell people why it is so. It is because God sent his Son into the world as an atoning sacrifice for our sin so that we are not treated as our sins deserve at all. If we were treated as our sins deserve, if we

experienced justice, who could stand before God and say I am righteous? No, not one! The fact that we have a real solid concrete hope that we will be able to stand in the presence of God and be embraced by him and welcomed into his eternal kingdom is a miracle of grace anchored and secured by Jesus Christ by him alone and by his shed blood. He did it! God did it! It was HIM! He started it. He loved us. He saw us from afar and he loved us.

If we think about this man John, the writer of this text, the youngest of those two boys, James and John, sons of Zebedee fishing on Lake Galilee with Jonah and his boys Andrew and Simon Peter who all grew up together in the little town of Bethsaida. If Salome, the sister of Mary was their mother they would be cousins of Jesus. Would John have wondered about such a plan and how many different roads his life could have taken, thinking how the religious nationalists were calling for people to follow them on some great rebellion, a triumphal march to take their country back. And there were the Pharisees saying don't go there we'll just stay in our little chapel and be holy. But then they all met Jesus, including the tax collector and Siman the zealot and his son Judas from Cana. He changed their lives. Who and what would John be without Jesus? What hope would he have had? What kind of life would he be living if he had never known Jesus? In his gospel he describes himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved. His whole life was defined by being loved by Jesus Christ.

How do you define yourself? John knows who he is. "I am loved by God in Jesus Christ. That is who I am. John writes to share that gospel with other people who don't know that love. He writes, "That you might believe". "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." We are so loved by God! What incredible grace! Who started it? God did. As underserving as we are he decided to show mercy and be gracious in his one and only Son as an atoning sacrifice of our sin. The whole understanding of this gospel is shaped by this love. John's most biting indictment against the church in Ephesus is that they had forgotten their first love. If we are defined by this love and there is no love in a Christian community then it is a total anomaly. It is impossible. We love because he first loved us. That is Christianity. God has chosen each one of us by the same grace so we love each other unconditionally. God has been kind to me so it is my moral duty and responsibility and spiritual life to love you for the same reason. He has been kind to me so I am kind to you. "Treat others the same way you want them to treat you" (Lk. 6:31) is not a promise that people will return your love. We do it because God started it and you are his disciples, the followers of Jesus Chrst, the children of God. It's how we are called to live.

The great 'because' of verse 19 takes us back to the origins of Christianity. It is the love of God that brings us into being. We are not the initiators; we are not loving people. God is not just a loving God, God is love. He is your Father who changes us and moves us to live this life of love. Love was growing cold, people were turning back and their love for God and others was going off the boil. They are walking away from God and the truth. They are walking away from the life.

God would have you serve him by loving one another so that his love is complete, (τέλος telos) so that it fulfils the purpose for which it was begun. When you find your love, tolerance, patience kindness, grace and forgiveness are being tested and tried it is a glorious opportunity to serve your God and show that you are the children of the Most High. The world sees these things as an inconvenience that must be dealt with in a harsh and brutal manner (eye for an eye) but for us it is an opportunity to be very very kind. Be like Jesus in this world.

Take a moment to count your blessings and remember the good things God has done for you from the very beginning to today. Think of something good that you have enjoyed today and give thanks for the gifts of God in your life.