

1 John 4:1-11

Friendship is a **gift** from God. Good friends **care** for each other, they talk **honestly** with one another, and they are **there** for each other in **good** times as well as in **bad**. I hope that **all** of you **have** good friends - people whom you **know** you can always **count on**. One of the **greatest** gifts which we have from our God is the friendship which we all have in **common** - our friendship with **Jesus**, our **Savior**. Jesus Himself said, "*You are my **friends**,*" and He **showed** that friendship most **vividly** when He laid down His **life** for us on the **cross** to pay for our **sins**. As our **friend**, Jesus didn't keep important truths **away** from us, but rather, He **revealed** those precious truths to us in His holy **Word**. He **confided** in us. Jesus is completely **in tune** with us, so when we're faced with **worries** and **cares** in this life, we know that we have a **friend** in **Jesus**, and that we can give all our cares and griefs to **Him**. We stand in **awe** together with the hymn writer, Joseph Scriven, who wrote the widely-loved hymn, What a **Friend** We Have in Jesus. Jesus continually expresses His friendship with **us**, so we want to find ways to express **our** friendship with **Him**. And that's where the words of John in our sermon text today can **help** us. These words teach us **Two Ways To Express Our Friendship With Jesus**.

The **first** way to express our friendship with Jesus is by **paying attention** to what other people **say** about our dear friend, and **recognizing why** they say the things they say. In our text John tells us, "*Dear friends, do **not** believe **every** spirit, but **test** the spirits to see if they are from **God**, for many **false** prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can **recognize** the Spirit of **God**: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the **flesh** is from **God**, and every spirit who does **not** confess Jesus is **not** from God.*" The spirit of **false prophets** can come from **anywhere**, so we shouldn't automatically **believe** everything we **hear**. Instead, we are encouraged to put everything we hear to the **test**. Rather than just going along with the **crowd**, or what seems to be the **majority opinion**, we need to **check out** the things people are saying - **especially** what they are saying about **Jesus**. If they're telling us that Jesus is the **Son of God** who became fully **human**, **died** on the cross and **rose** again, then they're from **God**, and we should pay close **attention** to what they have to say. But if they **don't** confess these truths about Jesus, then they're **not** from God, and they're not worth **listening** to.

In John's day, a man named **Cerinthus** taught that Jesus was the natural son of Mary and Joseph, and that the "**God** part" came to Jesus at the time of His **baptism**. He also said that the "**God** part" **left** Him again before He **died**. Cerinthus taught that only a **man** died on the cross, **not** the Son of God. Cerinthus

was **not** from God, and he wasn't worth **listening** to. **Jehovah's Witnesses** teach that Jesus is **a** son of God, but not **the** Son of God sent from heaven. Jehovah's Witnesses are **not** from God, and they aren't worth **listening** to. Some **preachers** today say that Jesus was **not** conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary, in other words, they say that Jesus was not **fully** God's Son. They are not from **God**, and they're not worth **listening** to. Even the largest church-body in the **world** says that Jesus' death on the cross was **not enough** to save us, that we need to add **our** good works to what **Jesus** did in order to be **saved**. In other words, they say that Jesus' sacrifice came up **short** of what God **demands**. They are **not** from God, and they're not worth **listening** to. **False prophets** are **everywhere** in our world. John says they have the spirit of the **antichrist** - in other words, they work **against** Christ. They **undermine** the **truth** that our salvation rests **entirely** on the one **perfect** sacrifice for sins, which **Jesus** made on Calvary's cross.

As **friends** of Jesus, God encourages us to **test** the spirits, and to **measure** their message by what **Jesus** has revealed to us in His **Word**. Through **God's Word** we know that Jesus **is** the Son of **God** - that He was born of the **virgin Mary** - that He **suffered** and **died** to **free** us from all **guilt** and **shame** - that He physically **rose again** from the dead - and that even now He **speaks** to us in His written **Word** - and **feeds** us with His body and blood in **Holy Communion**. Jesus didn't keep these truths **away** from us, but rather, He graciously **revealed** them to us, so we would be able to possess a true and saving **faith** in Him as our **Savior**, and that He would be our dearest **friend** for all **eternity**.

John tells us, "*You **are** from **God**, dear children, and you have **overcome** the false prophets, because the one in **you** is **greater** than the one in the **world**. They are from the **world**. That is why they speak from a **worldly** perspective and the world **listens** to them. **We** are from **God**.*" John continues by telling us about how people of his day viewed **himself** and his fellow **apostles**. He wrote, "*The one who knows God **listens** to us, but whoever is **not** from God does **not** listen to us. That is how we can distinguish between the spirit of **truth** and the spirit of **error**.*"

There is **comfort** in those words. Jesus is **in** us, and He has won the **victory** over the **devil** who is in the **false** prophets. The world may appear to be **religious**, with all **sorts** of religious **ideas** floating around, but Jesus makes it very **simple** and **clear** where **our** focus should be. It all comes down to the **truth** of **God's Word**. The Holy Spirit leads us to **hear** that truth - the **whole** truth, and nothing **but** the truth.

In Acts 17, Luke tells us that one Sabbath day the believers in the city of **Berea** went to their synagogue, and they heard a **newcomer** preach to them. His name was **Paul**. What they did when they went **home** that day was very **important**. They checked Paul's **sermon** to see if it matched what was said in their **Bibles**. It was only after they knew that his message **passed the test**, that they went back to hear him **again** the **next** week. The **Bereans** showed that they were **friends** of Jesus by taking His Word **seriously**. They really **cared** about what people were **saying** about their **Savior**, and they would only **listen** to the **truth**.

A **second** way we can show our friendship with Jesus is found in **these** words. John writes, *"Dear friends, let us **love** one another, because love comes from **God**. Everyone who **loves** has been born of God and **knows** God. The one who does **not** love has not known **God**, because **God is love**. This is how God's love for us was **revealed**: God has sent his only-begotten **Son** into the world so that we may live **through** him. This is **love**: not that **we** have loved **God**, but that **he** loved **us** and sent his **Son** to be the atoning **sacrifice** for our sins. Dear friends, if God loved us **so much**, we also should love **one another**."*

God is **love**, and He **showed** His love for us when sent His only-begotten **Son** to the earth to **save** us. God gave us His **best**. Without the gift of **Jesus**, we would still be **dead** in our sins and **lost** for all eternity, because we all go **astray**, we all **disobey** God's commandments, and we all fail to **love** God as He **deserves** to be loved. God showed His love for us by giving us His **Son** - the **only one** who could offer His **perfect life** as a **sacrifice** to pay for the sins of the world. His sacrifice **covered** our sins with His holy, precious **blood** - canceling our **guilt**. and **reuniting** us with the heavenly Father. Now by **faith** in Jesus, we live in God's presence, and we will **continue** to live with Him **forever** in heaven.

*"Dear friends, if God loved us **so much**, we also should love **one another**."* Jesus **wants** us to **love** one another. We have received God's love in **Jesus**, and we have become **new people** - people who are to **love** one another. So, let's **show** our love for one another in the most **positive** way we can - by sharing our **Savior** with them. It's **easy** to love your husband or wife - to love your children and grandchildren - to love your father and mother. That's **easy** because we know they **love** us. But it's **not** so easy to show love to those who **don't** love us - those who **oppose** us - those who **despise** us - our **enemies**. Yet, that's exactly what **God did**. He **loved us** - loved us **so much** that He gave up His **Son** for us, even while we were still His **enemies**.

It seems as though an increasingly larger number of people of our world today are **offended** by **everything** - except for the one thing that they **should** be offended by - and that's **sin**. We need to **realize** that we are **all** sinners. We need to **realize** that **no one** has done **everything right all the time**. We need to **realize** that we are **no better** than **anyone else**. And when we finally realize **those** things, we need to turn to our friend, **Jesus** - the one friend whom we can **always** count on - because Jesus has already provided the gift of **forgiveness** for the sins of all people. That gift **becomes ours** when we put our trust in **Him**, and **receive** His gift with the hand of **faith**.

Let's be sure that whenever we have the opportunity, we will **show our love** for one another by **sharing Jesus**. When our co-workers **despise** us, let's **share Jesus** with them. When our earthly friends **desert** us, let's **share Jesus** with them. When the trolls on social media **cancel** us, let's **share Jesus** with them. After all, Jesus **cares** for us, Jesus **speaks honestly** with us, and Jesus is always **there** for us. What a **friend** we have in Jesus. He's the **best friend** we could ever hope for, so let's be sure to **share** Him with **everyone**. Amen.