We've got a battle going on here, eh, between two brothers? There we go. Amen. Well, praise God. It's so good to meet together. I'm just so thankful for our church here at, again, Emanuel and the time that we have to celebrate, again, the goodness, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm so thankful, again, that all of you, again, have shown up to honor and glorify our Lord Jesus Christ. And it is amazing to think that we're celebrating 74th anniversary of Emanuel Baptist Church, and we're thankful for the history of Emanuel Baptist Church, and the history of what God has done, even as our brother said, through imperfect beings such as us. He's given us a place where we can grow, learn, serve, fellowship, and more importantly, worship this great God.

And let me just say as we start off, it's amazing to look at, especially I would say the last five or six, maybe seven years, half a dozen years, there's been a reorientation again of the church or how people look at the church, especially outside looking in. They many times look at the church as basically a moralistic enterprise.

In other words, it stands for certain morals and condemns other morals that happen to be out there. So it might stand for, again, the definition of marriage. It might stand against abortion. It might stand for this or that. It's many times even looked upon from a political sense, from a political movement, many times called the religious right. But it's basically this. It's filled with a whole bunch of people who define righteousness in a certain way and think that they're righteous and condemns everybody else that happens to be out there.

We realize what the church really is. The church really is founded on a person, isn't it? It's founded on the work of the Lord Jesus Christ for sinners such as us. And what he does is he brings us all together, he saves us again through his grace, and he begins that long process which is called the sanctification process in each one of our lives.

And it is amazing, again, to look at it because We realize when people are looking for a church, many times they will have a list of all the things that happen to begin out there. It's an amazing question. If you've ever asked a person, what are you looking for in a church, they come with a list.

I want this kind of preaching. I want this kind of fellowship. I want people that don't have a whole bunch of baggage, where there's not a whole bunch of drama. that happens to be in the congregation. And they'll go and go and go and go. I want people who are way more spiritual than me. And the reason why is because I want to hang around them, and I want to grow in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, what they're looking for is, if you look at their list, there's an absolutely perfect church. You know, a church, again, that's full of perfect people that happen to begin in here. I can remember I was in my office one day, and I took a phone call. The gentleman, again, had some various different problems he wanted to talk over.

He wasn't associated with his church. But I did ask him midway through the conversation, what church do you go through? How come you're not phoning your pastor, somebody else who happens to be in your congregation? He says, I don't go to church. I asked him why he didn't go to church and he said, the church is full of hypocrites.

You know, and I investigated that statement a little more, and he basically says this, they pretend to be perfect, but they're really imperfect. You know, if I could find a church that is full of people who are mature, full of people, again, who are perfect, I would join that church.

And that's a popular sentiment that happens to be getting out there, because we are imperfect. We are in the midst of that sanctification process. We do bump into one another. And not only that, we realize that we come from all different backgrounds. As I look here, there's different cultures here. As I look here, there's different age groups. We realize there's different genders. We were brought up in different contexts, so the way that we look at life, the way that we look at the family, the way that we look at politics, the way that we look at everything, many times, is so different.

And there's even this, there's even Montreal Canadian and Toronto, what is it, Toronto Maple Leafs, that's it, fans that happen to be in the same congregation, right? And a lot of people look at all those differences and realize what's in our human heart, and they'll think this. that the church is absolutely doomed to failure. It's doomed to implode upon itself.

And that's the amazing thing about the unity in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. God calls a whole bunch of people to saving grace, and it is his grace that he calls us. And he calls us together to work out our salvation, to work out that sanctification. In other words, that change where we're more and more in the image of the Lord Jesus Christ. And you know what's church? Bible believing church that you will grow the most in, get this now, is an absolutely imperfect church.

And the reason why is we will teach, and we even sung about his great forgiveness this morning, but it's in us bumping into one another, we learn practically what it means to forgive. you know, how great Christ's forgiveness is in our life. You know, we realize, and we all manifest, and we would all say this, that God is an amazing God. He's so patient with us, even when we mess up, even when we get it wrong. But we learn, again, how to be patient with other people who get it wrong, who irritate us, again, many times. You know, we know our Lord carries our burdens, and the Church of Lord Jesus, think of it, here's all these imperfect people. We learn what it means to carry burdens.

You know, the church that you can grow the most of in your life is a Bible-believing church full of, get this now, absolutely imperfect people. And I will even say this, if you ever find a perfect church, don't join it because you will not grow. You know, it's in this midst.

But one of the things I want us to really concentrate on this morning as we think about all this, all these imperfect people coming together, how do we mostly see the image of the Lord Jesus Christ, the likeness of Christ? What's the greatest, again, attribute characteristics that we can have as a church full of imperfect people trying to get along with one another. What's the greatest attribute where we can show again our great God, our great savior? It's a greatness again of what we call the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. I think there's all kinds of various different attributes, various different characteristics that we could put on the top of the list.

Maybe one of them happens to be holiness. Isn't it true? This is the distinctive quality of God. Even the cherubims and the seraphims fly around him. When we see this in Isaiah Chapter 6 and they cry out what? Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. We realize this is what separates God in a category all on his own.

So as we think of this, maybe it's holiness. Maybe it's truth. You know, we realize the Bible's truth. We realize we preach on truth. We realize that we cannot honor God. We cannot even trust Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins unless we know the truth. And maybe it's truth.

You know, that's a great answer. Maybe it's hope. Have you ever thought about hope? When we look into the future, when we look at to be with the Lord Jesus Christ,

when we long to be with him, it's incredible how it changes us in the here and now, how it changes how we handle all our materialistic belongings that happen to begin right here. It's not about here. It's about the time to come. And it's incredible how that changes each one of us.

Maybe it's faith. You know, we read in the word of God that it is impossible to please God without Faith! I'm gonna maintain this morning that the greatest witness our church, any church, any Bible-believing church, can truly be of the glory and the grandness, again, of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The characteristic that should come through our lives, should come through our congregation, happens to be love. You know, God, for God so loved the world, he gave. Isn't it true? You know, he gave. We realize the reason why we love God is why we even read this this morning, He first loved us.

Jesus even said, this is how you people will know that you're the disciples of mine by your love for one another. You know, and we even read in 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verse number 13, he talks about the three great attributes of Christianity. And he says this, so now faith, hope, and love abide. These trees, this is what he says, but the greatest of these is love.

In fact, without love, we're just noise, aren't we? We're just clanging cymbals. We're just clanging noise. We are not bringing any glory to God. We're not being that witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the greatest of these is love. So think about it, joining a church of full of imperfect people, not even people that are easy to love, easy to get along with, and all this. We come with all of our baggage. We come with all of our problems. We come with all of our blind spots that happen to begin in our life.

And when we learn how to love one another, when we learn the radical, sacrificial love of the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross, and it comes through us, it's the greatest witness. of who God is, of the gospel, again, of the Lord Jesus Christ in each one of our lives.

And that's what I want us to look at. You know, it's amazing even, I was listening to Richard read this passage of scripture, and the word of love is not even mentioned in this passage of scripture. But in this passage of scripture, we learn so much. about the love of our Savior, so much again about what we are to bide in our lives. And I want us to look at that. I just want to see two points this morning. I hope it'll really help us going forward to recognize our testimony of living among one another, loving one another, so that Christ might be manifest in our lives. So the first thing I want us to see, I want to see the people who Jesus loved.

I want to see the ones that he loved, that he sacrificed for. And look at the opening couple verses in this chapter. It says, when he came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him. And behold, a leopard came to him and knelt before him, saying, Lord, if you will, You can make me clean. Now, think about it, because if we're going to talk about love this morning, and we're going to see love in this passage of scripture, we have to define love.

You know, and it's one of those tricky words, isn't it? You know, and I think a lot of times we're not challenged in our life, asking ourselves, am I really a loving individual? Because we just really never define love. You know, and the most popular definition that happens to be out there of love is, get this, love, here it is, is love. You know, it's the most popular definition that happens to be out there. What is love? Love is love. You know, and what people mean by that is love is the way I define love.

So when you have a kid, you know, and he, I shouldn't say that, it's a bad word.

When you have a child, when he is in the grocery store and he sees that succulent little chocolate bar and he wants that chocolate bar, he says, ''Mommy, give me that chocolate bar. Give me the chocolate bar.'' He says, ''No, no, no. You're going to have dinner. You're going to have lunch soon. You're not having that chocolate bar.'' He stammers and stammers and stammers and he gets home and he accuses his mom again, ''You don't love me.'' Why?

Because he didn't love me the way I wanted to be loved. I mean, that's what's behind, again, the whole idea. We realize what the word teaches, again, about marriage. But if you don't agree on my definition of marriage, on my definition, again, maybe of same-sex marriage, you are unloving.

And why? Because I have defined love. What is love? Love is love. You know, if you look at the whole, it's behind a statement even of this. You know, I'm terminating this marriage, and the reason why I'm terminating this marriage is because I don't love you anymore. You know, what's so insane?

That I am defining what love is. I'm defining how I want to be loved. I'm defining how I want to feel if that happens to be in this marriage relationship. So when you think of love, if we're ever going to be challenged as loving individuals to show the breathtaking, beautiful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have to understand what love is.

And not only that, there's another problem. You know, whether it happens to be in a church, whether it happens to be in our community, whether it happens to be getting around us, everyone says this. There's a love drought. You know, there's so many lonely people. There's so many people who think that they're forgotten. There's so many people who have even been hurt by other people, and they felt that hurt.

They felt that sting of being rejected by those who should have loved them. Many adult children, many times, struggle in their adult lives because they weren't loved by their parents. You know, their father left them maybe when they were six or seven years old. Maybe their mother was distant from them and never gave them that nurture, never gave them that care. And when we look at a world that happens to be around us, everyone admits this, that there happens to be a love drought.

So the one place that we should see and we should be able to define love And we should see it, again, exemplified as the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, a caring, nurturing body of believers. But what is love? We still haven't answered that question. And I'm gonna just give John Piper's short definition. He tries to take everything that happens to begin in scripture, and rather than giving a boisterous, long definition, he tries to sink it down to this statement.

Love is our joy in God that overflows to meet the needs of others. So love is our joy in who God is, what he's done for a sinner like me. You know, the bounty of the cross work of the Lord Jesus Christ, his sacrificial giving again of his self that I might have forgiveness, that I might have love. And I see that more and more and more. There's a joy, there's a trust, there's a sense where he is everything. And as we fill ourselves again with that love, with that definition, with that joy, we gladly show that love, we gladly show again that love by meeting the needs, seeking to bless those who happen to begin around us.

I really think you see that in this passage of scripture because the question we have to ask ourself, if God came in human flesh, it's an amazing truth, isn't it? It's an incredible truth. God came in human flesh. Think about that. The uncontainable God, the God again who happens to be again present everywhere, came in human flesh and dwelt among us. and then gave his life as that ransom for sin.

And when we think of the value of Jesus, we should be amazed by it. And this is a

question that we should ask. When you see how valuable God is, when you see something of the glory of God, we should ask this question. What kind of people would Jesus ever die for, give his self? What kind of people would he love? Because I think it's surprising. You know, and I think we see it right in this text, because again, we read in the, let's just read the opening verse again, and this basically sets the setting.

It says, when he came down from the mountain, great crowds follow him. So the whole scene is Jesus coming down from the mountain, and we have to ask ourselves, well, what was he doing on the mountain? And what he was doing on the mountain is chapters five, six, and seven. It is called what? It's called the Sermon on the Mount. You know, it's one of the longest sermons of the Lord. And he taught, and he taught, and he taught, and he instructed, and instructed, and instructed, and now he's coming down from the mountain.

And here's this great throng, here's this great crowd that happens to be following him. And you think he would be tired. But here's what I love about Jesus, is he always notices people. He doesn't notice a crowd, he notices individuals. He always takes recognition from them.

And I know we only have 24 hours a day, and we don't have time to do this, this, and this, and this, and this. But I think when it comes to loving people, when it gets involved in other people's lives, we just make the excuse that we just do not have time, and we just don't bother, again, truly investing in others. This is where our savior is different. After that long day of teaching, he doesn't overlook individuals, especially, again, those who have needs that happen to be in their life. You know, and that's the setting. And then we come to verse number two, and this is what we see, and it says, and behold, otherwise take great notice of this.

A leper came to him, and knelt before him, saying, Lord, if you will. you can make me clean up this was an absolutely terrible disease in fact it still is a terrible disease goes by hansen's disease today and usually starts in a little spot again on your skin wherever it happened and it spreads until it covers your whole body uh... there's a discoloration that happens to begin uh... with it there's open wounds and here's the amazing thing about uh... leprosy and it's almost a grace but at the same time not a grace And that is it kills all the nerves.

It kills, again, all that sensitivity to pain. Because you can imagine with all these open wounds that happen to begin over you, all of these sores, that it would be absolutely painful. And like I said, there's a grace in that, but it's also a curse. Because you cannot tell when you're injured.

You know, if all of a sudden you have a tap and you have the hot water and you're washing your hands, that happened to begin right here, you can't tell that it's scalding hot. You know, you can burn the skin right off you. In fact, there's instances where a leopard drops something in the fire and he goes over and he picks it up again and just continues on. And he's burned his hand to the nth degree, but here's the thing he doesn't realize. He doesn't realize he's burned his hand. There's instances of leopards breaking a limb. And when they break their limb, they can't feel the pain of it. Even though their bones are out of joint like this, they just hobble, hobble along as if nothing is wrong with them. And why? Because they can't feel that pain. You know, it was basically a disease that was uncurable. And lepers were left out by themselves. You know, away from the community, away from loved ones, and away from God. That's what it means to be outside of the community, doesn't it? It means to be ostracized by God.

And when you look in the Middle Ages, I mean, this disease has always existed, but when you look in the Middle Ages, many times a leper would be brought into the church all by himself, and the priest would then give him his last rites. And the

reason why he would give his last rites is because a leper, when somebody had leprosy, they were known as a living dead. They were known, again, in our modern terminology, as a dead man walking. There's no hope for this individual.

And it is, I don't know, sometimes when you look in scripture and see what's highlighted, you have to ask yourself, why is it highlighted? I mean, there's so many different diseases that happen to begin in the ancient world. And when you look at them, there's this one, there's this one, there's this one, there's this one, there's this one, there's this one. And people are healed of all sorts of sicknesses, of all sorts of diseases. We find that over and over in scripture. But it seems that this one is singled out from all of the other ones.

Not only that, but it's talked about in the scripture that Jesus cleansed leprosy. He didn't heal leprosy, although he did that. Most often, it talks about him cleansing leprosy. You know, an excellent example, again, of that happens to be over in chapter number 10.

Jesus is ready to send out the disciples on their short-term mission trip, and he tells them to do this. And listen to the first thing he tells them to do. Heal the sick. Notice that word heal. And then he goes on, he says, heal the sick, raise the dead, and then do this, cleanse the lepers.

Now, why does he say cleanse? Why doesn't he just say heal? I mean, he talks about every single other disease, every single other malady as healing. Why this idea of cleansing? And I think, again, one of the reasons why the scriptures point out leprosy among all the other ailments that people had that Jesus Christ really cleansed, that Jesus Christ really healed. The reason why he points out this one, he even uses the words cleanse. is because it has so much to do. It's so emblematic, so illustrative of our sin nature, isn't it?

We realize that leprosy covered the whole body. We realize that there's not one aspect of our personality. not one aspect, again, of our being that is not tainted by sin. We realize, again, that a leper was unfeeling. We realize what sin does to our heart. It hardens, it calluses our heart to the cost of sin, to the cost of the things that we are doing in our life. We can do things, again, without any stricken conscience, just like a seed bouncing off that hard soil that happened to begin right there. We realize as we look at leprosy, leprosy again was a living dead.

We realize before God that we are dead in trespasses and sins. We realize that we are alienated just like the leper lived outside of the community. We are alienated from the life of God. We are alienated from God. We realize when we look at leprosy also is ostracized that leper from everyone else. This is what sin is. Sin at its core is antisocial. It doesn't bring us closer to people, it actually brings us apart from people. Here's the thing about leprosy.

Leprosy, a person again who had leprosy had no hope. There was no hope for him. There was nothing that he could do. When we recognize our sin nature, when we recognize our cost before an all-holy, all-righteous, all-glorious, all-grand God, there's absolutely no hope. that happens to begin for us. And that's not a pretty picture, is it? We see that again over and over. So you can imagine this man. He has no hope. He's heard something about the Lord Jesus. And here's the thing. A person with leprosy, they couldn't come in contact with other people.

So if they saw other people, what they would scream is, unclean, unclean, to warn them. And the rabbinic tradition, the rabbinic law back then is you could not come if they were If they were upwind, they couldn't come closer than six feet. If they were downwind, in other words, again, that all our germs are coming this way, was 120 feet. You know, and you can imagine this man, in all of his bravery, started to come closer and closer to the Lord Jesus. And you can imagine the people starting

to spread, starting to split.

And when he finally got a short distance from the Lord Jesus again, he's not right by him, he's not again at his feet or anything, he kneels down and he says these words to the Lord. He says, Lord, if you, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean. It's an incredible statement because he addresses him as Lord. Now, we realize when you address somebody in the ancient world by Lord, it could be just polite conversation. I'm an inferior and I'm speaking to an inferior, superior, and I'm addressing them by Lord, and it is that way. But it's also a common designation for God. I think when you look at the leper, he recognizes that Jesus is God, and we recognize that Jesus is God because we see two things.

One is, He knelt before him. Kneeling was a posture of worship and no Jew would worship anything or anybody else but God alone. Then his words, his words, think about it, recognize the absolute sovereignty of God, don't they? The sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

If you will, God, you can do this. Jesus, you can do this. He recognizes his absolute sovereignty and I love his request. because he doesn't come to him, he doesn't demand to be healed. I mean, it's so different today, isn't it? People come, they come to these healing crusades, they come, and if they think they come with the right formula, come through the right person, then they can manipulate, then they can force God to heal them. And what they want is not H-E-A-L, what they want is God to what?

H-E-E-L, to heal, to do their will. And here's what I love about the leper, if you will. Otherwise, if you don't, you've got your good purposes. And I can trust in those good purposes. Although it's painful, although I'm separated right here, you are the one. You are the good Lord that happens to be again above.

Now, I've said all of that. And I've painted, again, not a pretty picture, again, of leprosy. And we realize God talks, again, about all these healings, again, that he does. But the reason why I spent so much time, again, describing leprosy is because, folks, it's a picture of us.

We're spiritual lepers, right? All of us have been hardened in sin. All of us have been unfeeling towards this God and not even wanting his grace that happens to begin in our life. All of us are dead towards this God in and of ourselves outside of the Lord Jesus Christ and even as believers. I mean, how often do we, even as we've described, none of us are perfectly sanctified. None of us are perfectly sin-free. And even with all of our struggles, even with all of our mishaps, even with all of our waywardness, our God stays with us.

That's what is amazing about the Gospels. You know what's amazing about the disciples? It's not the disciples. What's amazing about the disciples is Jesus' love for them. You know, the night in which he was betrayed, I mean, he knew, again, the horrendous things he would be going through. He knew, again, that sin would be laid upon him as he hung on that cross. And here are these disciples, and they're arguing about who's going to be the greatest in the kingdom. And here he goes, and he washes their feet. And folks, he's not washing their feet to put them in their place. Look at your ignorance. Look at your pride. He's washing them because he loved them. He loved them and set them an example of, again, how we love other people from the heart, again, outward.

Even as he told them and he knew, again, all of them would desert them. No, no, no, we're not going to desert them. Even Peter says, I will never desert you. I am willing to die. He says, this very night, guess what? Before the rooster crows three times, you are going to deny me. But he says, and after I'm resurrected, Peter, I'm going to come to you. and I'm gonna restore you. I mean, isn't that

amazing?

You know, you look at you and me, you look at all of our mess-ups, you look at, again, how we do many times the same sin over and over, and he forgives us 70 times seven. Jesus, again, has separated so far our sin as far as east is to west. In other words, an infinite distance from ourselves. And nothing, folks, when the word says nothing, it means nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

He is for you right now, right here, no matter what your life looks like. He's for you right now, right here. Now think about it. What does that do in your soul? What does that do in your heart? You know, what does that conjure up? Because think of Piper's definition again.

My overflow of absolute joy in this God, in everything that he's done in my life, and how he has redeemed a sinner like me. All of a sudden, here it goes, it overflows. to gladly meet, to gladly seek to be a blessing in other people's lives, to gladly show that love of Christ, that love of my Savior and my Lord to those that happen to be getting around us.

So the church should be a living illustration of loving people, like Jesus loved, loving spiritual lepers. You know, over and over again, it should be a place of extravagant love. We need to recognize and see the kind of people that Jesus chose to love. But also, when we look at love, love also has action. In fact, you cannot love unless, again, there happens to be, again, action.

And we see this in this passage also. Because in verse number three, it says, and Jesus stretched, out his hand and touched him and says, I will be clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus said to him, see that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the gift that Moses commanded for a proof to them.

That's the thing about love, doesn't it? Love gives, and guess what it does after it gives? It keeps giving. We realize this. Love gives again to a person. It shows, it reaches out in compassion, sacrifice, and it keeps giving. It does not mean this, that the person that we are loving, please get this. It does not mean the person that we are loving is worthy of our love. It does not mean that the person that we are loving all of a sudden again will reciprocate that love. It's basically, I'll do this for you if you treat me this way. It's not that way.

In fact, we could never pay back the love of God in the way he has loved us again on the cross of Calvary. We give this extravagant love. There's two entities that God has ordained in this day and age where we're commanded to give this specific Christ-like love.

One of them again happens to begin in marriage. You know, it's incredible even as we look at our marriage partner, as we look at love in the marriage, the most popular way to speak of marriage many times is 50-50. You know, 50 for the husband, 50 for the wife. And let me just say, according to the gospel, according to the way that we have been loved, this is how we love our spouse 100%. It doesn't matter if it's reciprocated. It doesn't matter if it's paid back. It doesn't matter, again, if they thank us for that love. It's 100%.

Look at my God. Look at the love. Look at what he showered upon me. And we love that way. And the other place is in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you know who we love in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ? We love unlovable people, people just like us. It's absolutely amazing.

I mean, Paul describes the kind of love that comes from God. Listen what he says in

Romans chapter five, beginning of verse number seven. Some of this love we could understand in this world that happened to begin around us, but he says, for one will scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person, one would even dare to die. But he says this, but God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, for us.

And I wonder if we really see that. We look at people, and they're imperfect. We realize, again, they're going to bump us. We realize they're going to say things they ought not to say. But here in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, he brings people who would have nothing to do with one another.

I often wonder that. Don't you? If I could go back, and my former self that happens to be getting over here could look at my life right here and the people that I love, the people whose lives that happen to be involved in, that back here, I would want nothing, and I refuse to have nothing to do with them. how surprising and shocking that love would be because that's the element again of our love. Our love should be shocking to the world that happens to be around us because guess what? The cross is shocking and we realize that. So look at verse number three and think of this.

And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, I will be clean. And immediately, his leprosy was clean. Now, this really proves Jesus' deity and certainly, again, his love for this man. And you can imagine the whole scene. You know, I'd love to put yourself in the narrative, don't you? You know, because as you put yourself in the narrative, you can see Jesus, all of a sudden, here's the man, and he's knelt down. And all of a sudden, Jesus starts walking over to him. You know, he's getting closer to closer.

You can imagine the crowd that happens to be there. They're gasping. You know, what's he going to do? You know, don't touch him. And all of a sudden, he reaches out. Maybe the leper said, unclean, unclean. Maybe he's recoiling at this time. But he comes and touches him. And here's why people didn't touch a leper, because that leprosy, that uncleanness, that disease could be transmitted itself.

It's a picture of sin, isn't it? Because we realize when we come around people, when we come around sinners, when we sin, many times we take that sin and we influence other people to sin. Isn't that true? But here's the thing about our Savior. When we're touched, when anyone is touched by the Savior, that uncleanness never is translated to him. What is translated to him is holiness, wholeness and his great love. And it must have been such a picture. I don't know. I hope God shows us when we get to glory.

You can imagine he's touched him, and all of a sudden the puffiness that happens to begin around his eyes all of a sudden is dissipated. You know, those open wounds that happen to be all over his body all of a sudden closed up. You know, that grayish skin that he had all of a sudden turned pink and whole. You know, if there happens to be any any fingers or toes, any indentations, again, that happened to be missing, all of a sudden they were made whole.

You know, and this man was made whole. And he was made whole, again, by the touch of our Savior. And let me just say, when you look at that, I want to say a couple things about our love of our Savior that happen to begin right here that I think really should impact the way we love one another. And that is, our Savior touched this man. Now here's the question, I always love questions because questions get our minds to think, don't they? And here's the question, why did he touch him? Why not just speak? Why not say, okay, Grant, you know? Why not that? Because in the very next scene, we're gonna see again a centurion sends word to Jesus and says, can you heal my servant?

He's sick, right? And he happens to be a distance. And Jesus says, yes, I will. And Jesus is not present. So why does our Savior choose to touch this man? And I think the answer happens to begin in a parallel passage over in Mark chapter one in verse number 40. Listen to what it says. And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling and said, if you will, you can make me clean. And then it says this of Jesus.

Moved with pity, he did something. He stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, I will be clean. So it's a whole scene, but here we see something of the inner workings of perfect humanity, perfect deity, and it tells us not only that he felt pity, we can feel pity for people. We can look at their miserable condition, we can look at some of the things that they've done, we can look again at some of the pain that they happen to be going through, and we can feel real pity for them. But the scripture says Jesus is moved in pity. In other words, again, there's action that happens to be taken. And why? Because love cannot be known without action. It's such a touching scene. I hope we see it. This man is well-advanced in leprosy. And if he's well-advanced in leprosy, that means he's had it for years and years and years and years.

A never-known human touch. Never even, you know, because of all his skin, because of all those sensitivity sensors are gone, never even knew the warmth of touch. And all of a sudden, Jesus comes, and Jesus knows what this man needs most. He knows how to love this man most of all, and he comes, and he touches him. I mean, it's such an intimate scene. I mean, years, you know, no one would ever dare to touch him.

But our Savior would. And there's something about human touch, isn't there? There's something again about coming near to an individual and that touch speaks of love, that touch speaks of warmth, that touch speaks of belonging, that touch speaks about safety, that touch gives the message that everything's gonna be all right. I think one of the loveliest scenes that God has given us is a little child in its mother's arms.

You know, it's so great, isn't it? You know, you look at that little child and it's able to sleep. And why is it able to sleep? You might put it down and wah, wah, wah, wah, wah, right? Right, and picked up. And there's that sense of comfort. That sense, even though the baby cannot describe it, there's that sense of warmth, there's that sense of security. There's that sense of love. And we see that in this passage, don't we? I mean, it's just absolutely, I mean, when we come together, right, we come together, hey, we shake hands, we hug, right? And it's amazing because you think about it. What's it a picture of? It's a picture of the gospel, because you know what?

Through the gospel, here comes God, here comes Jesus, and he gives himself as a perfect sacrifice of the sin. Here comes the spirit, and through the preaching of the gospel, he opens up our heart, and this is what he does, he touches us. touches us and he says, no matter again who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter again your background, no matter again your life, you are accepted into beloved. And because what I've done on Calvary's tree, here it is, nothing will ever separate you from me ever again. You're in my grasp and I will never let you out.

I mean, that's a great love, isn't it? You know, and think about it, so here I am, and here's people doing things, and here they're messing up, here they're complicating my life, and how do I show the love of Christ? I show the love of Christ by the safety, by the security, by the warmth, by you belong. You know, when we see the touch of the Lord, we also see the words of our Lord that happen to begin in this passage of Scripture, which I think are just so important when we think about love. Because think about it, I think a lot of people, because they look in their background, when they come to Christianity and they start studying

about God, they see how wonderful God is, they see how holy God is, and they recognize the volition of their human heart. You know, that they've chosen to do this act, this act, this act, this act, this act.

And many times they see how horrendous it is before others, how horrendous it is before God, and they think there's no way that God could ever forgive me. you know, because of this great evil. Maybe it's infidelity in the marriage. Maybe it's, again, aborting a child, actually being guilty, again, of murder. Maybe it's some hurt that you did to another individual, and there's no way that you can make it right. Maybe they've even passed on, so you can't even come to them and say again that you're sorry. And it plagues you, it haunts you. You think about it all the time, everywhere that happened to be in your life, and you say, there's no way, no way that God would ever accept me. There's no way that God could ever love an individual like me, or we could be again like this.

We could struggle with the same sin. We could struggle again over it a hundred times, after a hundred times, after a hundred times. You know, and we keep falling, and we keep again pulling up our back, our bootstraps, and say, I'm going to do better, I'm going to do better, Lord just help me, Lord just help me, and we fall into it again. And we realize that Jesus will forgive us 70 times seven.

But let me tell you, I have overcome, I have gone past 70 times 70. I've gone past 490. Certainly if Jesus looks at my life, there's no hope for me. Are you there? Have you been there? Because here's the amazing thing that happened to begin about our passage of scripture, because Jesus says this to the leper, I will. Be clean.

In other words, he's willing. He's willing to love the unlovable. He's willing to love him, and it's not because, again, of who we are, folks. It's because of who he is. He has this profound love, and think of it, because he's God. It's a perfect love. It's without error. It's without, again, any sin. It's a perfect love. So if you're struggling with sin this morning, if you're struggling, falling, if you're struggling with your past, here's the thing. God's love for you. Jesus Christ's love for you. will never change. It's absolutely high. It's absolutely glorious. In fact, again, he's excited again over you. You know, I was reading, this is over, this is not gonna be on the screens, but this is over in Isaiah chapter 62, and he's talking about the nation of Israel.

You know, and he's talking about, again, how they come to redemption. And this is what he says, because this is a picture of every true believer. He says, you shall be crowned You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diamond in the hand of your God.

You shall no more be termed, think about salvation, you shall no more be termed forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed our lives desolate, but you shall be called, think of Jesus, you shall be called my delight is in her. For the Lord delights. in you and your land shall be married. And then the last, verse number five goes like this. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you. And listen to what he says about a bridegroom, Jesus Christ. And as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. Can you believe that Jesus Christ rejoices over a person like you? Can you believe that?

With all the mess-ups, yeah, He's willing to forgive. With all of the foul-ups, yeah, He's willing to bring us close. Think about it, because what is the response to that? And the response to that is to revel. It's to magnify, it's to glory in it, it's to enjoy it, it's to celebrate that amazing, that astonishing love that happens to be in our life. And it brings out not just the emotions inside, oh look at how much God loves us, but then it comes out, it has to come out, doesn't it? You know, you look at a lover, you know, and here's his beloved that happened to be getting over there, and he wants this love that happens to be inside, again, to be

shared, to be known. I love you. I want to marry you. I want to be a blessing in your life. I want to fill your life with substance and joy that happens to be in there. I want to act.

Why? Because that's what love does. That's what our Savior, that's the way our Savior loved us. And so think of it, here's a whole bunch of imperfect people that have been saved, that have been loved by Jesus Christ in such an extravagant way. And what do we do? What's the greatest message of our lives and how we treat one another? is love. In fact, our brother read from 1 John 4, and he said, again, this is an amazing book that teaches on love.

And in 1 John 4, in verse number 20, he says this. You know, and think of it, this is the word of God. This is not my opinion. He says, if anyone says, it's really easy to say this, isn't it? I love God. I love singing about him. I love rejoicing. I love cherishing this wonderful salvation. I love God and hates his brother. He is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this command we have from whom, here it is, whomever loves God must love his brother.

I mean, think of it, if we're overwhelmed, this is not dead orthodoxy, this is not dead and ritualistic obedience, but when we're overwhelmed, think of Piper's definition, when we're overwhelmed with this joy of all that Jesus Christ is for me as a sinner, that he will never let me go, what comes out of us is a Christ-centered love. It's a contradiction. to be an unloving Christian.

The way we love one another, the way the church will continue on to herald forth the necessity of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the way the church is a visual demonstration of all that Jesus is for us, is by our love for one another. People, let the love of Christ dwell in your hearts.

It will change your life and it will change the church. This truly is Christ's love. Let's bow our hearts in a moment of prayer. Father, what an amazing passage. Lord, I'm just, at this moment, I feel absolutely overwhelmed. that you could love someone like me. But Lord, when we look at the cross, when we look at Christ, when we look at the perfection of his love, Lord, we realize that love is not based upon us.

That love is based upon Christ, and to think, Lord, that he rejoices. He doesn't look back. He's the perfect God who knew my past, knew my present, even knew my future. Lord, he doesn't look back and grudge that he ever paid for our debt of sin, but Lord, he delights over those who are his. God, such truth is too wonderful, too magnificent to keep to ourselves.

Help us to love. in such a way that God's extraordinary love in the gospel is seen through our church, through our lives, for your glory. We thank you again in Christ's name. Amen. Brother. Thank you so much, Pastor, for that ministry to us this morning. What a stunning reminder of God's love that