[Advent E4 Transcript]

[The Hebrew Bible's Understanding of Love (0:00—13:17)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hi, Jon Collins.

Jon: Hello.

Tim: Hello.

Jon: And this is our fourth and final conversation—

Tim: It is.

Jon: In the Advent series.

Tim: Yeah. "Hope," "peace," "joy," and "love—"these are four words typically connected to—and have been for centuries—connected to the four Sundays of Advent that are the four weeks leading up to the celebration of Jesus' birth and Christmas.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Advent means arrival—

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: And these four weeks are about anticipating the arrival of the King.

Tim: You got it.

Jon: And these four words became four different ways to think about that anticipation.

Tim: Yeah. Really, each one of them is kind of like a—a Christian virtue, a character trait, that's worth aiming at and—hmm—thinking about: How can I structure my life, focus on these, so that I can cultivate these character traits more in my life?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And all of them are connected with anticipating, waiting for the arrival of God's Messiah. So we have done conversations on hope, and on peace, and on joy. And here, we're at number four. And there's got to be a reason why number four in most traditions that celebrate Advent is love.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And we're talking about the Hebrew word, *ahav*—is the verb—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: *Ahav*. And then *ahavah* is the noun.

Jon: We're just talking one Hebrew word?

Tim: There's a few other words for "affection," "display affection," but this is the main one.

Jon: All right.

Tim: Mhm. *Ahava* is referring to both the emotional feeling of attachment but then also, as we're going to see, the practical displays, actions. It's an action word.

Jon: Hmm. Man, love is such a big word.

Tim: Big word.

Jon: How are we going to have one conversation about love?

Tim: Ah—well, I've got an idea.

[Laughter]

Tim: I've got an idea of where to start.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Uh—because it would just make sense to start in Deuteronomy chapter 10.

Jon: I—I was—

[Laughter]

Jon: Exactly thinking that.

[Laughter]

Jon: Deuteronomy 10.

Tim: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: You know, like you—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Like you do.

Jon: All right.

Tim: Uhm—because the language of loving God comes first and foremost in the Bible from Deuteronomy. That's where it begins. That's very common now, especially in Western, like, worship songs—loving God—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "I love you God," "I love you Jesus—"that language is rooted in the Bible first in Deuteronomy. Let's just dive in—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Love in Deuteronomy. So the book of Deuteronomy is Moses' farewell speech to the Israelites. He's been with them—you know, brought them out of Egypt, wilderness wanderings, Mount Sinai, more wilderness wanderings, here they are.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And it's kind of his—I've called it the locker room speech before going out onto the field.

Jon: Okay. Right.

Tim: It's the pep talk.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Like, “You guys, I’m going to be—”

Jon: “We’ve got this.”

Tim: “I’m—I can’t go with you, but here’s what God’s done for you. Here’s what he wants to do for you. Here are the choices set before you—”and he says, “Good versus bad, life versus death, blessing versus curse. Choose life.” And one way to talk about choosing life is about love, loving God. So Deuteronomy chapter 10, Moses says, “‘Look, Israelites, to Yahweh your God belong the heavens and the—’”actually, “the highest heavens—”it’s “the heavens of the heavens,” “the skies of the skies.”

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: So it’s a beautiful sunny day in Portland.

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: I’m looking out at the blue sky-ceiling right there.

[Laughter]

Tim: And it’s a way of saying, “To Yahweh belong the skies that I can see and everything that’s above and beyond that. And to Yahweh belongs the Earth, the land, and everything that’s in it. It’s all from Yahweh.” “‘However, to your ancestors, Yahweh attached himself in order to love them.’” So he’s talking about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob here.

Jon: Okay. They’ve been in Egypt for a long time. So to them, this is great, great, great, great grandpa—

Tim: Yeah. Yeah exactly.

Jon: Abraham.

Tim: Exactly. Yep.

Jon: And it was—Yahweh made a special covenant agreement with Abraham.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah, out of the scattering of the tower and city of Babylon, he just chose this family and made a covenant promise that he’s going to bless them and bless all nations through them. He’s going to protect them, stick with them, no matter what. And Yahweh has done that. So here that’s remembered as Yahweh attaching himself. It’s the language of clinging onto.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's really interesting.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: He grabbed onto them and loved them. It's a—

Jon: "In order to love them."

Tim: "In order to love them." Yeah. "'And he chose their offspring after them, namely, you all, from among all the peoples as it is to this day.'" So notice there's this contrast of: Yahweh has all of creation to work with, and he has all the peoples. Yahweh is the—

Jon: Ah—

Tim: Creator. He's the Go—he's the universal—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: God.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "But he chose your ancestors and you guys to uniquely attach himself to you in this covenant bond to love you."

Jon: Purpose was to love them.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Okay. That doesn't help us know what this word means.

Tim: Uh—well, "He brought us out of Egypt. He brought us through the wilderness. He's fed you. He liberated you. He wants to bring you into this good land. He loves you."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Yep. "He loves you." "'For Yahweh, your God, he is the Elohim of all Elohim—"he's the—the God of all other spiritual beings."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "'And he is the *adon* of all *adonim*.'" "He is the master of—"

Jon: "Anyone who calls himself a master."

Jon: "Anyone who calls themselves a master."

Tim: "'He's the great, mighty God—awesome. He is not partial. He doesn't take bribes. He executes justice for the orphan and the widow. He is the one who loves the

immigrant, giving them food and clothing. And you all also shall love the immigrant because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt. Yahweh your God, you shall fear him. You shall serve him. To him, you shall cling.'"

Jon: There's that the same word?

Tim: It's a synonym.

Jon: Synonym, okay.

Tim: This is the word used from the garden of Eden story. "A man shall leave his father and mother and—"

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: "Attach himself to—grab onto—"

Jon: Hmm, "become one with."

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. So "Yahweh loved your ancestors and attached himself to them, and therefore to you."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "So you should attach yourself and cling to Yahweh." Verse four: "'And you shall love Yahweh your God, and keep his obligations, and statutes, and regulations, and commandments.'" So that's the: "Yahweh loved and attach himself to you."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "You love Yahweh and attach yourself to him."

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And then in the middle is this loving of neighbors, specifically—

Jon: Vulnerable neighbors.

Tim: Yeah, "the immigrants in your midst, because you were immigrants when Yahweh brought you out of Egypt as an act of love." So this is a cool paragraph because it's a full reciprocity of divine-human love, and then human-to-human love. And they are like mirrors of each other. Notice God loves the immigrant. How? By giving them food and clothing. "Oh, that's what he did for you guys through the wilderness. So you should love the immigrants because you were the immigrants in the land of Egypt. And that's when Yahweh loved you."

Jon: Yeah. So we talked about love being an emotion. Here, though, the focus seems to be on your actions towards others.

Tim: Yeah. I—yes. 100%.

Jon: Right?

Tim: Yes.

Jon: So “Here’s how you show your love. You’re going to keep all the,” like, “commands, and statutes, and—”

Tim: Mhm. That’s your love for God.

Jon: Yeah. “You’re going to honor your relationship with God by living by his wisdom.”

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: And then in the center here is: There’s immigrants—he also talks about the orphan and widow.

Tim: Oh, the orphan and widow. Yes, just, the vulnerable.

Jon: The vulnerable.

Tim: That’s right. Mhm.

Jon: “Man, God loves those people, and you’re going to love them too.” And it’s food—and it’s very tangible, like, you’re taking care of them.

Tim: Totally, yes. So what’s cool is that this language of clinging and attaching—it’s a figure of speech.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, I could do this to you, right now—just put my arm around you and, like—

Jon: Cling to me?

Tim: That would be clinging to you.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But the people that you cling to in your life for a long period of time—it might just be out of pure duty and obligation. Most often, there is some form of emotional attachment —

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That’s motivating it.

Jon: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tim: And that's a part of *ahav*. But what you're drawing attention to is really important—is that the proactive, concrete, action-oriented expression of love is also one of the main focus points here of this vocabulary. How do you love? By giving food and clothing. By keeping Yahweh's commands and wisdom. "Yahweh loved you by choosing the ancestors—"implied: bringing you up out of Egypt. So: action.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. So this paragraph has it all. This is, like, one of the coolest paragraphs to talk about love in the Hebrew Bible.

Jon: God loves you, you love God, you love each other.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. That's right. Yep. Love God, love your neighbor.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. That's it.

Jon: Who's your neighbor?

Tim: Well—exactly right. Yeah. It at least includes the orphan, and the widow, and the immigrant. Okay. Now, when Moses says, "You love God by keeping all of his obligations, and statutes, and commands—"there's hundreds of them in the Torah, hundreds.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So there developed, within Israelite tradition among Hebrew Bible nerds, on into Jesus' time, debates and conversations about how you focus in among all the hundreds of the commands—like: "What are the most important?"

Jon: Most essential?

Tim: Yeah, most essential. Yeah. So that's the background of the story in Mark chapter 12 when a Bible nerd, a scribe, comes up to Jesus and asks, "What—uh—commandment is first among all of the commandments?"

Jon: Okay. First.

Tim: First.

Jon: Most important?

Tim: Yeah. *Pr—protos*, pride of place—

Jon: Okay—

Tim: Yeah, of first importance. Jesus answered, “Here’s the *protos*: ‘Listen, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one—”or “he is the one Lord”—“‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength.’” He’s quoting from what came to be known as the *Shema* prayer, Deuteronomy chapter six.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: There you go. That’s the first one.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “Love God.”

Jon: With everything.

Tim: Yeah. But then he immediately follows, and he just says, “The *deutero*, the second one, is this—”and you’re like, “What? He didn’t ask for the second.”

Jon: Yeah, he just wanted—

Tim: “He just as—”

Jon: One.

Tim: He just wanted—

[Laughter]

Tim: One.

Jon: And he gave him two.

Tim: Mhm. “The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.” So apparently, the guy asked him what’s the first one, and Jesus is essentially saying, if you want to know the one thing, you actually have to know these two.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah.

Tim: And he calls them *protos* and *deuteros*, first one and the second one. But the way he’s presenting it is to say there’s nothing else greater than these, meaning that they’re —

Jon: Mmm. They’re both kind of equally—

Tim: They're the—

Jon: First.

Tim: Flip side of each other.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: Yeah. And it's the same logic that we saw in Deuteronomy 10.

Jon: Yeah, love God and love your neighbor.

Tim: Mhm. God loved you, so you love Go. And so you love your neighbor. This is Jesus' summary of the purpose of Israel's existence, which i—itself is a way on reflecting on the purpose of human existence.

Jon: Love God and love your neighbor.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. And the subtext of it in Deuteronomy 10—love God because he loved you. He's shown you love, so you reciprocate by showing love to God and showing love to neighbor. This is what a human exists for.

[Musical Break (12:51—13:17)]

[Agape and Jesus' Redefinition of Love (13:17—21:25)]

Tim: So in Hebrew Bible, you had *ahav* and *ahavah*, which I mentioned. In the Greek New Testament, mainly it's the word *agape*.

Jon: *Agape.*

Tim: Or *agape* is—

Jon: That's how I'm used to it.

Tim: That's how—

Jon: What did you say, *agape*?

Tim: Uh—*agape*.

Jon: Oh, gosh.

[Laughter]

Tim: So you soften the G—

Jon: Soften the G.

Tim: And the E on the end is really an E—*agape*.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Anyway—

Jon: All right.

Tim: A prolific New Testament scholar, and also a friend and colleague—he lives here in the Portland area—Nijay Gupta, has a new book—this is new in the year 2025—on love in the theology of Paul, the Apostle Paul—in Paul's letters. It's called *The Affections of Jesus Christ: Love at the Heart of Paul's Theology* [*The Affections of Christ Jesus: Love at the Heart of Paul's Theology*]. It's an excellent meditation on love in the letters of Paul. And he has the setup chapter where he just quickly notes that the New Testament's insistent use of this noun *agape* is actually a surprise in the history of love vocabulary in ancient Greek.

Jon: Oh.

Tim: This is really interesting.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So the main word for most of the history of ancient Greek to talk about love is the word *phileo*.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Plato's writings—like, foundational classical Greek writer—is in the—the 400s BC—big body of writings. He uses the verb *phileo* almost 1,500 times—

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: It's a lot. It's a lot. He uses the noun *agape* zero times.

[Laughter]

Tim: But you do have a verb that's connected to *agape*, *agapao*. And it appears 152 times.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So not nearly as much—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: As—

Jon: 10 percent.

Tim: *Phileo*, but it—the verb's in play.

Jon: Mhm. Okay. So what's the difference between these two words, *phileo* and *agapao*?

Tim: Uh—as I understand it, there is not a huge difference of meaning on one level between *phileo* and *agape*.

Jon: Okay. They're kind of just straight-up synonyms?

Tim: Mhm. Yep.

Jon: But one was just not really used much.

Tim: One was less common.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So then go forward to another Greek philosopher who's, like, 350 years forward in time—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So this is, like, in the century right before Jesus—a guy named Plutarch wrote prolifically. He was a philosopher. And he uses the Greek verb *phileo* over 2,000 times in his writings. He uses the Greek verb *agapao* about 500 times. And he uses *agape*, the noun, maybe one time. It's debated on whether that text belongs to his body—

[Laughter]

Tim: Of his writings or not.

Jon: Okay. Hmm.

Tim: So what's so fascinating is when the Jesus movement started to render everything mostly into Greek, which would have been right in those early years in Jerusalem, that *agape* was chosen as the main word to describe what Jesus said is the purpose of a human life.

[Laughter]

Tim: When you turn to the New Testament, *phileo* is used 25 times, the verb *agapao* is used 143 times, and the noun *agape* is used 116 times. It's just all of a sudden—boop.

Jon: Yeah. This is an important word all of a sudden.

Tim: Yeah. Yes.

Jon: All right.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: So the followers of Jesus—they're, like, so impacted that they're like, "We need a new way to talk about this."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Like, "We need a new word."

Tim: Yes.

Jon: So they adopt this obscure word, and they're like, "This is going to be our word."

Tim: Yeah. The word was given meaning now not by the Greek language. The word was given meaning, it was redefined—

Jon: Okay. Okay.

Tim: It's a—it's like a word got re—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Made—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: In the image of Jesus.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Uh—Jesus so reshaped a whole community's view of reality that they had to rethink how they treated each other and how they talked about how they were treating each other.

Jon: Yeah. Oh, interesting.

Tim: Yeah. It's the story of Jesus, his life and teachings, that gave the new definition of the word.

Jon: Hmm. Right. So there's something so radical and revolutionary about the way Jesus taught on love.

Tim: Mhm. Yep.

Jon: What is that?

Tim: Yeah. I'm so glad you asked.

[Laughter]

Tim: This is super interesting.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So here in the Gospel of Luke, it's a little dense concentration of *agape* language. So Luke six, verse 31: "'Treat others the way you want them to treat you.'" There's the golden—

Jon: Golden rule.

Tim: Rule, but in Luke.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "'If you love those who love you, you know, what real credit is that to you, your motives, and your character?'"

[Laughter]

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: "'Listen, even total moral failures, like sinners—'"

[Laughter]

Tim: "'Know to love those who love them.'" You know? Even the mafia boss gets his mother flowers on Mother's Day.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "'If you do good to those who do good to you, like, what extra credit do you get—'"

[Laughter]

Tim: "'On the moral accounting books? Even sinners do the same. If you lend money to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners in order to receive back.'" So let's pause. He gives three examples right here—love, do good, and to lend money.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And what he's talking about here is about reciprocity.

Jon: "Who do I want to have owe me a favor?"

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Or "Who do I want to create a bond with because I know that if I do, they'll have my back?"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "They'll cover me." It's like a calculus—

Jon: Yeah. Totally.

Tim: That we're doing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So what Jesus says—uhm—he expects his followers to do is, "'I tell you, love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return. And your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to ungrateful and even evil humans. Be merciful as your Father is merciful.'"

Jon: Hmm. But what strikes me is “love”—okay, big, fuzzy word—but then, “doing good,” and then even more concrete—

Tim: “Lending money.”

Jon: It’s like—

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. You actually need some resources?

Tim: Yeah. Always on Jesus’ mind with this love vocabulary is actually very practical, tangible acts of service and support.

Jon: And then a very radical view of who you give that support to.

Tim: Totally. Just upending these patterns of reciprocity.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So we’re watching a revolution in, really, the history of human thought and culture happening—

Jon: Oh.

Tim: Here in Jesus’ teachings—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: About love.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Because remember, love for God is primary for Jesus. That’s an obligation. He sees that as an obligation.

Jon: I see.

Tim: “Love God—”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: “With everything you’ve got.” And what that frees you to do, then, is to love your neighbor, just, indiscriminately, friend or foe.

Jon: Hmm. So Jesus came, and he showed this vision of living life where that you’re experiencing that love from God, and then you’re reciprocating that love back to God.

And that frees you up to be able to then live a life of generosity to others that isn't making a calculus about, like, "What am I going to get in return?" You're living out of just this abundance. And that was so new that that's what *agape* came to be known as.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

[Musical Break (21:03—21:25)]

[God Is Love (21:25—31:10)]

Tim: So we're going to look at two passages in the New Testament, one by the Apostle John that he starts off, "*Agatetoi*—"

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: "Loved ones."

Jon: "The loved ones."

Tim: "Ones who are loved."

Jon: "The ones of *agape*."

Tim: Yeah. "Let us love one another because love is from God. Everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God because God is love."

[Laughter]

Jon: You know, this suddenly feels more meaningful to me when I think about the redefinition of love.

Tim: Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: Something so radically different about what you even think love is has changed. Like, to be part of this means to have gone through that transformation of what love actually is.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So they're using this word to describe a fundamentally different way to love.

Tim: Yes, yeah, that's great. That's—

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Great.

Jon: Huh.

Tim: So he begins by saying, "People who are beloved—"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So he already is assuming that God's—

Jon: You're in on this.

Tim: God's done something.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "Let's love one another. Love is from God." So the kind of love that we're talking about, *agape*, this is—the only way to talk about is that it doesn't come from us.

Jon: Yeah. Okay.

Tim: This is divine love. And everybody who imitates that style—

Jon: That style of love—

Tim: Of loving—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: What that shows is that your fundamental identity that yo—it's like you've been reborn as a human—just a different category of human. If you don't display that kind of style of love, what it shows is you—you haven't fully attached yourself in—what he says is, "You don't know God, but you aren't relationally—"

Jon: Clinging to God?

Tim: "In union, because if you did know that God, what you would know is God is *agape*." S—

[Laughter]

Tim: U—it's three words—uh—"*agape theos estin*." It's three words that just revolutionized human thought.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But to say the essence of God of all gods is *agape*—that's just—this is revolutionary stuff, man. And look, here we go. "This is how God manifested his *agape* among us. He sent his only begotten son into the world so that we might live through him." There's a short, little early Christian dictionary definition of *agape*. So under—there's a story underneath that, right?

Jon: Ah—so interesting because the story is of a gift.

Tim: The story is of a gift.

Jon: But it's not a gift that God was like, "You know, if I give them this gift, then they could pay me back."

Tim: Right.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah. Totally.

Jon: Because—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "They're dying."

Tim: That's exactly right. We're—

Jon: It's a gift that's just like pure survival for us.

Tim: Indiscriminate generosity. Yeah. God took the thing that's so precious to him, like, God's own self in the person of his Son, and—right—that one surrenders his life to death so that others might have life. That's what we mean when we say *agape*.

Jon: To give a gift so others can have life.

Tim: That's right. And God is that.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: That's what God is. Mmm. He—

Jon: Wh—God is the gift. God is the life.

[Laughter]

Jon: God is the—the person who does those things.

Tim: In—yeah. The act of indiscriminate, generous gift-giving—that is the essence of the very being of what a Christian means by God.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Phew. Verse 10—he flips it over again. He says, "Hmm, here's another definition of *agape*: not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son as a—"hmm—"*hilasmos*—"uh—"an atonement-accomplishing gift."

Jon: *Hilasmos*?

Tim: "*Hilasmos* for our sins."

Jon: *Hilasmos*.

Tim: Mhm. So it's another little story underneath that. Our sins have created some really terrible scenario, that is, we're dying and the relationship's ruptured. And so a *hilasmos*—it—uhm—refers to a gift given that repairs a broken relationship. And that's most likely what *hilasmos* means. So—

[Laughter]

Jon: It's most likely?

Tim: Well, it's—if there's one word that's, like, hyper-debated—

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: In New Testament studies, it's all this language around atonement.

Jon: Yeah. How—how many times is this word used in New Testament?

Tim: Mmm. It only appears in First John—uh—here and in chapter two, where he says, "Jesus is the *hilasmos* for our sins—and not ours only, the whole world's sins are addressed by what Jesus did." Mhm.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. So the idea is not that we loved God. What gift can we give to God?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But he loved us. He sent his son as that relational-repair gift for our sins. "And beloved ones, if that's how God loved us—"here it is—the flip—"then we also ought to love one another." So "we ought to—"there's the obligation. So God gave us a gift, so we do have an obligation now.

Jon: And the obligation is to love each other the way we experience God's love.

Tim: Exa—yeah. Totally.

Jon: But to not do it in a way that we're used to seeing love being done by people.

Tim: Yeah, like leveraging it.

Jon: Which is—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah, "Who's on my side? Who's on my team? Who can I rise the ranks because of? Who's important that I can attach myself to?" It's—flips that to just be like—

Tim: It flips it completely.

Jon: "I don't need to worry about that."

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "I can—"

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: "Just love."

Tim: Yeah. We live 2,000 years in the wake of this revolution in human moral thought that Jesus' life made to th—

[Laughter]

Tim: To—right—to the—uh—the human family.

Jon: Yeah. So we're doing this all for the Advent season.

Tim: Yeah. That's right.

Jon: And so this is all leading up to the birth of Jesus.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: This is the birth of the gift.

Tim: Yeah. The birth of the gift. To celebrate the arrival of the Messiah, the advent of the Messiah, one way to talk about that story is to say it's a story of *agape*, divine *agape*, divine love. And what it means is that for God to have wanted to do that, God must regard me and the human family in some way. And that's how John opens and closes the paragraph, as "*agapetoi*," "people who are loved." So you already just by the sheer fact of being human are beloved because of what God has done in and through Jesus. And he tells the story two times. God sent his only begotten son into the world—that's what Advent is all—

[Laughter]

Tim: About—so that we might have life through him. And another way of saying that is he sent the Son to be the one through whom the relational rupture between God and humans because of sin is repaired. And that gift does create an obligation. But the obligation is to love other humans with that same type of liberal, indiscriminate generosity.

[Laughter]

Jon: To love others without obligation.

Tim: Withou—without obligation, yeah. Yep, that's it. And that's the—that's the mystery that we ponder. So the birth of Jesus is not technically mentioned in First John four, but I don't know what else this paragraph is about—is except to say, the arrival of the Messiah in the person of Jesus and his life, and death, and resurrection is the very incarnation of God's essence, that God is love. Love. Love. Mmm.

Jon: Okay. So we did four words.

Tim: We did. Yep.

Jon: Uh—four words all about anticipating and preparing ourselves for the arrival of the King.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And—

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: They help us live into the story.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: So there was the, kind of, being stretched with hope.

Tim: Yes, the waiting and the stretching.

Jon: And the tension and the energy—

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Of hope.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Then there was—

Tim: Filling full of a purpose—of a thing's purpose.

Jon: Which is peace.

Tim: Yeah, peace—to exist in a state of wholeness and completeness—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Of your purpose.

Jon: *Shalom*.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And then you used a really great phrase for the joy. It was like a anticipatory joy.

Tim: Yeah. That's right. Celebrating in the present because of what God has done, as like the down payment of what God will fully do. And joy is an attitude I choose in the moment, though I may not always feel like choosing it.

[Laughter]

Tim: Anticipatory joy.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. It's the pre-party.

[Laughter]

Tim: It's not the after-party, it's the pre-party.

[Laughter]

Tim: That's joy.

Jon and Tim: And then love.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Love.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: God is love.

Tim: God is love. And love given a precise definition, the kind of love displayed in the arrival, and the life, and death, and resurrection of Jesus for others. The whole thing was for—for others as a gift.

Jon: Okay. Well, cool.

Tim: Yeah. There it is. Hope, joy, peace, love—these are the words of Advent.