

The Great Love of Friendship John 15:12-17

We have been going through these comforting truth of Jesus before his death on the cruel cross of Calvary. And knowing that the cross and his agony is just a short time away. He will be betrayed by Judas in just a short time, and yet you have these chapters with really intimate and glorious and comforting truths, where he puts the disciples ahead of himself. When we are going through grief or heaviness we want others to come to our aide or listen to our pain, but here we have our Lord, and he knows how difficult this is for his disciples, and takes this opportunity to instruct them in the glorious truths of his relationship with them.

And we saw the metaphor of the vine and the branches, and also the need of the believer to abide in Christ. Here we come back to the theme of the need of his followers to love one another the same way that Jesus has loved us. As we grow in the love of Christ it should cause us to be more loving individuals, where we reach out intentionally to love others in hard and difficult places. We gladly seek to meet the needs of others even if they never reciprocate that love. And that is what this paragraph is about. You can see it sandwiched in between the same command in verse 12, **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”** And then in verse 17, **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”** And certainly when we look at our Lord and Saviour and his love for us, we need to recognize that God’s love might be a little more complicated than we think, because there are different degrees or intensities in which God loves. For example, God loves all of creation. He made it and it reflects his glory. He takes great joy in beholding the world of his hand. But God has a greater love for all of humanity. God so loved the world of humanity. And the reason why is because we are made in his image, although that image is marred. More than anything else in creation, we can turn and recognize him and worship him.

But there is a third aspect and high love of Christ, and that is for his own that he speaks of in this chapter. He loves his own with a perfect intensity and glorious high love that is absolutely unfathomable. Paul prays that we might know something of this love in Ephesians 3:18-19, **“may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”** He says this love surpasses knowledge but prays that we might grow in knowing something of the grandeur of that love that none of us deserve, in fact we deserve the opposite of his love, but we receive this highest aspect of Jesus’ love.

Isn’t it amazing as you consider how this love causes us to follow Christ and to love one another. When you look at sin, it destroys relationships. It isolates us from others. It destroys that which is good. But as we love Christ and grow in his love, we should love one another. And again, it is amazing that we actually think that we have this down pat, and yet we do not recognize how unloving we are. The disciples right here if asked if they loved Jesus would say that they love him with an extreme love and devotion, but none of them were willing to wash the other disciples feet, or Jesus’ for that matter, and all of them will flee from his presence when the soldiers come to arrest

Jesus. Think of it — where do you need to see the love of Jesus for you so that you grow in loving that individual or those individuals in your life that God has sovereignly put into your life to love as Christ has loved you? Where do you need to see that your unwillingness to love him or her or them is not a problem with them; it is not a horizontal problem but a vertical problem — a problem between you and God? Could it be that God has providentially put these individuals in your life to help you grow in loving Christ and loving others? I want us to see a couple things today as we consider and seek to grow. I want us to look and truly grow in understanding of the command, and then I want us to look at the example of Jesus loving us.

1. We need to seek to fathom the command Jesus gives. V.12.

I can remember talking to an individual who spoke of his love for Christ, but said that just had a problem with most other Christians, in fact, wanted nothing to do with them, but his relationship with God was fine. And I do think we have a way of silencing that inner lawyer that convicts us of sin in our lives. I obey and trust and worship God, but it is just this one area of my life that is off. I just cannot have anything to do with him or her. In fact, we might even go as far as saying I want nothing to do with them. I love others, just not him or her. Everything is fine with me and God. He understands. The problem really is not mine but my opponent.

But if this is just a horizontal problem, and not a heart problem have you ever considered how many of the Ten Commandments you break in not loving that individual or individuals? How about this one: you shall not murder? Have you obeyed that in all the intimations in your heart? We realize Jesus speaks about the anger in the heart as murder before God. But it is even more than that. We are to think well of others. Even if they harmed us. We are to seek to be a blessing in their lives. It is not just a negative command but positive. Right, the anger is replaced by something. It is replaced by a wilful heart that wants to bless others. So there is the sixth command. How about the next, “you shall not commit adultery.” And Jesus says we are not to have impure thoughts about the others. Flirting or intimate conversations that should only be with your spouse are ruled out. But positively we are to protect the reputation of another as my brother or sister in Christ, so there is no question. This is how we love others. To flirt or cross the line in anyway is really to despise God and love self rather than loving God and the other person.

Here is the eighth, you shall not steal. What does this command have to do with loving others, and in particular my enemy because I have not stolen from others and especially my enemy? It is Paul’s explanation of our duty and delight before God and others in Ephesians 4:28, “**Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.**” God blesses the just and the unjust. Have you sought to be a blessing to your enemy or your opponent? Christianity really goes this far, and we will see it in the example of Jesus. How about the ninth command? You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. How have you talked about your opponent? When others even ask and want to get the dirt on an individual, do you find yourself giving information that you ought not give? Do you find yourself examining motives and the like that you cannot see? Even if we are silent we still have not fulfilled our duty of loving that individual. Because again, listen to Ephesians 4:29, “**Let no corrupting talk**

come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.” How gracious are in your talk? How much of your speech is really edifying? And the last command is coveting. When others speak well of that individual do you hate that speech and want to put an end to that and put an end to that and let them in to what they are really like? Do you covet and want others would speak well of you rather than your opponent or are you thankful that God has used that person to bless others? Can you be thankful for the good things God has brought into their lives even through your opponent?

You see hate and strife and being fixed against someone and saying that is only one relationship really brings a host of sins in our life. And realize that the first table of the Law that has to do with our relationship with God spills over to obeying the second table. This is a vertical problem that causes us to sin against our great God and others. And it will affect our others relationships whether we realize it or not.

And it is so important that we understand the command here. We are not free to define what love looks like, how it acts and feels. And we are not free to apply to some and not others. We are not sovereign to make the rules. Look at what Jesus commands here again, **“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”** Whose commandment is this? It is Jesus’ commandment. It is not that it is his exclusive from God the Father. We realize both are one. It means that this is a command that comes from the highest and most glorious authority and is not to be taken lightly. Some of you have relationships that you know are not what they ought to be. And I get it. Sometimes people want nothing to do with us. But be honest, because God know your heart already — have you closed the door or are closing the door on others? Are you rationalizing away your lust, hatred, or envy of another as an anomaly and not that big of a deal? Do you realize that a lack of love opens you up to not one sin against God but a host of sins?

I have a Christian friend who tried to be reconciled to another individual who had something against him before the other person died. The response back is that he was good and at peace and didn’t want to see my friend and cut off communication from him. And I wonder if we look at some of our relationships especially among those who are believers in Jesus if we could say, “No, I’m good!”? I am good the way things are. Or maybe you have tried, but didn’t like how it went and you appease your mind that you tried once and that is enough? My plea to you today is to realize this is the command of Jesus. This is his holy Word and his way. You don’t have to wonder what his will is here because he has told you — and that is to love others — even those in the category of our enemies — the same way he has loved us.

2. We need to dwell on the example of that love. V.13

I know in our minds, we vent often and fume and argue against this command. You just do not understand what they said to me, what they did to me or whatever. But maybe we just do not understand what Jesus has done for us? There is nothing that turns our hearts and softens our disposition against our enemies than dwelling on the love of God and how specifically Jesus loved us. When we turn our meditations away from vengeance and hatred toward another person, and intentionally start to meditate on the scope, immensity, and grace of Christ’s love for such ill-deserving people as us, it causes us to change. And let me ask you: in all your struggles to love maybe a family

member, maybe a parent or sibling, maybe someone at work, or maybe someone in the household of faith, how much are we meditating on them and what they have done, and how much are we meditating on Christ's love for a sinner like me? This in many ways is dangerous stuff because so often we do not want to change. So often we want to be firm in our hatred, and it does call for our proud hearts, and that is what they are when we refuse to love others, to be humbled so much so that we love individuals the same way Jesus loved us. And the key is seeing the immense love of Jesus.

So read verse 13 and try and take in the grace and glory of this example, **“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”** In Callou, Northumberland Virginia is a war memorial with this verse as its inscription at its base. In fact, many war memorials have this on it to honour the sacrifice of those who fought for the freedom that we enjoy today. And it was a great sacrifice of soldiers and it is worthy to be remembered. And we realize some have blessed others by giving their lives for friends and loved one. A parent will rush into a burning house in order to try and save their child no matter if it cost their lives. An adult will push a child away from a coming car and sacrifice their own lives. Soldiers sacrifice for other soldiers. And these sacrifices should be honoured and remembered.

And I do not want to diminish or denigrate them in any way but when we come to the sacrifice of Jesus, he is in a category all on his own. I am thankful for James Boice for bringing some of these differences to light. His love for his own is simply stunning. And his love is different in him giving his life for others. But how is it different? Well let me name a few, but it certainly does not exhaust the list. One is that Jesus is without sin, therefore he has the right to live eternally. All other sacrifices no matter how noble and loving are by individuals who will one day perish., But Jesus gives his life as the absolute innocent one, knowing full well that he obeyed and loved the Father perfectly and never deserved death but gave his life that we might live and live eternally not just for the coming few years of this existence. This was a gift of his eternity.

Also, he knows beyond any doubt that he is going to die. He knows that he will lay down his life for his friends. Even though others sacrifice, there is the possibility that they will come out of that battle or they will come out of that burning building or they will survive being hit by a car. But Jesus knew he would not, and also knew all the horrors of not just the physical pain and turmoil, but more importantly the agony of the wrath of God upon him. Think of that wrath. He drank that full cup of punishment that we could never drink for all of eternity.

And here is another thing in this passage, Jesus died for people who were not really his friends but actually his enemies who became his friends. We often think higher than we ought to think of ourselves, and this language that Jesus uses here of laying down his life for his friends should stun us, amaze us, cause us to fall in worship to our great Lord and friend — none other than Jesus. But so often Jesus has become normalized because we have so many deluded and great thoughts about self. We see ourselves as worthy of his friendship. We see ourselves at least more meritorious than others. And that translates in the lack of love for Jesus and others. Jesus is just our buddy just like all the other friends we have. We think way too highly of ourselves. Listen to Paul in Romans 5:6-8, and listen to who you are in this passage and to who I am, **“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person**

one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” We were weak, ungodly, unrighteous, un-good if that is a word, sinners, and goes on and says we were his enemies.

But here it is — Christ died for us. He died intentionally for you and me. He dies so that he could make his enemies his friends. And I love this passage because Jesus is saying here that he is not dying for people generally but specifically. Who is he dying for? And you will see this a little later in this passage, and that is for his chosen ones. He is dying, not for all people universally, but specifically for his friends. And let me just say that the sacrifice of Jesus is of infinite value. It could save everyone. But specifically it saves those whom God has chosen to save, and that is the elect or his friends that he has chosen out of this world.

Think of the glory of having Jesus as your friend. We all want close intimate friendships. We realize they not only make life more bearable but more joyous. They know us and they get us. And in Christianity as we love one another we are to be intentionally building these friendships, not based on merit but based on our friendship with Christ and his love for us. We are drawn toward friendships and redemptive relationships, but at the same time find them very difficult. And the reason why is friendships have the potential to hurt you and harm you. We realize as we look at our lives the greatest pain does not come from the words and actions of those who are at a distance from us, but those who are close. We are cautious maybe of who we let in and trust. We do not want to be hurt, and because we have been hurt, we are not going to make that same mistake again. It is just too tough and too emotionally agonizing. And some have very few friends or no friends for that matter. Keep people at a distance. It is safe!

But is it a real reflection of Jesus' love for us? Aren't we the ones who betrayed and sinned and grieved him? Jesus chooses us and calls us friends knowing full well all the times we would still choose sin over him. He still chooses to go to that cross knowing that it was specifically for you with all your iniquities and hard heartedness. Let me ask you, as you meditate on that truth does it change you, is it changing you? Are you in awe that the most glorious person who ever appeared in human flesh calls you — you — friend? It should not cause us to feel proud or worthy but humble us? How could we ever hold animosity in our hearts if we truly believed this? How could we be satisfied with us reconciled relationships? How could we not be moved to seek to be loving friends with others whether they deserve it or not? There are some people that are easy to love. But the true test of our authentic Christianity is not the people that are easy to love. Even tax collectors love other tax collectors but the individuals who could be classified as our enemies. May Christ's love so move in our hearts to truly change us to be more like Him, to truly love our enemies and seek their highest good.