

Love Like Christ

The call of our text this morning is for us to **love like Christ does**.

The way I believe the text **aims to create that in you is by setting forth the riches of Christ's love toward you**. It aims to **sink you deep into the truth and reality of Jesus' love** for you personally, and out of that grow you into a loving person.

So that will be my aim in the sermon.....set before you the depth of Christ's love for you, so that you will have power imitate him by loving others.

Read Ephesians 5.1-2

Look at what a **daunting text** this is: verse 1, "imitate God"

Now if you are **reading quickly**, you may **miss the weight of that**. But if you give it a second thought, it is absolutely **breath taking**. And its **not an isolated** command. **Leviticus 19** God says, "Be holy, as I am holy," a verse that Peter quotes. And in **Matthew 5** Jesus says, "be perfect as your Father in heaven in perfect."

And then there is this: **love like Christ**.

Wow.

ill. In a college **football game a few weeks ago** a company was doing a promotion where a pre selected volunteer was to go out onto the field in between the 1st & 2nd quarter and throw footballs through a hoop 3 ft. in diameter that was about 10 yds away. For every ball they threw through the hoop the company would give \$5,000. to charity. The "finalist" was a middle aged woman who might have thrown a football twice in her life. She did not even come close to the target on any of her ten throws.

Point – she was called upon to go out in front of 50,000 people and **imitate what a skilled quarterback** can do with ease. But it was impossible for her.

And it is the same for us when it comes to obeying Christ—the standard is too high. **We can't do it**.

But....good news....God can do it through us.

What we have in these two verses is the **pattern for Christian obedience and motivation**. Obedience to the command here is to love like Christ loves. That is impossible. But the motivation is also offered in these verses: Jesus loves you.

The motivation of the Christian life is always rooted in Christ's love for me in the gospel. **When I really begin to get my mind around all that** means....than I am **going to find, churning around in my soul, power to obey** the command to love as he loves.

These **two little verses** form the pattern of Christian obedience, and motivation.

So, our **task today is mainly....not only, but mainly** to stir up those motivations. To put some **oxygen on the flame of your love for Christ (and thus other people)** by talking about Christ's love for you.

4 ways we see the love of Christ for us

1. See His Love in Making Us Children

Verse 1 says, "be imitators of God, as beloved children"

I want to begin this morning, by ringing a hopeful note.

We've come to a command this morning that is absolutely daunting....imitate God; love like Christ. The cost for obedience will be high.

But remember who is telling you to do it. Your Father. You are his beloved child.

ill. at the pool, on the basis of his love for me Ben hopefully will jump in. But he would not if it was you, who he does not know. But he will because he trusts me.

So, this command to love **comes from your Father**. As your father, he has promised to finish the work he's begun in you.

That gives us confidence that though we may have missed the mark, we have a God who will not give up on us. Who will continue to beckon us into the pool, catch us when we fall, set us back up.....

And this demonstrates his great love.

1 John 3.1, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

ill. CO adoption system....you could return children if they weren't working out....sort of like a library book. Can you imagine the insecurity of that?

On the contrary, we have absolute certainty that he is for us; that what he is calling us to here is good, and that he will help us to obey.

2. See His Love in the Willing Surrender of His Life

The text says that “he gave himself up for us”.

Jesus confirms this with his own words in **John 10.17-18**, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

[18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.”

It’s **essential that we understand this**. Wiley **Jewish leaders** did not steal away the life of this reformer. The **Romans, with all of their military might**, and brutal tactics did not take his life. **Pilate** did not. The **mob** did not. **Judas Iscariot** did not. **Annas** the high priest did not. **Satan**, in all his striving, did not take Jesus’ life from him.

At **every moment when it appears in the Scriptures** that the life of Jesus is *being taken from him*, he is choosing to lay his life down; he is willingly handing it over.

He could have called down **10,000 legions of angels**; he could have **shed his human form** and crushed every pretender of power.

Actually, we could go so far as to say, **at the moments that Jesus seems to be the most at the mercy of his murderers**, he was actually, along with the Father, **orchestrating** the events as they unfolded.

Let it **sink in this morning**--Jesus gave himself up for you. Willingly. He was **not coerced**. He was **not manipulated or persuaded or pressured**. Gladly, he gave himself up for you.

And indeed, **this sort of freely given, joyful, unsolicited love is the best kind**.

ill. CJ, “Mondays are my favorite day, Daddy.” Why? “Because we get to be with you for the whole day.”

That’s quite a bit different than how he made some of our Thanksgiving guests feel when he was supposed to greet them.....

No one forced the hand of Jesus on that dark day. He planned it. He orchestrated it. And **He gave himself** up for you.

III“**Could we with ink the ocean fill**, and were the skies of parchment made, were every stalk on earth a quill, and every man a scribe by trade.....to write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry. Nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky.”

3. See His Love in how Undeserved it was

We now draw our attention to the **same words with a different emphasis**.

Again consider, “He gave himself up for you.” **HE**....that is, Jesus, the spotless lamb of God, gave himself up for.....**YOU**, that is the rebel, the enemy, the sinner, the hopeless prodigal laying in the mud of your sin.

Paul aims to show the greatness of Jesus’ love on the basis of this very same truth in Romans 5:

Romans 5.6-8, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The Bible’s portrayal of you apart from Christ is that **even your best deeds** are **dirty rags** compared to the perfect holiness of God.

In the **smallest sin** we **defy God’s right to rule** and to reign over His creation. When we sin, we are seeking to **usurp for ourselves the authority** and the power that belong to God.

Every sin, no matter how seemingly insignificant is **cosmic treason**, because it is an act in defiance of a **cosmic King**.

Thus apart from Christ, the Bible’s word for you, is **enemy**. **Enemy of God**. That is not my word for you. That is God’s word for you.

For those of you who **have been around for a while**, and who have been paying attention, I think you are acquainted with the truth that I’m aiming to unfold here.

But if you are **relatively new in the faith**, or relatively new here, it may sound sometimes like we are trying to bludgeon you with all this talk of how sinful you are. I promise, **we are not trying to bludgeon you**. Nor, are we trying to put you down in some **pit of guilt, just to wallow** around in it.

But here is our heart for you, as pastors....God's heart for you.....**is that you feel deeply about Christ**. That you be deeply enthralled with Him, drawn to Him, love Him.

And I believe, Scripturally speaking, that **the key to feeling deeply about Christ; to being affected in the deep places of your soul by the gospel message, is to have an accurate, and sober assessment of the condition of your soul**. The greater sense you have of your own sinfulness is **exactly equivalent** to how great your sense of God's love for you will be.

If your understanding is that you are **generally good**, looking for a bit of a **pick me up from Jesus**, then you will be like the Pharisees—smug, self righteous, and loving little.

If, on the other hand, you have a biblical assessment of your sinfulness, you will **love much**.....like the **sinful woman**, who burst into the home of Simon the Pharisee in Luke 7, and **threw herself at Jesus' feet** in worship.

Jesus said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair...Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, love little." (Luke 7.44,47)

It is against the **blackness of your sin**, that the glory of God's love for you shines most brightly.

If you don't think of yourself in these terms, than **you are in love with yourself**. And it prevents the gospel from EVER being precious to you.

It is the aim of a large segment of the **culture to create this exact evil in your mind: you are good---love yourself**. Rather than---you are desperately sick---run to Christ.

Our aim today is for the love that God has for you to shine very brightly. Do you see it here? As the perfect Son of God dies for unworthy, thankless, enemies?

Indeed, this is a great display of love.

The Hymn writer Phillip Bliss draws attention to it in this verse:

Guilty, vile, and helpless, we;
Spotless Lamb of God was he.
Full atonement! Can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

"God's love toward us is beyond comprehension. God could quite justly have abandoned us to our fate. He could have left us alone to reap the fruit of our wrongdoing and to perish in our sins. It is what we deserved. But he did not. Because he loved us, he came after us in Christ. He pursued us even to the desolate anguish of the cross, where he bore our sin, our guilt, judgment and death." John Stott

4. See His Love in what it Cost Him

The measure of love is the cost.

ill. The old song says, "ain't no mountain high enough, ain't no valley low enough, to keep me from getting' to you babe."

I'll do whatever it takes to get to you. No cost is too great to be with you. That's how much I love you.

And so it is with Christ.

Paul is measuring the love of Christ for you in verse 2, when he sites what it cost Christ to save you.

Because of his love, Jesus became, "a sacrifice to God." **IT IS IN THE SACRIFICE that we see the high cost.**

Paul is **reminding his readers of the OT sacrificial system in which animal sacrifices were repeatedly offered** as a symbolic demonstration of sin payment.

When Christ comes, we find out that **he is the fulfillment** of all of these sacrifices.

Hebrews 7:27

He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily.....since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.

Hebrews 9:26

He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Now, what I am saying is that **it was a great loss for Jesus to become a sacrifice to God**. By becoming such a sacrifice, **he proves** how high and deep and wide is His love for us.

But how do we know that the cost was so great?

Let's head to the Garden of Gethsemane.

On a quiet night just before the crucifixion Jesus takes the inner 3—Peter, James and John deep into the garden, and there **tells them that he feels, 'overwhelmed and sorrowful to the point of death,'** and asks them to keep watch with him.

He then goes on a little farther alone, **falls prostrate** with his face to the ground and prays: **'My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not what I will, but what you will.'**

He returns to the disciples, **finds them sleeping** and returns in prayer to his Father, this time saying, **"My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."**

Three times he will find his disciples sleeping. It's a path he must walk alone. Luke describes him at one point as **"in anguish"** and as having **sweat like drops of blood** falling to the ground.

BB Warfield describes the term used by Luke about Jesus in the garden as **"consternation, appalled reluctance."**

Warfield says that the terms used by Matthew to describe Jesus' condition in the garden conveys a, **"loathing aversion, perhaps not unmingled with despondency."**

And the terms used by Mark speak of being **"horror struck"**.

Warfield says that Jesus' description of himself as **"overwhelmed with sorrow,"** expresses a sorrow, or perhaps we would better way, a mental pain, a distress, which **hems him in on every side**, from which there is therefore no escape."

So, Jesus describes this ordeal as a **bitter cup**; he sweats drops of **blood**; he prays that, if possible, **it be taken** from him.

What is this cup? What is it that is coming that he so dreads?

Is it the scourging that awaits him?

Or the torture?

Or is it the pain of the cross?

Is it the mental anguish of betrayal, desertion and denial that awaits him?

Is it the mockery and abuse?

Maybe it was all of these things together?

It could not be. Jesus had **moral and physical courage throughout the time** of his public ministry. Was he **now afraid of pain, insult and death?**

In fact, **Jesus had told his followers that when they were persecuted to 'rejoice and be glad'.** Was Jesus not practicing what he preached?

Those **followers would experience suffering** and rejoice. Do you remember when, in **Acts 5**, they left the flogging of the Sanhedrin, **'rejoicing because** they had been counted worthy to suffer disgrace for the Name'?

And then **after the apostles died, countless other martyrs followed in their steps.** The **stories of their lives** recount rejoicing in the face of torture, persecution and death.

In the 2nd century, **Polycarp refused to flee or deny Christ**, and was burned at the stake. Just before the flame was lit, he prayed, "O Father, I bless thee that thou hast counted me worthy to receive my portion among the numbers of martyrs."

So then when we see Jesus there in the garden, thinking of you—prostrate, sweating blood, overwhelmed with grief and dread, begging to be spared of this cup---what was the cost that he feared so?

How could the martyr have gained their inspiration from him when he had faltered, and they did not?

Was he now, at the moment of his testing, a coward in the face of this physical suffering?

No!

The **cup that he shrank from was altogether different from the cup that those martyrs were required to drink of.**

The cup did not symbolize flogging or insults or abandonment, or crucifixion. The **cup he dreaded was BECOMING A SACRIFICE TO GOD.** It was the **spiritual agony** of **bearing the sins** of the world; of **enduring God's judgment** for those sins. That was his agony. That was the cost of his love for you.

The rest of Scripture confirms the meaning of the cup.

The **imagery of drinking the cup always conveys the idea of receiving God's judgment.**

- The sinless Son recoiled at the idea of his soul coming in contact with sin.

- He hung back in horror from the anticipation of separation from the Father; from bearing the judgment for sin.

And **IF THE ANTICIPATION OF BECOMING A SACRIFICE WAS SO AGONIZING FOR JESUS**, what must of the actual event been like?

2 Corinthians 5.21, “For our sake God made Jesus to be sin,”

And **when he became sin, God poured out his righteous wrath** on that sin. Onto his perfect Son become guilty sinner. It was the **agony of absorbing your sin**; the agony of **bearing the Father’s wrath**; the agony of separation with his Father.

Jesus words on the cross, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,**” were not **exaggerated statements** about his pain. They were reality. Jesus was speaking truly of his experience. **TO BECOME A SACRIFICE TO GOD WAS TO LOSE GOD.**

It was this, that caused Jesus to be horror struck. That was his cost. And that is the display of his love for YOU.

And as Jesus emerged from this time of contemplating the coming event, he emerged with a **resolute determination** to follow through with what he came to earth to do.

Listen to him in John 18. Peter draws the sword, cuts off the ear of the soldier. And Jesus says to him, “Shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given to me?”

Jesus knows that the Father has given him the cup. It will not be taken away from him. And with his **face set like a flint**, he went to the place of his agony.....he was **determined** to go.....he was determined to **endure what it would cost** him.....to bring you to himself. **Because he loved you.**

The poem writer portrays it well:

We may not know, we cannot tell,
What pains he had to bear;
But we believe it was for us
He hung and suffered there.

Do you see his love for you in what it cost? He became a sacrifice to God.

Application

Well, what is the application for us in all of this?

It’s clear from the text: verse 2, “walk in love, as Christ loved us”. Now that you have seen Christ’s love for us.....now, **go and love people like this.**

The **only power to obey** such a command is to be deeply affected by who Christ is for you. The **safety and awe and joy and satisfaction** that comes from living day by day in the reality of God’s love for you through Christ, can supply the power to love others.

Indeed, the 1st and 2nd great commandments show us that **this is the main task of the Christian life:**

to draw our strength to love people by being rooted deeply in God’s love for us.

Is loving God—and, by extension, loving people, **what you are all about?** You know, it’s the **only thing that matters** don’t you?

No, **I’m not overstating it there.** That is God’s word in **Galatians 5.6**, “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.”

Or consider **1 Corinthians 13.1-3**, “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. [2] And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, *I am nothing.* [3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, *I gain nothing.*”

I am not going to belabor this point. **Straightforwardly, do you love people?** Are you **walking in love like Christ** toward those in your life?

Plug your name in the place of the word love in 1 Corinthians 13.4-7. Is that you?

_____ is patient and kind; _____ does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant [5] or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; [6] it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. [7] Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

I think sometimes we assume that **if we are nice**, people will know that we are Christians and want to know more about Jesus. But it doesn’t work that way. I know a lot of **really nice people who are not Christians.**

So there has to be more to our faith than being friendly and polite.

That's what Jesus taught in **Luke 6.32-36**, ““If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. [33] And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. [34] And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. [35] But 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 is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. [36] Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.”

Honestly, if someone wrongs me, or worse, wrongs my family or friends—my first response is **retaliation**. I don't want to bless or forgive or extend kindness to those who hurt me or those I love. But that is exactly what Christ asks us to do.

Later in **Luke (14.12-14)**, Jesus says, “He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. [13] But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, [14] and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Do you **ever do anything like that?** Do you do good **to those who cannot (maybe will not) repay you?** That is Christ's love.

He has given us something for which we can never repay him, and asks us to give like He has.

The only power to do that is, by faith, to live in the good of God's love for YOU.

“The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who *loved me* and gave himself *for me*.” **Galatians 2.20**

HE loved YOU.

And notice the tense of that word *loved*. Does that mean he no longer loves you? No it means that **Paul never graduated beyond the cross of Jesus Christ** as the source and power of his faith; as the place where he gained assurance of the love of God.

It is the same for you. Jesus Christ loved you, and so he was crucified for you.

And now he asks you to walk in love like His.