

Love

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[0:00] Now, if you have a Bible, you might want to turn back to Luke chapter 23 on page 1060, and we're going to think for a few moments about the reality that Jesus died as He has told us to show His own love to us.

So, we're going to think about love for a few minutes. We recognize, I think, as people that we have a capacity to love. It is something that is basic.

It is something that is universal. It cuts across all times and all cultures. As Christians, we very much believe that part of being made in the image of God is the ability to love, because God is love, the Bible tells us.

I think we also recognize the centrality of love. If we think about it at the cultural level, it's so important to our stories and our songs and our movies.

So many religious and ethical movements are built around love for a particular idea or a particular set of values. And think about just how central love is for ourselves, to the desires deep down within us, to love and to be loved.

[1:22] At the same time, I think it's fair to say that there is some confusion about love. Sometimes it's one of those words we hear so often, but it can be hard to define. Maybe partly because we've emptied it of meaning.

We apply it across the board. So, you know, we might love our job or our car. We might love our coffee or a nice cafe. But we also love our family and we love our God.

So, what do we mean when we talk about love? And when we have conversations and when we're moving around, we recognize that not everybody shares the same understanding of what love is. For many people, to hear the word love is to think of a mere emotion. It's just about a feeling. It's about how I feel about someone or something. We talk about falling in love and falling out of love. And I'm sure I'm not the only person to recognize the problem that comes with that. If the feeling goes, often so the relationship goes and the commitment goes.

[2:30] And when we lose our sense of love as a verb, as an active thing, then we have the pain of broken marriages and families, a lack of trust and security.

So, there's confusion about love. But something that we can all agree on, I think, and this would be true, I think, if we went into the streets of Edinburgh today and to ask people what they thought about costly love, it's recognized as a positive thing.

Take as an example, if we were to go to the Belfast Titanic Museum, or if you know anything about the Titanic, if you've listened to any of the podcasts, if you've read up on it, then you will probably know something of the story of the engineers on the Titanic.

So, when it became apparent that the ship was going down, they didn't leave their posts. They continued for as long as possible to keep the engines running, to keep the lights on, to allow the people on the upper decks as much chance as possible to escape and to find a life raft.

The engineers went down with the ship. But you won't hear anyone saying of them, well, what a waste, what a foolish action. Rather, even over a century on, it's still regarded as a heroic act.

[3:51] We understand that sacrifice is good, that it's noble. So, when Jesus says, greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends, that resonates.

We agree with that. And remarkably, with Jesus, that's not just a nice philosophical idea. That's an easy thing to say, perhaps.

Jesus says it, and Jesus shows it. Jesus practices what he preached. So, we're going to think this evening about what Jesus says about love and how he shows that love.

We're going to think about Good Friday, and just for a few moments together, to give thanks for the goodness of Jesus' love, to recognize that it was a costly, self-giving, sacrificing everything love for his own people.

Or we could put it another way, a love so powerful that it would turn enemies into friends. And we're going to think about why we call this day Good Friday.

[5:04] It is good for all who look upon the cross of Jesus as the supreme demonstration of Jesus' own love for us. It is a good day with good news for all who receive Jesus and his saving death as our supreme treasure.

So, what we're going to do, just really briefly, is we're going to take a look at the events that we've heard Luke record, and we're going to ask, how do we experience that love for ourselves?

So that we might together recognize with the Apostle Paul that the message of Jesus' death matters only when it becomes personal testimony in our lives.

that all of us might say with Paul in Galatians 2, the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

So let's turn first of all to the events and to ask ourselves, how does Luke's record help us to see Jesus' love?

So we're saying that his death on the cross is the ultimate demonstration of his love, but Luke has so helpfully recorded for us the hours leading up to his death. And some of those events, they really serve to magnify the love of Jesus as we see that his movement towards the cross is deliberate.

[6:32] That the love he is going to put on display is costly and gracious and life-transforming. So if you have a Bible, you can scan these verses with me.

In Luke chapter 22 and verse 39, we were told that Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives. Now that's a significant truth because Judas, the betrayer, knows exactly where Jesus is going to be.

And so we're told that Jesus will not avoid arrest, but he goes as was the plan. Jesus is willing to embrace the cross to show us the love of God.

We move further to verse 42 and we hear Jesus pray and recognize Dr. Luke tells us the agony that Jesus faces.

His face dropping sweats of blood as he prays, Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done.

[7:34] Jesus faces up to drinking the cup, this image of the Father's wrath, the wrath of God against sin, against sinners. Jesus will stand in the place of sinners and will take that cup and he knows the horror and agony he will experience and yet he commits, doesn't he, to the Father's will.

And so we see the love of Christ Jesus that sees him drink the cup that you and I ought to drink.

The story continues as Jesus is arrested.

From verse 48 to 53, we discover that as Judas and a host of men armed come to him, Jesus goes with the betrayer.

Jesus doesn't fight arrest. He could. He could call down legions of angels. But as prophesied in love, Jesus walks silent before his accusers.

And then in chapter 23, as Jesus is walking to the cross, by now he has endured the injustices of false arrest and false trial.

[8:52] He has been abused. He has been beaten. He's experiencing public mockery. Mockery. His body is weakening due to blood loss because of beatings.

And still, he looks outside of himself to see those women. Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and for your children.

Jesus understands judgment that will come, persecution that will face his own followers. And Jesus' love, even walking to the cross, is selfless, concerned for the good of others.

Verse 34, Jesus is now hanging, nailed to the cross. And as he is taking to that place of execution, Jesus said, Father, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

When the soldiers treat him as a common criminal, as they gamble at the foot of the cross for his clothing, Jesus prays to seek their forgiveness because he knows they do not know his true identity. [10:07] But in this prayer, aren't we being brought to see something of the effect that Jesus' love produces in his going to the cross to die? There is in him forgiveness.

And then in chapter 23, and from verse 40 onwards, we have that remarkable story of the dying criminal who recognizes something unique about Jesus.

Don't you fear God, he says to the other criminals, since you are under the same sentence, we are punished justly, but this man has done nothing wrong. And not only that, he turns to Jesus.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom. He is dying in apparent shame, but this criminal is able to see the king with eternal glory. And in that moment, Jesus' love extends grace to the undeserving who looks to him with faith.

Jesus says, today, you will be with me in paradise. And even as Jesus dies, we're reminded of his love, his love for his father and the father's love for him.

[11:25] Jesus called out with a loud voice, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit. and we are reminded of the eternal love of God that established this eternal plan of salvation that culminates with Jesus, the Son of God, dying in our place, offering us an overflowing love that we can be brought into.

So, as Luke records the historical events, he is at the same time shining a spotlight on the cross as the great demonstration of Jesus' self-giving love.

Well, if those are the events, we need to turn, secondly, to think about our experience of them, or more particularly, how can you and I know this love of Christ for ourselves?

You and I, we know the feeling when we read about those titanic engineers, or when we hear the news reports of a parent who sacrifices themselves to save a child, or we hear of soldiers acting with great courage under fire to protect soldiers or civilians at the cost of their lives.

We admire them. We honour them. We recognise their goodness. But it's a story that remains outside of us.

[12:57] It doesn't impact us beyond that, perhaps, temporary emotional response. With a cross, it's different, and it needs to be different. The cross of Christ is unique.

This supreme demonstration of Jesus' self-giving love, though it happened in history some 2,000 years ago, it's a story of the love of God that can become a vital part of each of our stories, and indeed, it must become a part of our story.

This love that Jesus puts on display is a love that must be received personally. It's not enough, because lots of people admire it from a distance, but that's not enough. We must embrace it and enter into it.

Let's just remind ourselves for a moment, why does God say we need this love? Why does He put this love on display that Good Friday? Let's make it personal.

It's because of my sin. It's because of your sin. That sin that separates me from God. That sin that robs Christ Jesus of His glory and the worship that He deserves.

[14:10] As the hymn writer put it, it was my sin that held Him there until it was accomplished. His dying breath has brought me life.

I know that it is finished. It's my sin. It's my guilt. It's your guilt that needs to be atoned for. It's the wrath of God that must be satisfied for my wrongdoing.

As the hymn writer puts it, Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left its crimson stain. Christ washed me white as snow.

We need this love when we come to recognize that without Jesus' death on our behalf. We have no righteousness to claim. We have no appeal to God's justice.

Rather, we stand in desperate need of His mercy. And as we recognize that, we hear the good news for us of God's love for us in Christ.

[15:19] We hear Jesus say, the Son of Man came to give His life as a ransom for many. We hear Him say, greater love has no one than this, that He lay down His life for His friends.

Or we turn to words of Paul in Ephesians 5, and we're reminded that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

And that begs the question, am I among the many? Can I belong to the church? Can I become a friend of God?

The cross of Christ is something that must become profoundly personal for each one of us. And as we ask those questions, the answer comes in God's Word again and again.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. The promise of John chapter 1, to all who did receive Him, who believe in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

[16:27] Romans 10, 13, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. At the cross, we are led to recognize that Jesus paid the highest price possible to give you and I the greatest gift possible by demonstrating His great love so that we can enjoy the glorious love of God for ourselves.

To know that love, we need to call on Him. We need to believe in Him. And when we do, we become His friends. We become one of the many.

We become part of the church. And we can say, the Son of God, He loved me. And He gave Himself for me. To help us think some more about the wonder of the cross, we're going to sing our closing hymn, which is when I survey the wondrous cross.

And after we sing, well maybe stay standing and I'll close in prayer. Let's pray. Thank you.