

Greater Love Has No One Than This

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[0 : 0 0] Consider these well-known words of verse 13, greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. On 11th November 1919, a national two-minute silence was observed, first observance offered to remember those who perished in what was then known as the Great War. And since that date, since that November 1919, since then, the nation as well by acts of remembrance, we've stopped to remember, we've stopped to give thanks for the freedoms, the many freedoms that we enjoy because of those who gave their lives in battle and in conflict. This year, of course, is rather different. There are no mass gatherings, gatherings in our cities or towns or in our villages. There's no vast parade walking past the Cenotaph in London, as has been the case over all these many decades, walking past that war memorial that stood for exactly a hundred years. But instead, there are smaller gatherings, gatherings such as our own today. There are online services happening even now.

But still, remembrance happens. Still, we go through the process, if you like, of calling to mind those who gave their todays for our tomorrows. And so, the impact that the coronavirus has on the various restrictions, yes, it has affected the way that we remember as we carry out remembrance this day and this week. But we still remember. We still give thanks to God that the evils of godless ideology was resisted and defeated. We still give thanks to God for the freedoms that we know in our own lives, the freedoms that certainly in World War II, when the evils of fascist ideology were so close, just a breath away even from our own shores. We give thanks for the freedoms won by those who gave their lives who gave their lives in sacrifice for us. And we do give thanks. We truly do give thanks and pay tribute to those who suffered in particular conflicts. But always, always, always remember not just once a year, but all year, every year, all times until the Lord calls us home. We remember the one who truly did lay down his life for his friends. And we never, never, never forget the one who, Lord Jesus, who gave his life willingly, who gave his life for sinners such as me and such as you. Because we have to say that every Sunday is remembrance Sunday, the first day of the week when the Lord Jesus, who died for us, who was dead for us and rose from the dead. Lord Jesus, he gave his life. He triumphed over death. His sacrifice on the cross was so that you might know the Lord Jesus, a Savior, so that you might not suffer that penalty that he suffered for our sins. He took your punishment, my punishment on himself. And so, yes, we truly do remember those who by sacrifice gave their lives in conflict. But I want to draw you to the one who gave his life in that conflict between sin and Satan, against sin and Satan. Jesus, who won that victory over sin and Satan on the cross. Jesus, who won that victory over death and that resurrection Sunday, that first resurrection Sunday. It's Jesus who lives forevermore, calling you to himself. And so, these words that we read there in John chapter 15, I pray that they will give you great comfort as we remember the Lord Jesus.

greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. Let's think, first of all, of that great love, the greatest love. Greater love has no one than this. Think of when Jesus came from heaven to earth. He came with sending love. God sent his one and only Son. God so loved the world that he gave. So, Jesus came from heaven to earth with sending love. He was sent by the love of God.

And Jesus lived that life of love amongst his people. And he says to his disciples, I have loved you. He says on a number of occasions, I have loved you. And of course, he gave himself in love.

[5 : 0 0] And John, who wrote this gospel, he wrote other letters. He wrote three letters. In fact, in his first letter, he said this, this is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And as Jesus is speaking to his disciples here, he's speaking of that abiding love that he shows to his own. And he uses that analogy, that, if you like, that word picture. He's the vine and his followers, the branches, and branches connected to the vine. And you see that relationship that

Jesus tells us of those who love him because Jesus first loved them. You see that great love that he speaks of. He says, this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.

And then immediately follows on and tells us of this great love. Greater love is no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. But who's Jesus speaking of when he speaks of the someone who lays down his life for his friends? Well, it's himself he's speaking of. He's about to be crucified. He's about to give his life for sinners. He's come to rescue sinners by his death. He's come to give himself willingly on the cross. He's come to be that sacrifice for sins. And Jesus is saying these words that we read. He's saying all these words on the night before his crucifixion. He's saying this the night before he lays down his life for his friends. So, he's speaking first and foremost about himself, the greatest love of all. He's speaking of his love, his eternal love, his self-giving love. And it's that love that sent Jesus into a war zone, that war zone, that conflict between himself, Jesus and Satan. And it's that love that kept Jesus in that war zone, that love that kept him there for us, for you, for me. And it's that love that gave itself in the most important war that's ever been fought, that war between good and evil, that war between Jesus and the devil, that war between the righteousness of Christ and the evil of Satan. And so, no wonder we can speak of the greatest love of all in the person and in the work of the Lord Jesus. And yes, I want to keep saying it's so important and it's so right that we recognize and remember those who've given their lives in conflict, given their lives for our freedoms, who've done it in loyalty to monarch and country, king and country, queen and country. But above all, let's use this opportunity to give thanks and to remember the one who came in love, who gave himself in love and continues to love you who know him, who trust him, who trust him and are his. He's your warrior. He's your conqueror. He's your savior.

He's the one for whom the greatest love of all was seen when he laid down his life for others. And he did it as a volunteer. The volunteered love of Jesus. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. Look at that phrase particularly, lays down his life. He did it voluntarily. It wasn't forced. It wasn't something that he did reluctantly. Jesus gave his precious life and he did it willingly for the sake of your salvation.

You know, in times of war, volunteer, many volunteers offer themselves in service. They respond to the call to serve. And they do it for different reasons. I'll suggest four reasons that we can apply from ordinary, if you like, human life and bring that to the Savior. There are generally four reasons why people volunteer. One is adventure. The second is guilt. The third is escape. And the fourth is patriotism. Let's look at these. And let's bring these reasons, if you like, and project them onto the coming of the Lord Jesus for us. Let's think of adventure, first of all. In the First World War, over two and a half million men volunteered. They volunteered to serve, well, at that time, of course, king and country. And for many, it was just out of a sense of adventure. It was a war that was reckoned to be done and dusted by Christmas, Christmas 1914. Just a quick five-month war. So the opportunity was there to go over and see France, maybe Belgium, see another country. Of course, at a time when just people generally didn't travel beyond their immediate locality. And so the opportunity was there to get on that adventure, to fight the enemy in a short, sharp, quick conflict. And when you see photographs of the troops who left, many from Waverly Station in Edinburgh, who went on that train to go down south, they're smiling, they're happy, they're rejoicing in the adventure that they're expecting to take part in. But for Jesus, for Jesus and His coming to earth, He didn't come out of, you know, an immediate sort of sense of adventure. Jesus came out of love for His own. He didn't come, you know, from heaven to earth for some kind of self-seeking pleasure. No, He came to give Himself. He came and He gave Himself for us out of love. But then we said guilt was often a reason why men joined up, certainly in the First

[11:17] World War. Certainly between 1914, end of 1914, and the middle of 1916, before conscription, you know, forced going into the war. Before conscription, there was so much pressure on young men to join up, to volunteer. It was forced volunteer, I suppose. But you look at the propaganda posters. Have you done this in school? You know, the posters, some of the posters really drove home at the consciences of young men, basically saying if they didn't join up, you were a disgrace to your family, a disgrace to your country. But when Jesus came from heaven to earth, there was no underhand pressure. There was no forcing His will to come and be that once-for-all sacrifice for sin. There was no sort of sinister way to try and convince Him to come from heaven to earth and leave the glory and perfection of heaven.

Jesus came willingly. He came of His own accord. And listen to these wonderful words that Jesus spoke just, well, just a little time before the passage that we read. Read these words in John chapter 10, verse 17 to 18. He says this, For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

No one takes it from me. No one takes my life 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. Jesus was the great volunteer who came willingly. There was no element of guilt or forcing being forced to come. He came willingly because of His love for sinners. But then think of escape. And for many young men in 1914, the opportunity to escape the really dreadful living conditions in towns and cities and villages, the war provided this opportunity to escape from these terrible conditions.

But when Jesus came from heaven to earth, there was no escaping. He had nothing to escape from. Jesus left the glory, the paradise of heaven. And He came from heaven to our sin-stained earth, full of corruption, full of sin. But He did it willingly. He did it for you and He did it for me. But then, another reason why men joined up and voluntarily joined up in certainly the First World War and other wars, patriotism. Out of patriotic duty for king and country. And of course, we have to say a commendable response, absolutely. Serving your country, serving your monarch.

[14:13] And certainly Jesus came from heaven to earth out of love for His Father and obedience to His Father, doing His Father's will. But remember this. Jesus came not just for the sake of one nation, but Jesus came out of love for all peoples from every tribe and language group and nation.

Jesus came so that all peoples might know salvation in Him alone. So, Jesus came. He came willingly. He came as a result through His great love for sinners from every nation. Jew, non-Jew, Gentile. He came to bring peace. He came to bring reconciliation. He came to bring peace between God and man. And He did that through His death. We have to say, what a Savior. That Jesus should come voluntarily. He came willingly.

He came into this war zone, not out of some kind of self-centered sense of adventure. He didn't come through any form of pressure. He didn't come as some kind of escape route. And He didn't come for one nation only. He came to give Himself. He came to lay down His life for your sake. It's that sacrifice, of course, we remember each and every Lord's Day. And it's that sacrifice that we give thanks for, even today. But then, thirdly and finally, when we think of Jesus and His giving of Himself, we see what we might call the friend's love. The friend's love of Jesus. Greater love has no one than this that someone laid down his life for his friends. During the First World War, many, many battalions anyway, many battalions were composed of friends. It's what were called pals battalions. These were men, young men, who enlisted together, and they were promised that they could fight alongside their friends rather than, you know, be split up into different battalions, even different regiments.

The Royal Scotch Regiment, for example, they had a First Edinburgh, a pals battalion, a Second Edinburgh. It was a bond of friendship. It was friendship that took young men from, mainly from the towns and the cities, to go to the battlefield together. Brothers in arms, we would say. They were friends who joined up in large numbers and friends who died in large numbers. They were friends. They were, we might say, equals. Friends who were brought up together in one location and died together in one location.

[17:03] When we think of Jesus, when we think of those for whom He came to give His life for, He came to give His life for friends. And isn't that the most wonderful, marvelous, truth, astonishing truth? This is the Lord Jesus. This is the sinless Son of God, that He should call those for whom He gave His life friends. He didn't come as, you know, one out of many to engage in war, that decisive battle against sin and Satan and death. He came as the only beloved Son of God. He came as the one whose name is higher than any other name.

And, well, if we marveled, and we must marvel at that great love that sent Jesus, that kept Jesus, that upheld Jesus, and Jesus' mission of salvation. If you've rejoiced knowing that Jesus came willingly, even to suffer death on the cross, we'd really have to gasp in astonishment that when Jesus says here, what He says is true, that He lays down His life for His friends. As we say, this is the sinless Son of God. This is the eternal Son of God. This is the one who knew no sin, but came voluntarily, came in love to give Himself for sinners. And that He should call those whom He gave His life friends.

This is amazing love. This is amazing grace that truly did save a wretch, a wretch like me. You think of what a friend is, you know, and again, this sort of magnifies the love of Jesus.

A friend. A friend speaks of closeness. It speaks of a sharing. It speaks of a relationship in love and a mutual love. In the Old Testament, you read of individuals who are particularly called friends of God. Abraham was a friend of God. Or you read of Moses. The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. There's that sense of communion, that bond, that fellowship that a friend that has with God. And so when Jesus is speaking of, well, in the first instance of His disciples, His friends, and you who know Him as a friend, then this is the marvelous truth that Jesus shows His love for you. He sends you. He keeps you. He provides for you as a friend. And that love that He has for you that you have for Him. And you who are His friend, you've got a responsibility. Friends have a responsibility to care for one another, to show that mutual love one to another. And you've got a responsibility to tell others of the friend of sinners. I'm a sinner. We're all sinners. But Jesus came in love for you, and He calls you His friend. He laid down His life for you, His friend. And He counts you as a friend. And again, the marvelous truth is this, that at one time, I was an enemy of Jesus. You were an enemy of Jesus. But He came, and He called you, and He saved you, and He calls you His friend. And this is the great love of God. This is the great grace of God in Jesus, that His enemies. That His enemies can be His friends. It's only through His love. It's only through His grace, of course. It's only through His initiative. You know, even on a human level, we've seen it happen, don't we, when former enemies become friends. Human relationships can be so scarred, particularly in wartime. But even in that one wartime, even when enemies are in wartime, there could be friendships, even as a result. And I may have mentioned this before, but I was going to say it, but tell it again. There are, of course, many examples of former enemies who became friends, and particularly friends, through the common bond of love in the Lord Jesus. [21 : 20] Jesus. The pilot who led the first attack, the first aerial attack at Pearl Harbor on December 1941 was a man called Mitsua Fuhida. That was 1941, December 1941. Anyway, some years later, in 1948, he'd been given a tract, a gospel tract, by a former U.S. prisoner of war, a man called Jacob de Chaser.

Jacob de Chaser was a Christian, and he'd forgiven those who had inflicted the most horrendous cruelties on himself and others in this time as a prisoner of war. And God worked through that tract, that gospel message, that message that spoke of Christ's forgiveness for our sins, and Fuhida, Mitsua Fuhida, was converted. And anyway, some years later, Jacob de Chaser was in Japan, and Fuhida met him, and he met him as a brother in Christ. And listen to the words that were said of that meeting.

Together, they were the embodiment of how real faith in Christ changes lives and makes former enemies into the best of friends. And of course, it is marvelous, wonderful. It's a testimony to the grace of God in the Lord Jesus. And of course, particularly when, you know, so much horrendous things happened in war. And we give thanks for that forming of friendship in Christ. But how much more the turning from an enemy to a friend of the Lord Jesus, that Jesus has made it possible by his death on the cross? For you, for whom he gave his life, he laid down his life for.

And it's that grace that turns an enemy of Jesus into a friend of Jesus. And so this day, as we come to the close of the service, this day we truly do remember, we give thanks, we pay tribute to those who gave their lives in battle, many of whom gave their lives in sacrifice for friends. These sacrifices that are won for us, the freedoms that we, the many freedoms we still enjoy in this land. But remember above all, the one who sacrificed for his friends has given you that freedom in him, that freedom from the penalty of sin, that freedom from the power of sin. And it's a freedom that you enjoy because of the friend of sinners. And I pray that you'll know each one know Jesus as your friend, and that you'll know that freedom in him, and that God will bless you all here this morning, and you who are watching from home. Amen. Let us pray.

Our Lord, our God, our loving Heavenly Father, you who sent your Son in love, and you, Lord Jesus, who came in love, and gave yourself in love when you laid down your life for your friends, we give you thanks. And on this day of remembrance, when again we remember those who gave their lives, we truly know that you are the one to whom all glory is due. And we thank you then for your preserving us, even as a nation, even through these decades. And we pray your continued preservation office, and that we might return to you, and love you, and serve you with all our hearts. [24 : 55] So hear us, Lord, as we continue in this service. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.