

No Greater Love

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Date: 03 November 2013

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[0 : 00] We can turn back together to the Gospel of John, but we're going to read in chapter 15. John chapter 15, and at verse 9.

We read in John chapter 19 the account of the crucifixion. There we see all that was involved in it. But now I want us this morning just to focus on the words of chapter 15 and verse 9.

We can just read a few verses together here from verse 9 to verse 14. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.

[1 : 12] You are my friends if you do what I command. And especially these words in verse 13. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.

The theme of our services over this weekend is the theme of love. And it's quite obvious from the passage that we read, the verses we read there, that love is what shines through in this passage.

How do you show love to someone? There are many ways we might show love to other people around us. We might show it in the words that we say to them.

The words, I love you, are very powerful. They are very powerful words, and even life-changing words in our experiences. But they are words.

There are also other ways we can show love. We can give gifts to people. Many times in the year, whether it's an anniversary or a birthday or Christmas, we give gifts to people to show that we care for them.

[2 : 22] But again, it's not really a lasting love. It's maybe just for a moment, for a time. But perhaps the greatest act of love that anyone can show to any other is to be willing to lay down their life for someone.

It's the ultimate price, the ultimate cost, to see someone else's life as more precious than your own, and to be willing to lay down your life for that person.

As we come this morning to the Lord's Supper to partake in the remembrance of the greatest love shown towards us, we see in these words what the Lord Jesus did for his people.

He says here, Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. And it wasn't just words.

He didn't just say it. He went on to perform that very act. When he went to the cross at Calvary, he showed that he wasn't just saying these things, but that he really meant it.

[3 : 35] And that he was willing to go to the cross, to lay down his life for those who would be his friends. We may be willing to lay down a life for those we love.

But when you look at what the Lord Jesus Christ did here, he laid down his life for those who were still so far away from him. Maybe those who were looking on at the time of the crucifixion, maybe they did so, hating him, cursing him.

But perhaps what they saw there ultimately changed their views of who he was. Certainly the Roman centurion who looked on, he changed his view.

He said, Truly this was the Son of God. It made an impression on those who saw it. And it continues to make an impression on everybody who reads about it and sees in the word what price the Lord paid so that we might have life.

He laid down his life so that we might have life. And it's amazing to think the kind of situation we've been in, in our own lives, we've had no thought towards the price that has been paid.

[4 : 53] When we were still sinners, the book of Romans tells us in chapter 5, verse 8, God demonstrates his own love for us in this.

While we were still sinners, Christ died. For us. He paid the price before we even had any thought towards him.

While we were still sinners, Christ died. For us. And as we come back from the cross to these chapters before the account of the crucifixion in the Gospel of John, when you look at chapters 13 through to 16, you find there the Lord Jesus with his disciples in the upper room.

What is commonly called the farewell discourse. Here the Lord Jesus is speaking to his disciples. And already, the one who was going to betray him has left the scene.

He has gone to do his work. He has gone to betray the Lord Jesus. But the other disciples are still with him. And they are aware of what lies ahead, but maybe not fully.

[6 : 03] They are sad because of the impending departure of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their hearts are filled with sorrow. They know he is going to leave them.

But in these chapters, we see the Lord Jesus speaking to them in a wonderful, caring way. He reminds them not to be despondent, not to lose heart, but to remember that what he is doing here, what he is doing here through his love for his people, is for a lasting memorial to all his people.

He is here, almost if you like, giving a rally call to them. A call that maybe they wouldn't remember until after the event when they would look back and remember these words and see that Jesus was speaking to them to give them hope.

As he says here, these words are so that they may have joy and that their joy may be full, but it seems so far away at the time. We are gathered here to remember the Lord's death.

We are also gathered in this week in remembrance of other events that have happened in the history of our world. This week, there will be remembrance services taking place for those who lost their lives in the world wars in the past.

[7 : 28] And there are many rallying calls, rallying speeches that took place during these world wars. And Winston Churchill was perhaps famous for some of his speeches that he gave to those who were going on into battle.

In his own tone, as I'm sure you've heard, the voice of Winston Churchill came across the radio to encourage the people in the midst of a time of war.

One of his speeches at the beginning of the war said, Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty and so bade ourselves that if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say this was their finest hour.

That was words to encourage the people, to make them recognize the seriousness of what they were in, but to challenge them to stand up to their duties.

And another one that stands out is one that he spoke after the Battle of Britain. And he said this, Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few.

[8 : 43] And of course you can apply that to what we see here before us today when we recognize the battle that the Lord Jesus was involved in here.

The battle that has come in this world because of sin. the warfare that goes on in your hearts and in mine. And we can say never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to one man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Because he is the one who said, Greater love has no man than this that he might lay down his life for his friends. when we consider this sacrifice of love today.

As we see Jesus here giving his rallying speech to the disciples. Reminding us even to this very day the very purpose for which he came.

To lay down his life for his friends. And he says that we are his friends if you do as he commands. It was indeed a sacrifice of love.

[9 : 52] I want us to see a few things about this love. First of all we see love's foundation. Yesterday we looked at God's covenant love towards his people from the book of Deuteronomy.

There we saw that God's love is central to the covenant he has with his people. It's a love unchanging. And that truly we can say today that if we love the Lord it is only because he first loved us.

And again as we come here into chapter 15 we are given a reminder of the love of God. In verse 9 we have these words As the Father has loved me so have I loved you.

As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. The Father's love is again central to all that is taking place here.

We see that that is the very foundation of this love. And when you look in the Gospel of John you find it is a book that is full of the love of God towards his people.

[11 : 03] Probably the most famous version of Scripture John 3 16 reminds us of that. God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

It is the foundation for love. It is the Father's love. God so loved the world that he gave his only son.

And that is the love that the son knows here. As the Father has loved me so have I loved you. and that is the foundation that we see in this Gospel.

Even at the beginning of chapter 13, the very beginning of this gathering of Jesus with his disciples. In verse 1 there it says, Now before the feast of the Passover when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Even as he began his speech to them, it was a speech filled with love. He showed them his love. Having loved them, he loved them to the end.

[12 : 23] He continues to love his people. And what we see here is God's love shown to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Its foundation is in the Father. As the Father has loved me, it says. There is an element of the past there. He has loved me.

It is not something new for the Son, but the Son has been loved by the Father from all eternity, from the very beginning of time. The Father has loved the Son.

It is a perfect love. And then the Son goes on to say, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

He has already loved the disciples. Even before he goes to the cross, he knows what is ahead of him. And the love that he shows for his disciples is a perfect love, a completed love.

[13 : 27] With the cross in view, he sees what is before him and knows that his love is going to be evident to all who see it and continue to be seen to this very day.

I have loved you, he said to the disciples. And what is he saying to us here today as we come together to remember the Lord's death?

The foundation is in love. Jesus says, I have loved you. I have laid down my life for you and you are to do this in remembrance of me.

Where do we look for love in this world? There are many places we try to look for love, but the foundation of love is only found in God.

Verse John 3 16 says, By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us. There is love.

[14 : 34] And yet there are many places we try and find through love and joy in this world, but the only place that it can be found in its perfect form is in Christ. What we look for in the world is a joy that we believe will change our whole being.

But do we find it? When we look in the world for joy and happiness, do we truly find that joy? we can never find it, because it's only for a moment.

But here we see a love that lasts to eternity. We are all familiar with the pain and sorrow in this world. There are times when we can struggle to cope.

It is true for every one of us. But surely if you're not trusting in Christ, it is far harder to cope. Because the Christian alone has that certainty that even in the midst of trouble and grief, the love of God is with us.

God's love is with us. The disciples here are reminded of that foundation of love. Although they are sorrowful, although they are sad here, he says to them in verse 11, These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

[16 : 04] At times it may seem difficult for us to be full of the joys. There are times when we are quite naturally sad, when we are sorrowful.

But for the Christian, we have this assurance of the foundation of love. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

It is a perfect love. The second thing I want us to see here this morning is love's example. Love's example.

It can be easy to say the words, I love you. It is something that can trip off our tongues quite easily. But it is another thing for our love to be genuine.

Because love takes more than words. In this world we maybe have very many different relationships with people. And the same was true in the days of Jesus.

[17 : 07] Even Pilate there, when he was accused of going against the people, they argued against him that if you do not crucify him, you will not be a friend of Caesar.

Caesar. And that filled him with fear. Because to be a friend with Caesar was so important. And there were very many different levels of friendship.

There were these political friendships, where you were classed as a friend of the king or of Caesar, and that was important for your own life in those days.

If you were seen as going against Caesar, against the king, your very life was in danger. the very reason why the people were accusing Jesus, because he was saying he was God.

There was that level of friendship, with jihad, between the authorities and the people. There was also the friendship between a benefactor and a client.

[18 : 08] Those who were wealthy would help those who were less well-off. We could say it's a bit like being a friend of a bank manager today. You have to stay on good terms with him in order to get finances from him.

And that is common in these days as well, the days of Jesus. There were those who would be wealthy, would be helping the poor, and for that to continue, you had to keep that friendship.

But neither of these friendships had any depth. Neither of these had any real love. They could be broken in the blink of an eye. But there was a real friendship in those days.

And there was a friendship of a mutual relationship. Where if you were truly friends, you would do anything for that person. Even to the extent that you would lay down your life for your friend.

Now Jesus had every right to show his friendship towards him as the king of kings. he had every right to say that he was richer than anyone else in this world.

[19 : 18] But that is not the level of friendship that he showed to his people. His example of love was to come down to the very level of human being, to come down to our level.

Though he was rich for our sakes, he became poor, and he showed his true friendship. friendship. And in these words we are reminded of what that friendship means.

Greater love at no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. And it wasn't just words. He went on to demonstrate that.

In going to the cross, he laid down his life. He said, it is finished. The battle is over. The war is won.

Because he laid down his life for his friends. In this week of remembrance of past battles in the world, there are many stories that I'm sure you know of where people have laid down their lives for their friends.

[20 : 27] The cost of war is the ultimate sacrifice, where many people lose their lives. And it's sad that it still goes on to this day. I'm sure you're all familiar with many stories of those who have paid the price, those who have given their lives for their people, for their loved ones.

There are many such stories. There's one I'm familiar with from the Second World War. It's a story about a ship called the Jarvis Bay.

It was the year 1940, and it was just into November time. And this ship, the Jarvis Bay, had left Halifax, Nova Scotia.

And it was escorting a convoy across the Atlantic. And it was a dangerous time to be crossing the Atlantic. The German battleships were out there looking for them.

The submarines were there. And on this day in the war in 1940, a battleship, a German battleship, came into sight of the convoy. And they knew that they were far slower than the battleship, and that the battleship was going to gain upon them, and that it was going to be an open day for the battleship.

[21 : 45] It could just pick its target, take them out one by one. There were more than 40 ships in the convoy. But the captain of the Jarvis Bay made a decision that day.

He commanded the ship to turn 180 degrees and turn back to towards the German battleship, knowing that it had no match to the guns of the battleship, but knowing that if it went towards it, it gave the other ships a chance to get away.

It was on the 5th of November, 1940, just in the late afternoon when it was starting to get dark, that the Jarvis Bay went up against a battleship that it stood no hope against.

And 187 men perished on that ship as it sank that day. But the price that they paid enabled the other ships to get away, and the majority of them got away safely.

But it was a price that had to be paid. 187 men perished so that others would be saved. And there are many such heroic accounts.

[22 : 58] things. And they remind us that humans are able to do these things. It reminds us within us that there is a goodness within many people.

But ultimately it reminds us that Jesus himself has paid the ultimate sacrifice. Because Jesus himself gives us that example here, that example of greater love.

As no one is that he would lay down his life for his friends. Notice how it says that he lays down his life. And again it's repeated in the chapter that we read in John 19.

No one else has authority over his life. All authority has been given to him. And he lays down his life. He went through that experience.

He went through the darkest hour on the cross. The forsakenness. That feeling of being forsaken by his father. He went through all that because he loved his people.

[24 : 07] Greater love of no one is that he lay down his life for his friends. And what did he say on the cross? In John 19 verse 30 we read these words.

When Jesus had received the sour wine he said it is finished. And he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. He said it is finished.

What was finished? What had he achieved? He had paid the ultimate price so we might have life eternal. As we sang in one of the Psalms, to redeem our life is costly, none sufficient.

Price can pay. and yet the Lord Jesus was able to pay that price. The price of our sins was paid so that only Jesus could say, it is finished.

And he said that so that our joy might be full. What a joy it is, what a privilege it is to come to the Lord's table to do this in remembrance of him.

[25 : 20] And we can maybe struggle in this world with sin, the fight with temptation on a daily basis. That is the reality of this fallen world, but for those who hope in the Lord, we can see the finish.

We can see the finish, the finished work of Christ. Because love's example is shown to us in that he gave his life for his friends.

I remember a number of years ago, this was a church that I first came to to a communion after I'd been converted. I was sitting in the middle pews there on a Friday night of communions, and as I stood up at the end, there was a man standing behind me who shook my hand.

I'd never met him in my life before, but I could see the joy in his eyes because he'd heard of my own conversion. And he went on to say in a fellowship that night, it is a fight to the finish, but at least there's a finish to the fight.

And that is what we see when we look to the Lord Jesus Christ. He has said it is finished. And if we are looking to him, we can know that joy of salvation, to know that he has paid the price for our sins.

[26 : 43] But as Jesus says these words, he leaves the disciples too with a command. That is the last thing I just want to consider briefly before we come to the Lord's table.

That is love's command. Greater love has no one in us that someone lay down his life for his friends. And then he goes on to say, you are my friends if you do what I command.

if you do what I command. What is the command that Jesus gave his disciples here? Well, here in chapter 15 he tells them that the command that he is giving to them is that they love one another.

That they love one another. And it is so important for us to recognize that command and all that it entails, that we are to love one another.

because in this command to love one another is the greatest command that Jesus had already given them. You are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength.

[27 : 58] You are to love the Lord your God. As we approach the Lord's table and we have this command, we have a command given by the Lord Jesus Christ to do this in remembrance of him.

It is not about doing it for our own status. It is not about doing it to please someone else. It is about doing it in recognizing what he has done for us.

What he has done for us. He laid down his life so that we might be called his friends. And we are his friends if we do as he commands.

One of the greatest pictures in the Second World War was on the 8th of May 1945 when Winston Churchill announced the end of the war in Europe and a ceasefire had come.

It was a day of celebration. It was a day waited and longed for and probably at many times had never seemed a realistic prospect. in the midst of that rejoicing there would have been great sadness as well.

[29 : 14] A great sadness about those who had lost their lives. But we have a very different picture when it comes to the day of the Lord. The day when he returns when ultimately it will all be finished.

It will be a day of rejoicing and a full rejoicing. In Isaiah 51 verse 11 we have these words The ransom of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing.

Everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. The ransom of the Lord shall return.

It is a picture very different to a ceasefire in a war when there is sorrow over those who are lost. because when that day comes, when the ransom of the Lord return, it will be a day of joy, everlasting joy, of singing of gladness and the sorrow and sighing will flee away.

How often sin makes us feel that we are far away from that freedom. But the love of God in Christ Jesus reminds us that there is a day coming when the ransom of the Lord will return.

[30 : 37] A day of joy, a day of gladness, a day when we will know the peace of God. Do you love the Lord today?

Do you recognize what he has done for you? Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

He has done it. He has loved us with a greater love than anyone could ever show. He has given his life. And today, as we come to the Lord's table, if we are his friends, we will do as he commands, and do this in remembrance of him.

Amen. And may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. we come now to approach the Lord's table in what is commonly called the fencing of the table.

In the book of 1 Corinthians, where we will read shortly the warrant for coming to the Lord's table, we also have these words in verse 28 and 29.

[31 : 57] 1 Corinthians chapter 11. A man ought to examine himself before he eats the bread and drinks the cup. But anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

We have to ask the question, this morning, who should come to the Lord's table? Who is the Lord's table for? And considering that, I think one of the best answers we find is in the shorter catechism.

A book well worth reading and knowing, with great teachings about all that it means to be a Christian. And in question number 97, we have this question, what is required of the worthy receiving of the Lord's supper?

It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon them, of their repentance, love, and new obedience, lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.

There are five things, five qualifications that we have there in that shorter catechism answer. Five things that we should ask ourselves about before we come to the Lord's table.

- [33 : 24] The first one is knowledge, knowledge to discern the Lord's body. That is to understand what is represented here, that Christ's body was broken, and that his blood was shed, that he showed his love towards us, in that he laid down his life for his friends, life.

That we might recognize and know that. We are also told that we need faith. Faith that we believe that Christ did this for our eternal benefit.

That he is the only one who is able to redeem our lives, to pay the price of our sin. We need to believe that he is the way to eternal life.

we need repentance. We need to truly repent from all of our sins, even the sins of this day.

We have to have that heart that fears God and truly repents of all of our sins, and to recognize that by so doing, he alone is the one who is able to forgive our sins.

- [34 : 41] We also have the qualification of love, that we love the Lord, and that we show love for others, that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

We are to show the love of Christ in our lives, and we are to show that we love him, and that we will do this in remembrance of him.

The final thing is, that there is a qualification of duty, of obedience, as it says in the shorter catechism.

We are to be obedient in doing this, that we see what Christ has done for us, in paying the ultimate price in giving his life, and in saying, do this in remembrance of me, that we would not forget what the Lord has done for us.

So let us approach the Lord's table with these things in mind, but ultimately, looking to the Lord Jesus for his blessing and his strength.

- [35 : 56] We can turn together now to find our warrant for the Lord's Supper in the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 11. We can read at verse 23.

2 Corinthians 1. For I receive from the Lord what I also deliver to you. For the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, which is for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he also took the cup, after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. On the night that he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he passed it round, and likewise we will now give thanks.

our Father in heaven, as we continue in your presence, we are thankful, O Lord, for what we have before us here this day.

[37 : 14] We are thankful, O Lord, for the privilege to be your people, that you have called us from darkness to light, that you have pardoned all our sins, and that we can know that because you have loved us with the greatest love of all, that you gave your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As we have considered this morning, the Lord Jesus himself showed that love, and that he laid down his life for his friends. And as we come to remember all that has been done for us, as we see before us here the elements, the wine which represents the blood, the bread which represents the body, which was broken for us, we may you give us, O Lord, that joy in our hearts, that we will be able to know your joy, and to know it to the full, that these elements, O Lord, as we partake of them, may be for our nourishment and our spiritual strengthening and our growth in grace.

May it, O Lord, encourage us all to go on in the strength of the Lord. So, Lord, receive our thanks, for we ask it all in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen. On the night in which he was betrayed, when he took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you.

In the same way also he took the cup after supper, saying, this is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

[39 : 04] For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. As we come away from the Lord's table, I want to share with you a wee story.

It may seem a strange story at first, but it does have a relevance to us. It's from the town of Monterey, California, on the west coast of the United States.

And it was a great fishing town. It had many fishing boats coming in and out. And because it was a big fishing industry, there were many birds there. One particular bird that would flourish there was a pelican bird, quite a large bird.

And these birds would feed on the leftovers of the fishermen. As the fishermen were gutting the fish, they were throwing the remains over the side, and the birds would pick up the remains and eat them.

The birds had become quite fast and lazy and very contented. But over time, people realized that the leftovers from the fish could be used in other industries.

[40 : 13] So instead of throwing the remains over the side of the fishing boats, they were all kept and taken away to other plants that were used for different purposes. What happened to the pelican?

Well, the local pelicans, they'd forgotten how to fish. They'd forgotten what was the most natural thing to them, to catch fish. Because they had it easy, because the food was put on a plate for them, they had forgotten their basic instinct.

To solve the problem, what did they do? What happened was, they imported other pelicans in from the south, those who were used to fishing.

And they were put among the colonies of the local birds, and these ones who had come in started to fish, to catch fish for themselves. And the pelicans who had grown fat and lazy, who over time had become so hungry they were starving and dying, saw these other birds catching fish and feeding themselves.

And they learned from that example, and they began themselves to catch fish for themselves again. But it took others coming into their midst to remind them what was their most basic instinct.

[41 : 35] What's the moral of that story for ourselves today? Well, it's there's two sides to it. Today we see that there are people sitting at the Lord's table, we also see that there are people behind the Lord's table, just like there were two different kind of pelicans.

And there was one pelican who had forgotten their most basic instinct. And what is our basic instinct? What does the shorter cadence tell us?

Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. But we lose that basic instinct when we focus on other things in this world.

Things that make us fat and lazy. Things that make us forget about God. And we come to the point where just like the pelican who had forgot to fish, we find ourselves ultimately wasting away and coming to the point of death and starvation.

what is so basic to us we have forgotten. And if you are in that category today, if you are looking on, you see the example before you of those who have gone to the Lord's table.

[42 : 53] It's a reminder to us of what should be the most basic thing for us. That we are made in the image of God and that our very purpose is to worship him and to glorify him.

So may you who have sat behind the table look on and remember that the Lord Jesus laid down his life for his friends and that you can be his friends if you do as he commands.

There's also a lesson there for those who sit at the Lord's table. Other birds were taken in to be an example to those who have forgotten their basic things.

And we as a people of God must be examples to others around us. We have to go out into the world and show that though we are in the world we are not of the world and to be an example to others of the love of God through Christ Jesus because by your example you can teach others the way to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. In 1 Peter chapter 2 we are given a great reminder of that. In verse 12 we have these words, Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of the visitation.

[44 : 27] May people see your good deeds and come to glorify God. And it goes on in that chapter to say that we have been called for that very purpose.

For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

We have that example before us today. The Lord Jesus gave us that example of love and that he was willing to lay down his life for his friends.

You are his friends if you do as he commands. Part of that command as well as coming to the Lord's table is leaving the Lord's table today and going out to be the salt and light of the earth.

To be an example to others. So may people see of your good deeds and glorify God. Not just in the day of the visitation but today and in days to come.

[45 : 33] So may God bless to us all that we have been part of here in this day. is important.

And to the program's exceptional and to