

Tracing The River To Its Source

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[0 : 00] This passage that you have in front of you, and there's a defect in it. I don't know whether you've picked it out or not, but it's there.

So I hope that when we come to that, you'll see. Have you figured out what it is yet, Jerry? Yeah. Good for you. We're in John chapter 15.

This is Jesus talking to his disciples immediately before the account of the crucifixion. And he's trying to get them to understand who they are.

And it is the kind of ultimate existential question that Jesus, I think, is addressing.

And I don't know how you experience it. I don't know whether you experience it or not. But there seems to me to be a profound kind of loneliness at the heart of almost every individual, which nobody can break into, nobody can get through to.

[1 : 26] And, of course, modern psychiatry and modern psychology and modern counseling techniques all try and probe and see what they can do to bring something into that area of your life or to be able to speak to it or address it, to deal with the guilt or shame that must be there.

It's just that human beings are profoundly difficult people because nobody, I mean, they say nobody knows me, nobody understands me.

But then the assumption is that they know and understand themselves. And, of course, they don't. And so they don't even know what nobody knows about them or understands them. I find it an enormous help when you come to a passage like that in Titus where Paul says, We ourselves were foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

Now, I take that to be a rather acute description of the general human condition. Do you want to hear it again? We ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

Now, that's why people can't get along because that is, humanly speaking, that's the kind of basic reality of our human experience.

[3 : 23] That's where we are. Foolish, because we know better, but we don't do it. Disobedient, we know what the rules are, but we don't obey them.

And we hate other people and we accumulate the hate of other people.

We bear malice to other people. And that works on the kind of graded scale that those who are below you and are trying to take over from you, you have malice towards.

Those who are below and are looking up, they have envy. And, you see, that's why this great moment in North American history, it looks as though the World Series is canceled.

And it doesn't have a lot to do with baseball, I don't think. It has to do with the fact that we ourselves are sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another, and we can't come to any agreement.

[4 : 45] And so that you get this kind of strange alien reality, which is at the basis of our lives, and we have to try and figure it out.

Our behavior is a surprise to others, and it's a surprise to ourselves. And how can we sort it out? And I think Jesus begins on this problem in dealing with his disciples because he wants his disciples to know who they are, and then he wants them to demonstrate to others what they are meant to be.

So he writes, or he speaks to them as they gather on the eve of his crucifixion and says, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now, see, what he's saying is that the great, enormous, huge reality of life is the Father's love for me.

[5 : 50] That is, you know, if you look at a country like Canada and say, what are the resources on which we can call? The fish, the lumber, the minerals, all these, we can use these resources to make a country.

And I suppose most of you are in some way involved in the development of resources like that and using those resources to build a country, to build a nation, to build an economy.

We have all those kinds of things, and that we're totally dependent upon them. I mean, if they weren't there, we could do nothing. So Jesus is saying, but there is another kind of primary resource upon which the whole of human life is built.

And that primary resource is the love of God for the Son. That, he says, is what is at the heart of the whole operation. Now, human philosophers and human artists and poets and all sorts of people can wallow in despair about the meaninglessness of the human situation.

And they can, you know, they can say that we've come from nothing and we return to nothing. Our life is filled with meaninglessness. Love doesn't pay off because love does not serve self, and self is all that there is.

[7 : 26] It's against the backdrop of despair. And so you see, it's against that background which is so familiar to us in our materialistic and existential kind of world in which we are deconstructing all the values and all the things that we've lived on in the past.

And we're trying to do something. We're trying to do something. And the despair is there. And then he says, as the Father has loved me.

So he's saying that that's it, you see. I was in Prince Albert over the weekend for the young fellow who used to be a student at Regent College became the dean of the cathedral in Prince Albert.

Prince Albert. Prince Albert is the cathedral city of the Diocese of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Diocese is the northern half of the province of Saskatchewan.

The Diocese of Saskatchewan is 63% Cree Indians. The Diocese of Saskatchewan. The Diocese of Saskatchewan.

[8 : 44] I mean, I don't know why this happens, but the Diocese of Saskatchewan is what in the Anglican Church we would call a relatively conservative diocese.

The reason that it's a relatively conservative diocese is because the Indians still believe the Christian faith. And they, you know, you can talk to them about, you know, aboriginal spirituality, and they say it's bad medicine.

You know, it's, they don't, and they hate being identified with it. They don't want to have anything, whatever. I mean, they think it's positively satanic.

They don't. But, of course, that doesn't fit the media concept. So when we have the British Commonwealth Games, it's full of smoke and sweet grass and dancing and all sorts of things, which I think somebody told me yesterday that well over 80% of the Indians in Canada regard themselves as Christians.

Now, to what extent they mean that and what they mean by it, we don't know. But, you see, the sort of popular image is so fouled up on this kind of thing. Well, I tell you this because, you see, what they, what's got through to them is not Western culture, but the reality as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

[10 : 30] They've found something in terms of what life means and what it's all about. Something that we in our culture, in our society, are very anxious to lose because it's done so much damage to us.

As we think. So that's what Jesus is saying to his disciples. It's, uh, the other thing about Prince Albert is that it is, uh, intersected by the South, by the South Saskatchewan River, I think.

The South Saskatchewan River, uh, starts somewhere down around Rocky Mountain House in Alberta. It travels through, north through Edmonton.

It goes across east through Prince Albert. It joins the other Saskatchewan River there, and then they both flow into the Hudson's Bay. You know.

Now, the interesting thing about it is that most of the people who live on that river don't know where it comes from. And most of them don't know where it's going to, you know. They only know it in terms of the fact that it's the river in their community.

[11 : 39] Very few of them can tell you where it comes from. Or at least that's, uh, something I, I don't know whether you could prove that or not statistically, but it seems like most of them don't know where it comes from. So I'm glad to tell them.

But it's, it's, it's exactly the same picture here, you see. When you talk about as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. All those communities are built around and live on and are dependent upon the river.

Because it's a big river. But they don't know where it comes from or where it's going. And you see, the same thing is true of us. Is that we are, our whole life is built on the love of God the Father for the Son and the effective demonstration of the love of the Son for us.

That's the source of our life. Now we can live in, without any concern or care for that source, but sometime we have to come to grips with it.

And that's what Jesus is trying to help his disciples to do. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love, you know.

[12:51] And live by the river where you are constantly finding cleansing and refreshment and food and all the things that the river can supply to your daily life, so you are to live in that kind of relationship to God.

In touch with the source. Remain in my love. And you see, love is the infinitely renewable resource. Unlike oil or lumber or fish or minerals or any of those things, love is infinitely renewable.

And so he says, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. And the reason I'm telling you this is because I don't, I mean, I think what really is important is that you read this passage yourself and you figure out what it's saying and you work out in your life what it means. That Jesus would say to his disciples, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain or abide in my love.

Then he goes on to say, if you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed the Father and remain in his love.

[14:24] Now, you see, the thing about this, I think, this is where I think all religion gets really hung up badly. I think Jesus made a great mistake in saying this.

Not because it wasn't right, but because we've misunderstood it so consistently. When it says, if you obey my commands. Because the whole caricature of the Christian faith is you do this and you don't do this.

Everybody on the street, if you tell them you're a Christian, they will immediately interpret that to mean, that means you do this and you don't do that. Whether it's drinking or dancing or gambling or whatever it is, you do this and you don't do that.

That's what it is to keep the commandment. Now, that doesn't have anything to do with what Jesus means when he talks to his disciples about that. When he does that, he's saying to them, my command to you is that you love one another.

You know, it's that circle which you can't escape from. That if you love me, you will keep my commandments. To keep my commandments is to love me.

[15:33] And it keeps going around like that. And Jesus said, the work of God is to believe in the one whom he has sent.

That's what it is to obey God, to do his work, is to believe in the one whom he has sent. You see, the God who loved the world and sent Jesus Christ to live in obedience to that love, that's the one in whom you are to believe and to put your faith and to put your trust.

And that was the thing that I was talking to you about last week. You see, in our existential despair, when we probe deeply into the world in which we live, the only person we find there is ourselves. You know, our own wounded child, our own misunderstood adult, our own neglected wife. You know, our husband or brother.

We keep finding ourselves. And that's no good. The thing we have to find in the encounter is the one, as it says in John, to believe in the one whom God has sent.

[16:55] So that our fundamental, primary relationship in life is to be with the one who exhibits to us in the most practical possible way the reality of the love of God.

And the reality of the love of God becomes available to us in the person of Jesus Christ. And in that relationship, we find out who we are.

That's the thing that is at the center and core of our lives. Again, he says about it, a new commandment I give to you that you love one another.

You see that the whole, the whole emphasis is that what there is, is not by deeply penetrating into who you are, but it is the one whom he has sent.

It is one another. And that you find yourself in relationship to one another. You know, when you talk about, you know, the breakdown of the baseball contract, we see, when you have people, and I'm not criticizing them because Paul says we're all like this, this is our basic human condition, but when you find people living who are foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and passions, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another, then you can't get anywhere, you know. [18:24] You're dead-ended by the reality of human lust and greed and all the things that are so characteristic of us as human beings. But when, but something has to happen to change that basic reality of our human life.

Something has to break through to that. And what breaks through to that is the love of God as it is revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Well, that's what, that's what Christ says in this passage. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love just as if I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love.

Now, you see the, it's a, it's a, the meaning that Jesus found in His life was to obey the Father's commands.

That's where He found meaning. He didn't find it in self-fulfillment. He found it in deliberate obedience to and submission to the will of the Father.

[19:42] He did what the Father sent Him to do. Now, you see, this, this leaves us with a vast range of possibilities. There can be tragedy or difficulty or disease or sorrow.

The most horrible things that can happen humanly speaking can still come within the purpose of God for us. And we can tolerate them not because they have any external benefit, but quite the opposite.

We can tolerate those circumstances ultimately because the will of the Father is not perverted in that situation. We can still do it.

And you see, that's what happens when you go to the next verse and see what He says. I have told you this, and this is where the error in your passage is, I think in the text that you have in front of you.

I have told you this so that my joy may be complete. That's not what it says. It says that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

[20:51] And then it describes what Jesus' joy was. And His joy is described in Hebrews 12 when it says, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross despising the shame.

That was His joy. So that joy is not, as we popularly tend to think about it, a series of external circumstances in our lives of wealth, prosperity, beauty, wisdom, knowledge, and all those things and recognition and all those things which seem so important to us.

Joy comes from the recognition at the heart of our lives of doing the Father's will. Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross.

And it was that joy which Jesus had in knowing that He was doing the Father's will even in going to the cross that He says, this is the joy I want to share with you in this profoundly difficult life that you're called upon to live.

I want you to have the joy of knowing that you're doing the Father's will. Do you see what He means here? He says, I want this joy to be in you which was in me.

[22:19] And what joy was in Him? The joy of being obedient to His heavenly Father. Now, I don't want to get morbid about this or anything like that, but one of the things that you do when you get retired is you think about dying.

You know, that's sort of the next thing on the agenda. Now, when you live in a culture and in a society where we don't speak about it or, you know, try not to speak about it because it seems the kind of ultimate disaster that's ultimately going to take over.

But that's not the way it works. What you do is recognize that this is all part of the will of the Father and that the whole panorama of human existence here on earth, the three score years and ten and all that is all part of and derives its meaning from being God's will for us.

And as Jesus said, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, which was a very difficult death, as He endured that, He endured it with joy because He knew that it was a fulfillment of the Father's will.

And so, all that lies before you, even if you're elderly and retired, like me, all that lies before you are things which, humanly speaking, aren't going to produce the joy or the contentment or the satisfaction which gathering around you are things, external things that give you some measure of

happiness, the joy is that in everything that happens to you, you can know the Father's will.
[24 : 31] Now, I tell you that because in the course of my life, I have been called hundreds of times to go and see people who are in bed, terminally ill, with the prospect of death not far away.

And most of them, I mean, are quite naturally quite frightened by it and anxious about it. But you see, the strange thing is that in the reading of the Scriptures and in the very simplest stories from the Scriptures, you suddenly find out that nothing can happen which is outside the Father's will. And as long as it's inside, as long as it's within the Father's will, then there is reason to be joyful because you are sharing an experience even in death which is part of the working out of God's will in the same way that Jesus meant it when he said, who for the joy that was set before me endured the cross.

He saw that joy as being the thing which would be the result of the Father's will being worked out in his life.

Now, of course, we always look at one another and see that successful person there or that wealthy person there or that beautiful person there or that intelligent person there and we wish that the circumstances of our lives were such as to compare with the circumstances of their lives and we live in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another and we get churned up by that.

[26 : 12] But you see, the thing that belongs to you and to me in a unique and wonderful way is what Jesus says he wants his disciples to have.

That you may and this air I can't tell you to read because it's not there. it's partly there. That my joy may be in you.

That the joy I found the joy I remember this is on the eve of his crucifixion. He says that my joy may be in you and that your joy may not be an incomplete joy but a complete and full joy.

and that is through your faith in Jesus Christ. And that's what he calls on you and me to do and to be. Well, I've told you that you need to read this for yourself and work it out in the circumstances of your own life.

But it seems when you first read those few verses that we've looked at from 9 to 12 of John 15 that they are innocuous in the extreme. But then as you read them and see what it is that Jesus is saying and who he's saying it to you suddenly realize that the whole heart area of our life is being dealt with there.

[27 : 41] When Jesus says as the Father has loved me so have I loved you remain in my love.

That's the place for you to live. And that's the place of obedience for you and that's the place out of which your joy will come.

And you see that place you know as you see that all in the one whom he has sent.

And you recognize that your work is as John's Gospel tells us your work is to believe in him whom he has sent. To put your trust in him.

And see that passage from Titus we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and passions living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

But then it happened. You know the grace of God broke into our lives. And that's the reality of what God has done for us in Christ. Let me pray.

[28 : 42] Let me pray. our God and Father it seems a staggering possibility that your will in our lives no matter what form it takes can be the source of our joy.

And that that joy can surpass anything that this earth affords. Help us to make it our work our diligent the diligent application of all our capacities to do your will and to believe in the one whom you have sent in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen.