

"No Greater Love" John 15:12-17

Introduction

Yesterday, Ryan Cerbus was married to Laura Zimmovan. Like most Christian weddings, it was a beautiful affair. It was filled with joy and hope and optimism. The wedding party, the bride, and the groom, all were beautiful. Vows and rings were exchanged. Love was pledged. It was all sealed with a kiss.

And now of course, the living of that love begins. Love is wonderful concept that gets tested in the everyday events of life.

Last week we introduced the characteristics of love by considering the union between agape love (that perfect, unconditional love) and phileo love (its emotional counterpart). Today we come to the particulars of Jesus' instructions about love in John 15. The passage that we are going to study today is sandwiched in between the bookends of identical commands in verse 12 and 17 – *that we love one another*.

But Jesus' instructions are given in a very sobering context. He is about to die on the cross – a supreme act of love. And it is exactly to that example that Jesus exhorts us to model our love for one another. There is no greater love than how Jesus loved. So right out of the gate, we are given an overwhelming task. We are incapable of loving as perfectly and completely as He loved us. And yet that is exactly what we are called to do – to love one another just as He loved us.

This morning we are going to look at Christ's love for us and see just how we might begin to imitate that in our love for each other.

[John 15:12-17]

The truth of verse 12 is not isolated to this verse – in other words, this is not the only place we are told to love as He loved us. Back in John 13:34,35 Jesus said, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.* And in Ephesians 5 husbands are commanded to love their wives *just as Christ loves the church and gave Himself up for her.*

We have talked about some of the general ways that Jesus demonstrates His love for the church. But in the passage before us today, the Lord gives us some very specific things to consider as we take up this charge. He tells us three ways that He has loved us:

1. By dying for us.
2. By revealing the Father to us
3. By choosing and sending us to bear fruit.

On the surface we might be puzzled to think how we could even begin to love one another by doing any of these things. Before we give up the idea, let's take a closer look at these supreme acts of love and see if we can't discover how we might love as Christ loved us.

I. He laid down His life for us.

Verse 13 – *Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.* This is an obvious reference to what Jesus has been telling them He is about to do for them. If we are going to

understand anything about love, we need to consider this extraordinary act of Christ love where He died on the cross. And we ought to realize that while occasionally we hear a story of some wonderful act of bravery or sacrifice where one man gives up his life to save another, nothing can compare to the unique love of Christ in His death. What made Christ's death the greatest act of love ever committed?

1. His Recipients. It's important to notice who Jesus died for. Did you notice that in verse 13? Let me ask you this. Who would you be willing to die for? If you put together a list, who would be on it? That's a big question isn't it? Most people never have to literally answer that question.

The amazing thing about Christ's death is who He died for. Verse 13 seems to indicate He died for His friends. But that is only true from the perspective of what His death accomplished. The reality is that He died for us to *make us* His friends, not because we were His friends. Listen to Romans 5:6-10. *For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.* Jesus' death is the supreme act of love, because He died for us when we hated Him; when we were His enemies.

2. His willingness. Jesus came to the earth to die. It was His intention from the beginning of time to die. Jesus didn't have to die. He didn't have

death coursing through His veins like you and I do. He was the way, the truth and the life. But His plan was to die.

Today, when we hear of heroic acts it is rare - virtually unheard of for someone to intentionally die for another. Someone may drown trying to save another. Someone may unexpectedly die giving a kidney to another – but usually even if there is risk, there is the possibility and the hope of survival. But when Christ came, He knew the consequences of His actions ahead of time. He willingly and intentionally died because of His love.

3. His purpose. Jesus' death was so extraordinary because of what it accomplished. Jesus' purpose was not to rescue us from physical death, but to do something far greater. His purpose was to rescue us from spiritual and eternal death. His death was fully substitutionary. He took our judgment. He gave us His life.

So this is the kind of love with which you are to love one another. And it begs the question, how can I ever love like that? How can I give up my life for someone else – and even if I did it literally, how would it minutely compare with what Jesus did for you?

Part of the answer, of course, is that it can't compare. *Greater love has no one than this.* Our love cannot exceed or even equal Christ's love. And while it is unlikely that you will ever be called upon to lay down your physical life in a single act of love for another, you know that you are, in a very real way, called upon to die to yourself and live for Christ and for others. Paul talked about pouring out his life as a drink offering and sacrifice for Christ. He truly *gave his life* to and for Christ.

You are called to no less. While you can't give a person spiritual life, you can offer it to him –

through the gospel. What would you be willing to do to insure that another hears about Jesus Christ? Where would you be willing to go? What would you be willing to endure? How much sacrifice are you willing to make so that the lost might have life and so that your brothers and sisters in Christ might have their needs met? Those are all questions that we need to ask if we are going to love as Christ loved.

God actually tells us how to apply this kind of love. Listen to I John 3:16-18. *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.* So we love people by opening our hearts to them and giving them whatever they need – whether that be the truth of the gospel or some act or deed of service, or some tangible thing.

So the first thing we are to learn about Jesus's love – it was so sacrificial that He laid down His life for us.

II. He Revealed the Father and His Will to Us

Verses 14 & 15 - *You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*

This act of love fits well into the idea of Covenants that we are currently studying in the evening service. We've seen that a covenant is a way of God revealing Himself to us by entering into relationship – or friendship with us. But every covenant has obligations. Your friendship with God is not like any friendship you have here on earth.

God is still God. And while it is a wonderful blessing to be considered the friend of Christ, being His friend is not quite like being His buddy. Can you imagine saying to one of your friends, *listen you can be my friend as long as you do everything I command you to do?* Earthly friendships don't work that way. But God has made us His friend in that He has loved us, made Himself known to us, brought us into His presence where we learn from Him and talk with Him and discover things that know man could ever know apart from His saving love.

But we come with a proper sense of submission and commitment to follow and obey – because He is still God. As we do that we see more and more of Him. We know Him better. We will be taught by Him about life and truth and eternity. What great love it is that He would reveal these things to us.

How can we imitate that kind of love? Again, on one level, we certainly can't. We cannot make people see God. We can't open another's eyes to truth. But we can use the gifts God has given us to help others grow close to Christ. We can teach and encourage and exhort and sometimes rebuke each other. We can live in the community of God's people as friends. Loving one another as Christ loves us in this sense means that we are passionate about helping each other draw near to God. We care about one another's spiritual condition. We want to encourage each other to pursue God's will for our lives. And if we are not humble enough and willing enough to both learn from each other and teach each other, then we shouldn't say that we love each other.

- Jesus loved us by laying down His life
- By revealing the Father and His will

III. By Choosing and Sending Us to Bear Fruit

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. It would be understandable if we chose Christ. After all, He is supremely desirable. Were it not for our fallen nature and darkened minds, we would be utterly attracted to His attributes and we would seek Him and choose Him above all else.

But of course, it is precisely because of our sinful nature that we would never choose Him. It is folly and foolishness for us to think that we are Christians because we choose Christ. And Jesus makes that abundantly clear here. We did not choose Him, but He chose us. And that confirms that depth of his love for us – that He would choose us when we were utterly undesirable.

But He chose us with a purpose. He has given us a calling. In spite of our sin, He calls us back to the garden. Our purpose in life is to bear fruit.

You've all seen rotten fruit. If it's a rotten apple, it's all soggy and brown and mushy. If it's an orange it's usually just all dried and shriveled up. Berries get mold all over them. And bananas, bananas are the worst. They turn black and squishy and out of no where appears these little black flying bugs. But fruit will always turn rotten over time if it's not eaten.

What Jesus promises us here is a life that bears fruit that will never get rotten. It will never turn black and moldy. The fruit of the kingdom is a fruit that lasts for eternity. You can love the way Jesus loved by entering into your life calling. By taking up the vision and the work of the kingdom. By seeing the value and centerpiece of people and redemption

and the church in all that you do. Loving others entails doing what God calls you to do.

And so Jesus says, *this is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. . . This I command you, that you love one another.*

How is your love for one another? In what sense are you dying for each other? Is your love sacrificial? How are revealing the Father to another? Are you using your gifts to build others up in their faith? And what kind of fruit is your life producing? When your days are done and you look back on the work of your life – will it be like a shining apple or shriveled grape?

It's may strike you as odd to think about these things in the context of love – for certainly no one but God would define love like this. But this is what how Christ puts feet to the greatest of all virtues. There is no greater love than this.