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The Christian Life, Part 2: Love

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TEXT: John 15:9-17 (ESV)

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 lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

Dear friends,

I thought we would begin today's message by making a little list together. For the heading of our list will write down "The distinguishing marks of the Christian life." Now let's fill it in. What would you put? Some might say, "Well, we need to write down 'Truth' on that list; correct belief, loyalty to the doctrines of the faith." And that's a good answer. We need truth to stand firm. Someone else might add, "We need 'faith' on that list, after all, we're justified by faith in Christ Jesus. That's the heart of Christian

doctrine.” Some of you listening today may want to write down a religious experience, a special feeling of the Holy Spirit. And that, too, has some truth. For a personal relationship with God through Christ by the Holy Spirit is an essential part of being a true Christian believer. Others might also want to add to that list “service.” After all, we follow one who said, “I came not to be served but to serve.” And He even washed the feet of His disciples as an example for them. So, service definitely is a hallmark of the Christian life. Anything else? All these characteristics we've put on our list so far are very good things to have working in one's life, wouldn't you agree? If we're going to add anything more to the list, I got an idea. Let's see what Jesus says.

Now in our passage for today in John 15, Jesus is talking to His disciples about our relationship with one another as believers. And He gives us a word to put it the top of our list. It's what He considers to be the chief, the all-encompassing, distinguishing mark of a Christian. And that word He gives us is “love.” He uses it eight times for emphasis. He began saying, abide, remain in my love. Now, what does that mean? This is as enter in, make your home in my love, settle into it, trust it, cherish it, revel in it. But a way to abide in in love also is by obedience, Jesus says today. He says, “If you keep my commandments, you abide in my love.” Now, what commandment is He talking about? He goes on to say, “This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you.” That commandment has come up before already in chapter 13, after He washed the feet of His disciples and He said, “If you do this, all people will know that you're my disciples, you love one another.” So now we have it repeated for us, as if He wants to make sure they don't forget.

Now, perhaps you already know that, in the New Testament, it's written in Greek, ancient Greek. And it has four different Greek words for the word “love” in our New Testament. First is *philía*, which is a friendship type of love. And there's *éros*, an attraction type of love. And then there's *storgē*, which is a familial type of love. And then there is *agápe* love, and that's the word Jesus is using here. An *agápe* love is sacrificial, self-giving love. It's a verb, something that you do for the sake of others. It's not simply something that you feel. It's not motivated by emotion or feeling so much, it's something one decides to do out of obedience and loyalty to Jesus, in whose love you already abide. Christian scholar and apologist C.S. Lewis has some helpful insights on *agápe* love. He writes,

It would be quite wrong to think that the way to become loving is to sit trying to manufacture affectionate feelings. Some people are cold by temperament. That

may be misfortune for them, but it's no more a sin than having bad digestion is a sin, and it does not cut them off from the chance or excuse them from the duty of learning love. The rule for us all is perfectly simple: do not waste time bothering with whether you love your neighbor. Act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we learn one of the great secrets: when you are behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love them.

Love is something you do.

Now, what does this love look like? Jesus tells us with this qualifier: “Love one another as I have loved you.” It looks like Jesus’ loving. And He says greater love has no one than this, that someone laid down his life for his friends. And we know Jesus would do just that to save us from our sin and give us eternal life with God, He sacrificed Himself on the cross to save us out of love for us. John, in his first letter, wrote “This is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins.” “God so loved the world,” John says in John 3:16, “that he gave his only son.”

It's Mother's Day to day, and I'm reminded of a story I came across about mother love. Deep in the mountains of northern Japan lies the tiny town of Takamatsu. Heavy snowfalls isolate towns and hamlets in that area for days at a time. During the worst blizzard to hit the area in 13 years, work crews were attempting to clear the roads in and around Takamatsu on a Thursday since the snowfall seemed to be letting up. Mrs. Tamiko Takano, age 37, ventured out on an errand with her daughter. Her husband had left the house earlier to join the road clearing crews. While Tomiko and her seven-year-old daughter Isumi were outside clearing a path to the road, an unusually high pile of snow on their roof suddenly gave way, and mother and daughter were buried beneath nearly 10 feet of snow. When Mr. Takano returned later in the day, he saw his wife and daughter were missing. He launched a search, but they were not found. Now, the next day, a work party clearing snow from around the Takano home heard a soft whimpering from a huge mound of snow out beside the house. Frantically, they dug toward the sound and discovered Mrs. Takano's frozen body curled around Isumi, who was moaning. Because of her motherly love, Tomiko Takano gave her own life to save Isumi's life.

You know, that's very heroic. More likely, this *agápe* love, sacrificial love, will be given in small ways the everyday things, sacrificing personal time and energy and resources for those around us, like parents do for their children and vice versa later on.

Sometimes it's sacrificing our personal agenda for the welfare, the advancement of someone else, or it's giving oneself away. For others, it's forgiving when hurt, sacrificing your right to get even. It's taking time to pray for the welfare of friends and families and even your enemies. That's *agápe* love. Love is also Jesus treating someone as a friend. We love our friends. We value them, we share our heart with them, we tell them the truth. And Jesus said to His disciples, "I call you friends. Everything the Father's told me, I've told you. I'm transparent with you. I've passed on to you my father's truth." Friends do that out of love. Jesus concludes this passage for today with these words, He says, "These things I command you so that you will love one another."

So love is the chief distinguishing mark of an authentic believer in Christ, the mark of the Christian life. So what's going to happen when we, as believers, abide in His love and obey His command to love one another as He loved us? There are some very good things that are going to happen, Jesus says. First of all, we're going to have joy. He says, "These things I've spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." We get His joy. Obedience to His love commands leads to a joy like no one else can have. He said, "You can have the joy that I have. My joy may be in you." He says to have joy in life is a wonderful thing. It's satisfaction and contentment deep within you, knowing that no matter what the circumstances, you have God constantly present, loving you and giving you power to go on. You know that you're His, nothing can snatch you from His hand.

Second, besides joy, you'll be more effective in your mission for Christ. Jesus brings all of this back to their mission and purpose as disciples, He said, "You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit." Go and bear fruit – that's mission talk. Lead others to Jesus. So, it sounds like your love can attract others to Christ. Renowned Christian author Henry Nguyen, in one of his devotional books, comments on this passage. He says,

Jesus' whole life was a witness to His Father's love, and Jesus calls His followers to carry on that witness in His name. We, as followers of Jesus, are sent into this world to be visible signs of God's unconditional love. Thus, we are judged not, first of all, by what we say, but by what we live. When people say of us, "see how they love one another," they catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God that Jesus announced, and they are drawn to it as by a magnet.

He goes on to say, “In a world so torn apart by rivalry, anger, and hatred, we have the privilege, vocation to be living signs of a love that can bridge all division and heal all wounds. They’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

Let me ask you a personal question. How is your love life these days? First of all, have you personally tasted the love of Jesus Christ in your own life? That has to come first – receiving his love. He does love you, you know, He went to great lengths to make you His friend, and He wants you to ask Him into your life and let Him make His home in you. He says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock, and if anyone hears my voice and opens a door, I will enter in and be with him and he with me.” That’s a promise of personal, intimate relationships. A relationship with Him. I assure you, it’s not too late for you to answer His voice, His knocking, if you haven’t already. And if you are His friend, are you growing in your ability to love other people? How about at church? Are you loving those you worship with, serve and study with? Are you giving yourself away to them, praying for their welfare and growth, weeping with those who weep, rejoicing with those who are rejoicing? Are you patient and kind with them? I remember someone once saying, “You know, the church is the light of the world, but we remember that light attracts bugs and some people can really bug us.” How is your love life towards them? And how is your love life at home? How do you treat your spouse, your children, your parents? Would they describe you as patient and kind and self-giving towards them? And how is your love life towards those who are different from you? A different political bent than yours, a different color, or sexual orientation, a different economic level... Is there evidence of Christ’s love in you as you relate to them?

All of this loving Jesus commands does sound like a pretty tall order, doesn’t it? How does one love like Jesus commands and remain loving? I mean, some days, let’s face it, it’s hard to do this. Life beats us up and we get hardened and defensive, protect ourselves. And I know myself: I’m weak. Sometimes I am so self-serving and have such a big ego. Well, the truth is, we’ll never be perfect at this – not as long as we’re living in this world because we still have sin in our own lives. But the good news is we are not on our own in living out our lives loving like Jesus. We have the power of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the living Christ, and the love of God, the Father, available to each one of us, helping us to love and to grow in our ability to selflessly love others along the way. We are not on our own in this endeavor. You see, Jesus talks about the power of praying to His Father for help in this passage, He says, “That your fruit, your

love should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, He may give it to you.” That’s a promise. He said He knows it’s not possible for us to bear this kind of supernatural fruit on our own. But we can pray and ask our Heavenly Father His name, meaning praying with the mind of Christ, to help us grow more loving and enable us to love others like Jesus did. Jesus said that He will give that to you. Did you hear it? He will give that to you.

So, I propose we get started on this right now, on growing in love. Let’s finish this message today with us doing that kind of praying together for God to make us more loving, like Jesus. I’m going to use the words from 1 Corinthians 13 as the basis of our prayer. So, bow your heads with me now and let’s pray.

Lord, I want to be more loving. Help me to be patient and kind, to not be envious or boastful. May I not become arrogant or rude and selfishly insist on my own way all the time. Keep me from becoming irritable and resentful. Empower me to not rejoice in wrongdoing, but to rejoice with the truth. Help me to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things. Help me to love as I have been loved. In the name of Jesus, I ask this, Amen.