

February 28, 2021

“As He Has Loved Us”
John 13:34-35

FCF: The clarity but difficulty of the call to love
PROPOSITION: (anchor) We are to love one another
(magnet) as Jesus has loved us.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTON:

Last week, I mentioned the challenge among the Brethren Christians in post-World War II Germany and what it meant to love fellow believers who responded to a crisis in different ways.

That was not the first time the Church has faced this dilemma. In 250, Emperor Decius ordered all citizens of the Roman Empire to publicly sacrifice to the traditional gods. Those who did received a certificate. Those who refused would be imprisoned, tortured, and killed. Many Christians refused. Others obeyed the order. Those who did were called the “lapsed”. So you see the divide. A year later, Decius died and one of the bloodiest seasons of persecution finally came to an end. But the Church now had a dilemma. What did it mean to love fellow believers who had responded to this crisis in such different ways? Do you see the running theme here?

While the degree is not the same, the question remains before us as we transition from 2020 to 2021. We have our opinions and many have taken strong stances on a range of issues - COVID-19, racial reconciliation, and politics. There’s been a great deal of relational bruising. How then are we to love one another? What would it mean? What is Jesus saying to us?

SCRIPTURE READING: [John 13:34-35](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

There are times when it is right to set our standards high - planning a wedding, training for the Olympics, knowledge of tax law, packing a parachute, brain surgery, rocket telemetry. There are times when it is right to set our standards high, when just doing “okay” is not okay.

We see something of that here in John 13. Jesus has marked the path for His disciples. He has not left us to guess as to the standard He has in mind. It is as high as we can imagine. We are to love one another as He has loved us. We are to love one another as He has loved us.

What would it mean for us to love in this way? To get at that, we need to drill down into three things. First, the path of Jesus’ love. Second, the way of His love. Third, the fact of His love. We need to grapple with those three things - the path, the way, and the fact of Jesus’ love.

I. THE PATH OF HIS LOVE

First, the path of His love, the call to imitation. Here we need to be clear on some things.

A) A Disclaimer

1. Not emulating

A disclaimer is in order. The imitation of Jesus is not a call to emulate a great hero who has given us a pattern by which to live. Unfortunately, some fell into this in the WWJD movement.

2. But responding

That can degenerate into a salvation by works. We are not meant to emulate Jesus but to respond to Jesus. It is not imitation that makes us His own but being His own that makes us imitators.

B) A Clarifier

That disclaimer is worth making. But, that said, there is still a call to this imitation.

1. Christlikeness - the Lord's goal for us

The Lord's goal for us is Christlikeness (**READ Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 John 3:2**). You hear the theme. The Lord's goal for us is Christlikeness. Clearly, it ought to be ours as well.

2. Christlikeness - our goal for ourselves

This is a fundamental part of discipleship, becoming like the One we follow. As professing Christians, it stands to reason that we would share His goals, including even His goals for us.

As His disciples, as His followers, we are to walk this path, to heed this call to imitation.

Application:

These are some extraordinary things to consider. We have been made in the image of Christ. Yet, as fallen image bearers, we are also being remade in His image. That is God's goal.

And, again, it should be the longing of our hearts. The immensity of what has yet to be in this restoration project should not make us then play it down. No, instead, we should be looking to Him each day, breathing prayers through the day, for yet more and more grace to grow.

This call to imitation is directly tied to the call to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

II. THE WAY OF HIS LOVE

That brings us to the second point, the way of His love. Here's where we get into some specifics. In what ways has He loved us? Let's consider some things just from John's Gospel.

A) Who He Loves

1. The disciples as a group

Let's start with who Jesus loves. Certainly, He speaks of His love for the disciples as a group (**READ John 15:9**). Let that settle in (**READ John 15:9-12**). Consider the chain. As the Father loves the Son, so the Son has loved them. As He has loved them, so they are to love one another.

2. His individual followers

But we know Jesus also loves us individually, not just en masse. Five times, John is described "as the one whom Jesus loved." But it's not just John (**READ John 11:5**). We see His heart.

This is an inclusive embracing love. But it is also specific in its extension to each of us.

B) How He Loves

But John speaks not just of who Jesus loves but of how He loves us as well.

1. Humble serving

His is a love of humble serving (**READ John 13:1**). That then sets the stage for the washing of the disciples' feet, an astonishing scene. I'm hoping to come back to that in a couple of weeks.

2. Great giving

So this is a love of humble serving. And great giving ([READ John 15:12-13](#)). Note that Jesus is not making a theoretical statement. This is exactly what He would do, how He has loved us.

This is a love of humble serving. And of great giving. A greatly sacrificial love.

Illustration:

This is one of the themes in the seventh Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. It's there throughout the series. Here's a line that speaks right to this ([READ](#)):

Finally, the truth. Lying with his face pressed into the dusty carpet of the office where he had once thought he was learning the secrets of victory, Harry understood at last that he was not supposed to survive.

As Harry sees his friends suffering and dying in their fight against Voldemort, he gives himself up. He leaves his dearest friends behind and commits himself to one final walk alone into the forest, going to his death as his enemies mock and jeer. He does not draw his wand. He does not fight. He simply gives himself up for his friends - much as his mother had for him years before.

Application:

This is a picture of how we have been loved by Jesus. And it's a picture of how we are to love each other. There's a reason such scenes of sacrifice in literature and film strike a cord so deeply inside. There's a reason it can move us to tears when we see it. This is far beyond mere sentiment. It's because this cord has been woven deeply into the very fabric of the universe.

We were made to love this way. We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us.

III. THE FACT OF HIS LOVE

But that brings us to our third and final point. To say "we are to love one another as Jesus has loved us" assumes we know that Jesus actually loves us. Which means we need to talk not just about the path and the way of His love. We need to look at the fundamental fact of His love.

A) For Us

Beginning with His love for us ([READ John 15:12-13](#)). This really is stunning.

1. Who is speaking

Think of who is speaking here. This is the eternal omniscient God of the universe. All things made through and for Him. The Word made flesh, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World.

2. What He is saying

And what is He saying? "You are my friends." Why do we call people our friends? Why are we moved when others call us their friend? It speaks not just of mutual interest but deep concern.

B) For You

Jesus is speaking to us of His love for us. And not only that but His love for each of us.

1. Deeply personal

His love for you. This is deeply personal. There's a section in John's Gospel where John stops as the narrator, turns to face the camera, speaking right at us ([READ John 20:30-31](#)). "So that you may believe." John is reaching to the reader, longing to draw us close, that we would know.

2. Utterly wonderful

Why? Because this is deeply personal. And utterly wonderful. Let me jump from John to Paul and his letter to the Galatians ([READ Galatians 2:20](#)). Martin Luther wrote of this ([READ](#)):

Read these words **me** and **for me** with great emphasis. With a firm faith you may engrave this **me** on your heart and apply it to yourself, not doubting that you are among those to whom this **me** belongs.

Years later, John Wesley wrote in his journal that when he was coming to faith in Christ, Luther's words here made a deep and lasting impression on him. He said ([READ](#)), "I labored, waited, and prayed to feel 'who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*.'" There's power in these pronouns.

That's the fact of Jesus' love. And this has to break in upon our hearts if we are to love.

Illustration:

Let me tell you the story of another figure from church history ([READ Hosanna](#)):

Anna Warner's family lived in New York City where her father was a wealthy lawyer. After the economic depression of 1837, her family had to leave their home in New York for their house up the Hudson River. As teenagers, Anna and her sister Susan wrote poetry and stories for children to assist their family in this time of financial difficulty. They published 106 collections in all. One contained a story called "Say and Seal," which describes a dying little boy, Johnny Fox. In the story Johnny's Sunday School teacher comforts him by singing (a new song appearing for the first time), "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

The house on the Hudson sat across from West Point Academy, and Anna often went there to teach Bible classes to the Army cadets. This hymn was well-known to the future officers in her classes. She was, in fact, so loved and respected by the soldiers that, upon her death, she was granted a full military funeral and buried on the Academy grounds.

Application:

The response of the West Point community to this saint who brought a message of Jesus' love points us to what our own response should be to the message itself. Jesus' love for us is not just an historical fact but a present reality. As we look to His love, it changes us. As it becomes the air we breathe in, a transformation begins to take place. It becomes what we breathe out.

We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Well, He has and He does.

CONCLUSION:

This is not just about the imitation of Jesus' love for us but the enablement by Jesus' love for us. And, by "enablement," I do not mean when we mistakenly encourage someone in their cycle of bad choices. By "enablement," I mean ability, something that powers and propels us in ways we desperately need and without which we would have no hope of pressing forward.

Perseverance is NASA's newest Mars rover. It touched down a little over a week ago. Its mission is to search for signs of life on Mars. *Perseverance* is NASA's most autonomous rover yet. Its power source? It's not gasoline, a lithium battery, or even solar panels such as in earlier missions. It's a nuclear battery with plutonium prepped in Oak Ridge, TN. Such fuel is what NASA has used on more than two dozen deep space missions. And it can last for decades.

Which stands to reason. A demanding mission requires reliable energy. Just like what we see here in John 13. Listen to what Jesus is saying ([READ John 13:34](#)). Here we see not only a call to the imitation of Jesus' love for us but also the enablement by Jesus' love for us. It's both.

We are to love one another as Jesus has loved us. This is His command. And promise.

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