

The Benefits of Abiding in Christ – Part III
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John 15:1-17
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I invite you turn with me in your Bibles to the 15th chapter of John. We come to our fifth message on this passage, and I believe it will be our last before we move on, and our third, kind of in a subset of the passage. We've seen that this passage, what we have here is Jesus teaching an extended metaphor, and the metaphor is the vine and the branches. He culminates His 'I AM' sayings, His seventh 'I AM' saying, "I am the bread of life." "I am the light of the world," and the seventh is, "I am the true vine and you are the branches." And so in this extended metaphor, we've seen that what is going on, we looked in our first week at what the purpose of Jesus was in giving this metaphor, and the particular circumstances in which He gave it.

He gave it to His disciples the night before He was crucified. He gave it to His disciples after He had announced to them that the ruler of the world was on his way to meet them. That they were basically marching into battle, forces of wickedness are gathering, Judas' plot is being carried out. Jesus knows that the arrest is going to happen soon, and so He says, "Get up. Let us leave here. Let us go meet the ruler of the world." And as they walk on, as they are marching to battle, He stops and says, "Look at the vine. I am the vine. I am the true vine. You are the branches." We saw that this metaphor was used by the Lord Jesus, in a sense, soothing metaphor, comforting metaphor, was used by the Lord to show us what we are to do when life falls apart around us. What are you to do when suffering comes in like a flood, when evil comes in like a flood? What are you to do as a Christian? And we've seen in the text that what we are to do is to bear fruit. Seven times in the passage, bear fruit, bear fruit, bear fruit. We are to bear fruit for God. We are to do what a vine branch is supposed to do—stay connected to the vine and bear fruit. So what are we to do? Bear fruit.

The second message we looked at in this text was, *How are you to do it?* And we said that it is by abiding in the vine, abiding in Christ, connecting to Christ, staying connected to Christ, by letting His word fill your mind, letting His love fill your heart, and letting His will rule your life. That is abiding in Christ, and that is how we bear fruit in whatever circumstances we are in. And then we looked at how really as Jesus gives this instruction, "This is what you are to do. This is how you are to do it."

Then we moved to the question, *Why?* We've seen the last two Sundays before today, today being the third week, we've looked at answering the question, *Why? Why are you to abide in Christ?* How kind of God, how kind of the Savior to give us reasons. He doesn't need to give us reasons. He could just say, "Do it because I said so," but He gives us reasons. Here are benefits, and that is what we've titled the message the last two Sundays and today. The title of the message is 'The Benefits of Abiding in Christ'. If you abide in Christ, you will experience these blessings in your life, these benefits.

And so we began looking at that two weeks ago, and we saw that the first benefit that we need to see that Jesus offers to us, extends to us, and by way of inducement, encourages us to abide in Him, is the benefit of fullness of joy. That the pathway to joy, and fullness of joy, is to cling to Christ no matter what is going on around you. You can have a joy that is completely distinct from your circumstances. Your circumstances can be falling apart and you can be filled and overflowing with joy. That's what we looked at two weeks ago.

Last week we saw that the second benefit of abiding in Christ is that you will have power in prayer. When you ask, when you are abiding in Christ, what you ask for, God will grant because you will be meeting the condition of abiding in Him. You will be submitted to Him, your will is submitted to Him, and so you'll ask in accordance with His will, and He will, Heaven will move when you pray.

And today we are going to look at the third benefit of abiding in Christ. We are to abide in Christ not just because we'll have fullness of joy, not just because we'll have power in prayer, but thirdly, God wants us to experience transformed relationships. Transformed relationships, He wants us to experience, in another way of saying it, it is supernatural love, the love of Christ. He wants us to express it in all of our relationships, and the way that you do that, or how you come to do that is through abiding in Christ. So the third benefit, and that is the subject today, 'The Benefits of Abiding in Christ – Transformed Relationships, Supernatural Love'. That is the title, and as we read the passage we're going to see, we're going to read all 17 verses, but we'll be focusing in on Verses 12-17 though. So read with me John 15:1.

John 15:1-17 ~ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it

abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. 7 If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. 9 Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 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. 11 These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 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. 16 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. 17 This I command you, that you love one another.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask that You might grant us insight into Your word, understanding by Your Spirit, conviction, in repentance and faith, to respond in a way that is pleasing to You. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

The third benefit of abiding in Christ, transformed relationships, relationships that are transformed by the supernatural love of Christ. He says, "If you abide in Me, you will exhibit, and demonstrate, supernatural love. Love that is other worldly." Now what I want us to do to consider this subject this morning, is spend our time answering three questions. Three questions, and the third question we are going to spend most of the time on, but here are the three questions. The first question is: *What are we commanded to do?* Secondly, *Why don't we do it?* And thirdly, *How can we more faithfully do it? How can we more faithfully obey this command?* So, *What are we commanded to do? Why don't we do it? And, How can we begin to do this more faithfully?*

1) What Are We Commanded to Do?

First of all, *What are we commanded to do?* It's very clear in the passage, we're commanded to love one another. We are commanded to love one another in Verse 12 and in Verse 17. "***This is My commandment, that you love one another,...***, Verse 12. Verse 17, ***This I command you, that you love one another.*** These two commands bracket this section of the passage. We believe it is connected to the vine and the branches, and it is not a new section entirely because in Verse 16 you've got the focus on going and bearing fruit. He is still talking about the imagery of the vine. He hasn't left that entirely and so He's dealing with, as we said, the benefits of abiding in Christ, and really what abiding in Christ ought to look like. So we are commanded though to love one another.

Now the word 'love' is of course the word 'agape'. This was a word that the New Testament authors basically took, a little used Greek word. The word 'agape' existed, or 'agapao' in the verb form, and it was one of four different words that we know of that the Greeks used to say, "I love you." There are four different ways they can say it. We have, in English, "I love you." We use that word to talk about our love for pizza, our love for our dog, our love for our wife and children, and our love for God. The same word, right? Love, l-o-v-e, a wide range of meaning. Well, the Greeks were more specific in their words for love, as several different words, but 'agape' was actually one. The three words they used most of the time were 'philos', 'storgai', and 'eros'. 'Eros', 'philos', and 'storgai', but 'agape' was one that was in the language but almost never used. And when it was used, it was used of the love of the gods. It was used as something that was somewhat other-worldly, even though, when you know much about the Greek pantheon, when you read Greek mythology, their love wasn't that impressive. But the word was used there, and so the New Testament authors take that word, and infuse it with the meaning of God's love.

So the word is used over and over in the New Testament. So we are commanded to love with the love not of the gods, but of the love of God, God's love—supernatural, sacrificial love. We are commanded to love one another with that kind of love, not the normal loves of human life, but the love that belongs to God Himself. And He adds to it in Verse 12, ***...love one another, just as I have loved you.*** Wow! He raises the bar. "Don't just love with the love of God, love as I have loved you." He says this in the shadow of the cross. He echoes what He said in John 13:34, ***A new commandment...*** earlier this evening, just a few hours before they had heard Him say in John 13:34:

John 13:34-35 ~ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

So the command is love with this kind of love, demonstrate the supernatural power of God. This is what is on Jesus’ heart. He begins the night, that is shortly after He washes their feet, He says, ***A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you,...*** Now He’s been talking to them about the fact that He is going away, and now He says, reminds them, “This is My commandment, that you love one another. This I command you, that you love one another.” He wants them to know that what they must do, when life is falling apart around them, as they go through the tribulations and trials of life, that you must, and I must be loving one another. And here He is talking about ‘one another’ means Christians. There are other places where He talks about we are to love all people. We’re called to love our families, our spouses. We are called to love our children, but here He is talking about the love within the body of Christ, the love for our brothers and sisters is to be a supernatural love that reflects the love of Christ Himself. And when you look at the context carefully, John 15:12, 17, He makes that commandment, but look what He’s just said right before that, when we read just a moment ago, Verse 9:

John 15:9-10 ~ Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. 10 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.

He is basically saying, “Listen, you need to abide in My love and then you need to express My love. And when you abide in My love, and express My love, you will be experiencing the love that the Father has for Me.” He is basically saying the calling of the Christian is to exhibit the awesome love of the triune God that He has within Himself—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He is going to pick this up again at the end in John 17. The *High Priestly Prayer* is one of the last things that we have, recorded words of Jesus before the arrest basically, when He is praying to the Father. And what does He pray? In Verses 20-26 of John 17, He says, “I don’t ask on behalf of these alone, not just the disciples, I’m praying for all who will believe as a result of their ministry.”

John 17:21-23 ~ that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe

that You sent Me. 22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity,

I in them and You in Me... Jesus in us, and the Father in Him, in us. He is talking about something that is mind-blowing, mind-boggling. He says, “This is to be the normal Christian life. We are to experience and express the love of almighty God in our relationships.” We read from 1 John 4 earlier, John, the same author that wrote the Gospel, writes in 1 John 4 the passage we read earlier. It says:

1 John 4:7 ~ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

He goes on down to say, in Verse 12:

1 John 4:12 ~ No one has seen God at any time;...

Basically what He is saying is, “But when we love one another, the love of God is perfected.” What He is saying is no one has seen God, the closest they can ever come to seeing God is when Christians love one another like this, God becomes visible. You make God visible in your love for one another in the way that you love one another.

Now that is what we are called to do, the command is clear, it is emphatic, repeated twice. “You are called to love one another as I have loved you. You are called to enter into the love of the Trinity, and you are to express that to one another.”

2) Why Don't We Do It?:

Now the second question, *Why don't we do it?* It is a clear command, why don't we do it? Well, I think in a sentence, to express the love of Christ you must experience the love of Christ. To express the love of Christ you must experience the love of Christ. So first of all, the reason that some who profess Christ don't exhibit supernatural love in their lives is because they have not truly experienced the love of Christ in a saving way. A theme that is running throughout this section is the idea that there are some branches who are not genuine branches.

John 15:2 ~ Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away;...

Every branch that doesn't bear fruit is taken away. Look at Verse 6:

John 15:6 ~ If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire...

So the branches that don't bear fruit at all are cast away, they are not genuine vine branches. Verse 8:

John 15:8 ~ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

How do you know a disciple? He bears fruit. Some 30, some 60, some 100. There are periods where you are not bearing fruit like you ought to, but a disciple will bear fruit, a true disciple. So He is saying in this passage that one of the fruits that needs to be born is the fruit of love. Some people are not able to express the love of Christ because they have not experienced the love of Christ themselves. Have you experienced the love of Christ in a personal way? Have you come to understand that He loves you? If you haven't come to understand that in a personal way then you need to cry out to God to open the eyes of your heart so that you can see your unworthiness, your unloveliness, that all have to come to terms with. He doesn't love us because we are lovely or valuable, He loves us in spite of our worthlessness, in spite of our ugliness, in spite of our lack of value. He places love upon us, but He loves us for Jesus' sake, on account of what Jesus has done. Cry out to God to experience His love. Why don't we obey this command to love supernaturally? Because to express the love of Christ you must experience the love of Christ.

So first of all, we need to make sure we are believers, but secondly as Christians. Is this our normal Christian life? Supernatural love, that our love looks like Jesus. People look at us, and the way that we relate, and we look like Jesus. Is that the case? Again, the answer is that to express the love of Christ, you must experience the love of Christ. You can't give what you haven't received. If you are not walking in the awareness of His love for you, you don't have anything to give. So we have to, as Christians, be continually coming to the cross, continually reflecting on the love of God, continually realizing the wonder of His love, continually receiving again His love, so that we can then respond to His love.

3) How Are We to Experience and Express This Love?

That leads us to the third question that we're going to spend the rest of our time on, *How are we to begin to express this love? To experience it and express it? How can we do this?* What we are going to see is that what Jesus basically does in this

passage is show us how to do it. He begins and ends this little subsection, John 15:12-17, with the commandment.

John 15:12 ~ “This is My commandment, that you love one another,...

Verse 17:

John 15:17 ~ This I command you, that you love one another.

What you have is an inclusion, or an inclusio, it brackets this little section and says that by repeating at the beginning and the end, He said, “This is My main point. This is My objective. I want you to do this. I’m commanding you. It is not a suggestion. It is not I would like for you to, I command you to love one another.” In fact, the word ‘*commandment*’ occurs three times in the passage. He actually says it again in Verse 14:

John 15:14 ~ You are My friends if you do what I command you.

He is claiming authority, and He is saying, “I’m commanding this of you,” but He doesn’t just command, He also gives the ability by His grace. That is the way God does everything. He commands you to repent and believe, but you can’t repent and believe unless He gives you the ability to repent and believe. So you cry out to God for the ability. You acknowledge, “I have nothing, Lord. I am looking to You. Help me.” Then with everything you can, you turn to Him, and you try to disown yourself, but you look to Christ at every moment for His grace to enable you to obey what He has commanded you to do.

Well, in Verse 13-16, He basically gives us three principles. Basically, He says, “Look, if you want to respond to Jesus’ love, you need to receive His love,” and He shows us three, like a diamond, turning a diamond three different ways, He says, “Look at three beautiful aspects of the love of Christ, three faces of the diamond.” That is what He does. Verse 13 is the first face. Verses 14-15 are the second face. Verse 16 is the third. So we have three sub-points under this final point, *How are we to exhibit and manifest supernatural love in our relationships?* Well, what we need to do is to receive the love of Jesus so that we can reflect the love of Jesus, so that we can respond to the love of Jesus. And the way that we do it is by looking at three aspects of His love. So here are the three things we want to see.

Let's look at the first. To be able to love someone else with the love of Christ, I have to be connected to the vine. For me to try to love someone like Jesus, and be disconnected from the vine, is as foolish as a vine branch to try to bear fruit disconnected. You can try all you want, you can't do anything. He said, "Apart from Me you can do nothing. Abide in Me." And so He is really showing us in these verses how again to abide in Him. And what He basically says is, "Listen, if you and I are going to love someone with the love of Christ, we have to know something, and remind ourselves of who Jesus is, and cling to Him, and then what'll happen is His love will captivate our hearts and make us love." This is what He says in 1 John 4:19, we love because He first loved us. Our love is a response to His love. Or what 2 Corinthians 5:14 says, the apostle says, "The love of Christ constrains us." That if one died for all then we who live ought to no longer live for ourselves.

That word '*constrains us*', the love of Jesus, the love of Christ constrains us so that it wraps its arms around us. The idea of like grabbing someone to arrest them, seizing them and pulling them into the jail cell. He said, "The love of Christ does that." I mean, it takes you where you don't want to go naturally even. The love of Christ comes and captures your heart, and makes you do what is against your original nature. And the love of Christ, when you see it, and when you walk in it, it does that, and you find yourself overflowing with the awareness of His love for you that you must love someone else. It has to have an expression. You've got to love, what you want to do is you want to love Jesus back, right? But how do you love Jesus back?

He says, a beautiful picture in Matthew 25, remember at the judgment seat? The people are there, the sheep and the goats, and He says to the sheep, "I was hungry and you fed Me. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was naked and you clothed me. I was in prison and you visited me and the righteous shall say, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give You drink?'" And Jesus will say, "As much as you did it unto one of the least of these, My brethren, you did it also unto Me." Listen very carefully, that does not mean that any poor person that you help in the world, that means anybody who belongs to Jesus that you help. When you touch someone that belongs to Jesus, you are touching Him.

So if you want to love Jesus back, you are full of His love for you, you are overwhelmed by His love for you, then you must love the nearest person around you that loves Him. Now it is also going to result in love for all kinds of unbelievers too, but this command is about make sure you do it for Christians. He says, "It is so important for Me that My family is right." It is interesting too, just be

careful to observe this, what this passage is encouraging us to do is to focus not on the love of God, the Father, but the love of Christ Himself. Ted mentioned earlier John 3:16, and there you have a celebration of the love of God the Father, don't you? For God so loved the world that He gave... Look at the love of the Father that He gives His only Son. And we are to drink that in, and marvel at that, but Jesus is saying right here, "Listen, a regular part of your daily life needs to be reflecting on My love for you." The Father didn't just, yes, He loved and He gave, but also I gave.

A) Jesus Laid Down His Life for You:

This is the first principle we need to think about in reflecting on receiving the love of God. Think about this, Jesus laid down His life for you. Jesus laid down His life for you. This is a very rich sentence. Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends. The first thing we need to see under this first sub-point—Jesus laid down His life for you. We are looking at three things that show us three different faces of the love of Jesus, three different facets of the love of Jesus. The first is, Jesus laid down His life for you. Look at the verb 'lay down'. Greater love has no one than this that one lay down his life for his friends. This word, it is interesting, He didn't say, "Just gives His life," He could have said that. He says, 'lays down'. The verb means 'to place, to put, to set in its proper place, to definitively place something'. What it connotes is His authority and intentionality.

What it's saying is that when Jesus gives His life, it's not an accident. He's not caught up in a whirlwind of evil that envelops Him and hurls Him along to the cross. Though there really is a big whirlwind of evil happening, what He's saying here in this is, "I am laying My life down." It's the same thing He said in John 10. Remember when He talked about the good shepherd? What's the characteristic of the good shepherd? "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep." It's the same Greek word (τίθημι) tithēmi, to place, to put, to set. "I lay down My life," John 10:11.

John 10:17 ~ For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative.

Did you see that? "Nobody takes it from Me. I'm laying it down."

John 10:17 ~ ...I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

So when we look at the cross, we look at Jesus laying His life down, placing it with intentionality and authority, giving Himself for us. John makes much of this in His Gospel. I just mentioned Chapter 10 where there's this idea of laying it down, but it's not an accident that Jesus goes to the cross. Look with me at Chapter 13 for a moment. John really emphasizes how Jesus knew exactly what was happening, and He was freely offering Himself each step of the way. Look at John 13:1.

John 13:1 ~ Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. 2 During supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, 4 got up from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself. 5 Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

John wants us to be clear that Jesus knows exactly what is happening. Nothing is surprising the Savior. Everything is on schedule, and He is giving Himself at each stage of the moment. In John 13:36, He tells them, "Where I'm going, you cannot follow. I'm about to go." I mentioned earlier in John 14:29, when He says, "The evil one is coming," He knows what's happening. In fact, in John 18 after they'd gone to the Garden of Gethsemane, Verse 4, Judas is on the way, the Roman cohort is in tow, the officers are there, they've got their torches, they come out to arrest Jesus, and look at Verse 4:

John 18:4 ~ So Jesus, knowing all the things that were coming upon Him, went forth and said to them, "Whom do you seek?"

See, He's not surprised at the timing that they come. He sees them coming, and He goes to meet them. He doesn't sit there and wait. "Hey guys, they're coming to get Me." No, "I'm going to meet them." He takes off directly to them, and then the most amazing thing happens after that. Here is a little army contingent basically. Chief priests have sent their soldiers that guard the temple, and they've got along with the cohort, which apparently is some Roman officers too. Jesus comes forth, and He meets them on the way, and He asks them a question, because He wants them to answer the question. "Whom do you seek?" Verse 5:

John 18:5 ~ They answered Him, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He *said to them, “I am He.”

“Ego eimi.” That’s what He said. “I am.”

John 18:5 ~ ...And Judas also, who was betraying Him, was standing with them. 6 So when He said to them, “I am He,” they drew back and fell to the ground.

“Who are you seeking?” “Jesus the Nazarene.” “I am.” Boom! The amazing thing is, what’s more amazing than that, because we know He’s the *I am*, at this moment His glory is shone out, and when He says, “I am,” they know He’s the *I am* of the Old Testament. He’s the *I am* Yahweh God who has existed for eternity past, and is exalted in glory. He says, “I am.” They fall on their faces, because when you’re in the presence of the glory of God, that’s all you can do. The glory of God knocks them down. You need to be on your faces. It’s just like that story about the Dagon. Remember when the Ark of the Covenant is put before the idol Dagon, the Philistine god? They put it in the temple of Dagon because they think they’ve beaten Israel. Well, they had beaten Israel. But they think they’ve beaten Israel’s God, and they put the artifact of the Ark of the Covenant there before the idol to say, “Look Dagon, here’s your spoils. You beat Him, Yahweh.” They come in the next morning and Dagon is face down. This giant, towering statue is face down before the Ark of the Covenant. I just would love to have seen those priests that day. “What’s going on? Close the doors. Lock the doors. Don’t let anybody in. We’ve got to get this thing back up.” So they put it back up. They go home that night. They turn off all the lights, they lock up, and they go home. They come back in the morning, and Dagon is face down again before the Ark of the Covenant. This time his head has been severed, and his hands and feet are severed. You’d think they ought to get the message. Yahweh alone is the one true God.

So when Jesus says, “I am,” it was the same kind of thing happening. It’s time to bow, and what’s more amazing, though, is what happens in Verse 7. He then asks them again, after they’re getting up. The glory that had knocked them down has been hidden from their eyes again. They’re getting up off the ground, and He says:

John 18:7 ~ Therefore He again asked them, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus the Nazarene.” 8 Jesus answered, “I told you that I am He; (This time without the glory blast) so if you seek Me, let these go their way,”

John 18:12 ~ So the Roman cohort and the commander and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him,...

He freely gives Himself. He could have destroyed all of them in an instant, but it's His purpose to go to the cross. And so when you understand that, He, the Lord of glory, was crucified for you. He went to Calvary for you. He laid down His life for you. He experienced the agony, the physical agony of the cross, the horrible agony of physical death through crucifixion, but more than that He experienced the death of the soul, in a sense. He experienced death in His soul. He experienced the mental anguish, the emotional horrors of being made sin, of being mocked and ridiculed, spat upon, beaten. He experienced that His whole life, but especially the cross. He experienced that profound sense of rejection in His soul. And then more than that, more than those things, He experienced spiritual death, as on the cross He was imputed with every sin of everyone who would ever come to faith in Christ. All of God's elect, the sins were credited to Him, and He was treated as if He had lived our wretched, wicked lives. He bore God's holy wrath against sin, in Himself. The sky got dark. "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" There the sin-bearer is being cast away from the presence of God. That's why He trembled in Gethsemane. That's why He said, "Now is My heart troubled." Two different times in John's Gospel as He anticipates the cross, He says, "Now is My heart troubled." In John 12:26 He said that when the Greeks came to see Him. "Now is My heart troubled. Now is the moment for the Son of Man to be glorified. Now is My heart troubled. I want to say, 'Save Me from this hour,' but for this hour I came." In John 13, before He announces that Judas is going to betray Him, He actually says, "One of you will betray Me," and His heart is troubled that leads Him to say that. He experienced emotional agony, spiritual agony, physical agony. He did that because that was what was required to save you and me. There was no other way. He said, "Father, if there be any other way, let this cup pass from Me, if there's any other way, Lord." But there was not, and so He continued to lay down His life, and to lay down His life.

He loves us, and we are so unworthy. How can we withhold love from those around us who at times are also very unworthy of our love even? But when you are loved like that in complete unworthiness, your heart when you really are understanding that, is overwhelmed, isn't it? And then what can I do but spend my heart in trying to get back to You? Just like we sang a moment ago, "When I survey the wondrous cross," that last verse, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small." What can I give to God? I can give Him everything that I am, surrender to Him. I have no rights of my own. I'm ready just to love You with all that I am.

It's like if you love someone and you want to give them a special birthday gift, if you're smart and you really love them, you don't give them what you like. I remember doing that when I was young. I gave my brother for his birthday exactly what I wanted. The two of us, there were just two of us in the home, two boys, so whatever he got was mine anyway, and whatever I got was his anyway. We were always playing games and stuff together. But I saw a game and I thought, "I want that. I'm going to give that to Todd." That wasn't very loving. He liked it though, so anyway... But if you love someone, you want to find out what gladdens their heart, and you want to give to them, and you want to make them happy. And if you want to love Jesus, what gladdens His heart, what thrills His soul is for you to love His little ones at the times when they're in the most need. That really thrills Him. When they're the most unlovely, if you love them, you are loving Jesus so well.

So He says you have to understand. You have to receive His love. Jesus has laid down his life for you, and then you respond to that and you lay down your life for others. The second facet that He encourage us to look at is really in Verses 14 and 15. What we see there is not only has Jesus laid down His life for you, but Jesus has called you His friend.

B) Jesus Has Called You His Friend:

John 15:14 ~ You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 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.

"You're not My slaves. You're My friends." Now, in reality, He says, "No longer do I call you slaves." I think what He's saying there partly is the path to becoming the friend of Jesus is to first become the slave of Jesus. The only way that you get saved is to become His slave, and the reality is you're a slave of something. You think you're free before you get saved, but you're not. Jesus said, "Everyone who sins is the slave of sin." So every single person on the face of the earth is born a slave of sin. They're under the tyranny of sin. They're under the tyranny of the god of this age who has blinded their eyes, the prince of darkness who is at work in the sons of disobedience. He is reigning over you. "You're of your father the devil," Jesus said in John 8:44. So how do you get delivered from that? You become a slave of Jesus. The New Testament authors made this clear in a number of different places. Paul in Romans 1:1, what does he say? "Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ..." The translation in English says *bondservant*. It really literally is *slave*, someone who has no rights of their own, no will of their own, someone who belongs to

someone else. If you are a Christian, you must become someone who belongs to Jesus Christ. That's why the word *redemption* is so important. Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it. Redeemed means bought, purchased out of your slavery, out of your bondage, purchased, and now owned by the one who bought you. This is why 1 Corinthians 6:19 says:

1 Corinthians 6:19 ~ Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.

He says that in relation to saying, "Flee immorality. Don't be involved in sexual morality, because your body doesn't belong to you. You belong to Jesus Christ." So you become a slave of Jesus Christ. Paul said, "I'm a slave of Jesus Christ." In 2 Peter 1:1, Peter says, "I'm a slave of Jesus Christ." I think it's really profound that James and Jude, two New Testament authors who were both half brothers of Jesus, they were children of Mary and Joseph, sons. They were guys who were mocking Jesus in John 7. We read about it. They weren't named by name, but it was His brothers. They were basically mocking Him in John 7. They became followers of Christ after the resurrection. Two of them write epistles, the epistle of James, and Jude writes the epistle of Jude. This is how they began their books. They don't say they're the half brothers of Jesus. James says, "James, a slave of Jesus Christ." Jude says, "Jude, a slave of Jesus Christ and the brother of James." He doesn't claim his relationship to Jesus as brother. That's irrelevant. "When I tell you my relationship with Jesus Christ, I am His slave. I'm no longer mocking Him now. I'm worshiping Him, surrendered to Him."

So you must become a slave of God. That's why Jesus said in Luke 9:23-24, "If any man would come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For the one who saves his life loses it, and the one who loses his life for My sake, finds it." So you have to lose yourself in Christ to be saved. But what you know if you are a Christian today is you know that slavery to Jesus Christ is true freedom indeed. He said, "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." And you also come to know as you abide in Him and you reflect on this, that the wonder of it is—now, to be a friend of Jesus, you've still got to do what He commands you. It's not a reciprocal friendship. You do what He commands you. He doesn't do what you command Him. But He still calls you not slaves, but friends.

Isn't that neat when maybe you hear about somebody that said, "Yeah, he's a friend of mine"? "I didn't even know he knew me." Jesus says, "Hey, she's a friend of Mine. He's a friend of Mine." Two people in the Old Testament were called friends of God—Moses in Exodus 33:11, and Abraham in 2 Chronicles 20:7 and Isaiah 41:8. And apparently the idea of friendship—by the way, God is not called the friend of Moses. God is not called the friend of Abraham. Moses is the friend of God. Abraham is the friend of God. But apparently, when you look at what was really going on in those two men's lives, and what Jesus says here in John 15:15, what is it about moving from slavery to friendship? It's about revelation.

John 15:15 ~ ...the slave does not know what his master is doing;...

"I've not called you slaves but friends, because all things that I've heard from My Father I've made known to you." A friend, it's about revelation. God reveals Himself. Jesus reveals Himself. He tells you what He's doing. His word is telling you what He's doing, and He invites you into His counsel in that sense. "This is what I'm doing." I love the story of Abraham in Genesis 18, where God is about to destroy Sodom. He comes down and He's talking to Abraham. They're getting ready to leave, basically. They get up from dinner, and the Lord says to apparently the angels with Him, "Shall I withhold from Abraham what I'm about to do?" Here He is condescending to talk in language that we can understand, because He doesn't really care what the angels have to say about it, ultimately. He's made the decision that He's going to do it. He's speaking in a way Abraham can understand, though, to comfort Him. "Shall I withhold from Abraham what I'm about to do?" And then He tells Abraham He's about to destroy Sodom. "I want you to know what My purposes are and what I'm doing," and then He basically invites Abraham into a dialogue. Remember where Abraham says, "Lord, what if there were 100 righteous people? What if there were 50? What if there were 45? What if there were 40?" You read it and it's just laborious reading it. It's like, "Abraham, you need to stop, man," but he keeps asking Him all the way down. I can't remember if it was to 10 or 5. I think it was 10. "For ten righteous people I would spare the city." Why did God do that? It's because He wanted to show what it's like to be a friend of God. When you're God's friend, He cares what you think. I don't know why He would care what I think, but He does. When we're abiding in Christ like we saw last week, it's even here. When you ask, He's going to give you, because you're asking according to His will. You're asking in His Name. You're asking in His Lordship. So He's called you His friend.

Finally the last thing we need to go to, the third facet of His love for us is that not only has Jesus laid down His life for you, not only has Jesus called you His friend, but thirdly:

C) Jesus Has Chosen You for Himself:

John 15:16 ~ You did not choose Me but I chose you,...

Now, you have here in this passage, and this is one of the things I think that makes the Doctrines of Grace so exceedingly wonderful. The Doctrines of Grace are basically, sometimes they're called *The Five Points of Calvinism*. They're better called the Doctrines of Grace, because it's the teaching of the Bible about grace. John Calvin would hate the fact that we call it *The Five Points of Calvinism*. He's got an unmarked grave in Geneva. It's the Doctrines of Grace. There are two of the Doctrines of Grace right here in front of me. In Verse 13, you have limited atonement or particular redemption. "One lays down his life for his friends." Who did Jesus lay down His life for? His friends. There are other places where the Bible talks about in some sense Jesus died for the world, but here it's focusing on His death with particular view to the elect. And then in Verse 16:

John 15:16 ~ You did not choose Me but I chose you,...

That's unconditional election. Now, this is really neat, because the normal rabbi-teacher relationship, the pupils would go and want to study with a rabbi. "Hey, can I matriculate in your school?" Jesus says basically, "You may have thought you came to Me." Not many of them did. There were a couple of early ones that went from John to Jesus, remember, in John 1. Most of the time, though, Jesus went like to Matthew and said, "Hey, follow Me." "Peter, follow Me," right? And He's basically saying, "Even the ones that came to Me first, you didn't come to Me. I chose you. The only reason you came to Me was because I had already chosen you."

John 15:16 ~ ...and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit,...

So the wonder of this is, when you realize that your relationship with Christ didn't start with you, it upsets the apple cart at first, because this goes counter to our human pride. We want to be the masters of our fate and the captains of our soul, but the reality is we are not. The reality is that if you remain the master of your fate and the captain of your soul, you will continue to choose what you want in your own sin nature, which is everything but God. No one seeks God. No, not one.

So the reality is the only way that you can seek God is if He first seeks you and gives you a new heart. And then when you hear the call of the Gospel which goes out to every creature, the call of the Gospel that's for everyone, yes, call everyone to repentance in faith, but when you see them come to faith, what do you know? God chose them. Invite them all. I love the illustration Jesus says of the dinner that He prepares. Remember the banquet that's prepared and the man says, "I want to prepare a banquet for all of my friends. Prepare this wonderful banquet," and his servants are all working like crazy to get it all fixed up. It's time for the banquet and nobody's there. "Did you send out the invitations?" "Yes, we invited everyone." "Where are the people?" Nobody came. He says, "Go out into the hedges and highways and compel people to come in, that my house may be full." That is election. That is God doing what we could not do. And then when the person is born again, then they run to the banquet. And then when you get inside the banquet hall, it's like one of the Puritans said. The outside of the door says, "Whosoever will, may come." Think about a door frame, and you've got the door mantle above the door. "Whosoever will, may come." When you get inside and you look back, it says, "Chosen before the foundation of the world." And when you know that He chose you, this word *electos* means to choose for oneself, to call out for oneself, to say, "I want that one." He chose me for Himself, and appointed me to bear fruit. He chose me for Himself, and He wants me to bear fruit, and one of the fruits He wants me to bear is love. You loved me, Lord, with this eternal love, chosen before the foundation of the world. How can I not love those that You call me to love?

Jesus has laid down His life for you. He has called you His friend. He's chosen you for Himself, and when you are walking in the awareness of that, your heart will not be able to contain it. It's hard. There are doldrums and it's amazing how depressing it can get. Isn't it funny how bad a day can go so quickly? "This day was going great, and now look at everything," and you feel like Eeyore. You know who I'm talking about. "Good day, Eeyore." "Well, it's a good day, which I doubt." He never expected a good day. You feel like that. When you feel like that, what have you got to do? Focus on the love of Christ. Say, "Jesus, here I am again, discouraged. I don't have any of the fullness of joy that You've offered me. I don't have any love in my heart." What's my problem? Oh, I must not be connected to the vine. There's no fruit growing. What's the problem? I've got to get reconnected to the vine. I've got to focus on His love. I've got to focus on who He is and what He's done for me. And if I will get there, get in His word, meditate on the Scriptures that I already know, then I will begin to bear fruit for Him and His glory. That's what He's called us to do.

Let's go to Him in prayer...

Our Father, we stand in awe of the glorious Gospel, the Good News, that you were in Christ reconciling the world to Yourself, that You gave Your only Son whom You love, who was so precious to You. You did not spare Him, but You delivered Him up for us all. We praise You, Lord Jesus, that You not only obeyed Your Father, but You freely, willingly laid down Your life. For the joy that lay before You, You endured the cross despising the shame. The joy that lay before You was redeeming for Yourself a bride. And not only do You redeem us, but then You call us into the counsel of Your dear friendship and remind us that we belong to You. Lord, forgive us for our lovelessness, for our unbelief.

We pray for those that are here today that need to repent and believe the Gospel for the first time in a saving way, that You might open the eyes of their hearts even now to cry out to Christ. Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You said that anyone who comes to Me, You will not turn them away. You continually say, "Come unto Me, come unto Me, come unto Me," and if they're hearing You right now, You're ready to receive them if they will bow the knee. We thank You that even those decisions will reflect the wonder of Your grace, Your electing, saving grace. Father, we give you praise for what You have done. We pray that You would help us to live in a manner worthy of the call in which we received, that our lives would reflect Your love, and we pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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