

The Love of Christ – Part IV

April 21, 2019

John 10:14-18

Reading: John 10:1-18

Love Is Christ

We conclude today a four-part series on the “The Love of Christ.” The series began with Paul’s writing to the Ephesians in chapter 3 where the apostle prays, and it is also my prayer for us as a church, that we “**may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.**” (Ephesians 3:18-19) This is my goal this morning, that God, answers my prayer and our prayers and through the ministry of his Word and with the aid of his Holy Spirit it will help us comprehend the depth of Christ’s love for us. That our understanding would surpass human knowledge and would be one of spiritual wisdom, surpassing the human ability to know and by God’s power we would go beyond human comprehension and journey into God’s heart.

We began this series with the costliness of Christ’s love. As Paul stated, “**Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**” (Ephesians 5:2) Christ loved mankind so deeply he willingly gave up his life.

Secondly, we explored the depth of Christ’s love and how little we deserve it. Paul says, “**For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.**” (Romans 5:6) By God regenerating your soul and by his doing so, you were able to choose Christ as your Lord and Savior and you were no longer “**ungodly.**” It is important you understand the word “**ungodly**” because in other places in Scripture it is because of the “**ungodly**” that God’s wrath was poured out onto the world. As Paul’s letter to the Romans testifies, “**For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the**

truth.” (Romans 1:18) Back to the statement that “Christ died for the ungodly” Paul continues the thought in verse 7, “For one will scarcely die for a righteous person— though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Christ’s love for each person is deeper and greater than any human love. We were ungodly, carnal, sinners and by our nature enemies of God, yet Christ’s love is deeper and great than all that, and so we come to understand, he sacrificed himself for our salvation.

Thirdly, we experience the depth of Christ’s love by the benefits that he gives to each of us. John said it so straight forward, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.” (1 John 3:1) This is what we dug into last week – God loved us so deeply that he would not settle merely to save us from sin and give us forgiveness, but he penetrates us to our very soul and indwells us with His Spirit and this gives each person a new birth and changes their spiritual DNA into the image of God and we are truly his children. We are to model our lives after God’s first born Son, his only Son, Jesus Christ and beyond that, Jesus is our brother and more than a brother he is our Lord and Savior. This makes us fellow heirs – heirs of all that God has created. “For **all** things are yours,²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—**all** are yours,²³ and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.” (1 Corinthians 3:21-23) God went beyond adoption, he gave us a new birth, he gave us his spiritual DNA and made us his true children and it was his joy to do so.

Love With Joy

Finally, we come today—on this Easter, this Resurrection Sunday morning, to consider the fourth way that the depth of Chris’s love for us is revealed in Scripture. You see the depth of someone’s love for you not only by the pain it costs and by how little you deserve their love and how the person overcomes obstacles to love you, and

how great of a blessing the person gives you; but you also see the depth of love in how freely the love is given. In other words, is the good thing they are doing for you is it by some external compulsion to do so and is it that they do not really want to do it but because of some kind of pressure they have to do it or is it done freely?

In 1986, Pastor John Piper wrote a book called *Desiring God* in which, he put forth the concept of Christian Hedonism. The dictionary defines “hedonism” as *the doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the sole or chief good in life*. Is it possible such a concept can be biblical or Christian? Piper feels that unless you care about your joy and pursue it with zeal, you cannot be a loving person. At first glance this sounds backwards. To love means setting aside your joy and placing the joy and needs of others over your own. After all God tells us to consider others more worthy than ourselves. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3) In Piper’s defense, let me ask, “When someone does something good for you, do you feel more loved if they are doing it out of obligation or doing so freely because it is their joy to care for you?” The obvious answer is we feel more loved when someone does good things freely for us out of a joy and love to care for us, we would say they as showing their love for us. Piper would say, that a person’s joy in loving another person is an important part of what makes it an act of love. He would argue for one to not pursue joy for the sake of loving ends up destroying the very love one seeks to give. The command to love others in the Bible is not a demand to renounce the pursuit of our own joy for the good of others, but rather one needs to pursue their joy in loving others – this is a concept promoted by Piper for years. What do you think? Is it the right concept?

Consider that the more engaged and willing and glad and free your love for others, especially if it is costly, the more amazing that love is and the deeper it is. This is the very approach we see in Jesus and his love is truly amazing and there is no deeper love one can experience. We see the depth of Jesus’ love in the freedom of it, the

willingness of it, the eagerness of it and the gladness of it. He was not forced into doing what he was not willing and eager to do. Yes, it is true, there was no joy in the physical suffering. Physical pain did not become physical pleasure on the cross, he willingly suffered out of love, a deep unconditional love for people.

I desire that you see the depth of Jesus' love this morning in the freedom of his love; he loved all humanity; he loved each individual person with all his heart. Seeing the freedom in which Jesus loves is also the connection to Easter and his resurrection because of the depth of his love and its freedom with which he gave it that is also the reason he rose from the dead.

Love Given Freely

Please open your Bible to John chapter 10 and we will begin in verse 17, **“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again.”** This tells us that God the Father loves his Son, Jesus Christ, for loving us. There is special pleasure that the Father has for his Son because of Jesus' willingness to lay down his life for those the Father calls. By his love Jesus defeated death on their behalf, your behalf. Also, the Father loved the Son before creation. Both of these truths were stated by Jesus, **“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”** (John 17:24) As God the Father is perfect, so too, is God the Son and both of their love for us is rooted in their perfection as the One true God. Because of Jesus' perfect agape love, he both obediently went to the cross to fulfill God's plan for redemption and he lovingly went to the cross for us. This is why Jesus, says in verse 17, **“For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life”** and added at the end of verse 18, **“This charge I have received from my Father.”** What John and Jesus are both saying is, **“The Father loves the Son for loving us.”** The question that

this brings to my mind is, “What does the Father’s love for Christ and Christ’s love for the Father say to us, each of us, about the God’s love for us?”

Well, to find out let’s move onto verse 18, “**No one takes it - meaning Jesus’ life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.**” This speaks to the freedom in which Jesus loves us.

Take a second and let these forceful words of Jesus penetrate, “**No one takes my life from me**” Is that not astonishing? Judas did not take it. Annas the high priest did not take it – remember they could not convict Jesus, they even brought in false witnesses and they could not - not until he freely gave the answer they sought. Herod did not want the responsibility and sent Jesus to Pilate because he could not take Jesus’ life. The mob who yelled to Pilate “crucify him!” they did not take it. The soldiers may have put nails in his hands and feet but they did not take his life. Even as powerful as Satan is, he hoped for the end of Jesus’ life, but dared not directly seek it. Satan did not understand if Jesus died, he would rise from death. All of these people were involved, so what does it mean, “**No one takes my life from me?**”

Jesus is saying to the casual observer of Scripture - when it looks like I was being forced - to stand trial, sentenced to death, whipped, the crown with thorns jammed onto my head, being nailed to a cross - I was not, in truth, being forced, but I choose all of this and I embraced every step of the process. The truth is both my Father and I were orchestrating all of it – every detail. Why? Because of my deep unrestrained love for each person. An agape love, an unconditional love and it was my joy to love each person despite the cost I knew had to be paid and knew from before creation. Jesus continues in verse 18, “**No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.**” Jesus is saying, I freely gave the price of love for you and despite the pain, it was my joy. My love is free and it is my joy to give it to you.

Several of us went to see Pilgrim's Progress this week, John Bunyan's allegory of the faith and struggles of living as a Christian in a fallen world. Bunyan said one cannot understand the joy of love until they serve someone who can give nothing back. This describes Jesus' love for sinners. Bunyan was imprisoned for 12 years because of his faith and he found joy in the midst of his suffering, writing, "I never had in all my life so great an inlet into the Word of God as now. Those scriptures that I saw nothing in before are made, in this place and state, to shine upon me. Sometimes, when I have been in the savour of them, I have been able to laugh at destruction ... I have had sweet sights of the forgiveness of my sins in this place, and of my being with Jesus in another world." Bunyan realized the scriptures give us a greater understanding of Christ's love and deepen a relationship with God through all of life's journey. Bunyan's relationship grew, as Paul's did, while in prison away from the world's distractions and they both found joy and peace in receiving Jesus' love.

Love's Freedom

Here in this morning's passage why does Jesus stress the freedom of his love? Because if it were not true, if his death was ordered and he had no choice, if it was not freely given, if despite the suffering - he would then not have peace and joy and then the depth of his love would be thrown into question. Jesus' love was freely given to those, as Bunyan said, who can offer nothing in return. Jesus stresses that his love was freely given, his life was freely sacrificed because of love. Jesus said, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." Jesus was in complete and total control and he freely choose to die for our sins. Verse 18, finishes with "I have authority to lay it down meaning his life, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." This is not saying God the Father ordered Jesus to die. What it is saying, is that, the Father and the Son are in complete unity, or we could say from a human perspective that they share the same mind and heart and are in perfect harmony.

What the Father loves, the Son loves and what the Son loves, the Father loves and they love mankind who they created in their image above all other creation.

Why does Jesus stress the freedom of his love? Why does Jesus say his love is freely given in a number of places in the Scriptures? Because, if this were not true, if his death was ordered and he had not choice, if he did not freely give it, if his heart did not have joy in the sacrifice of his love, then we would have to question the value of his love and sacrifice. The depth of Jesus' love is seen in his joy to freely give it, the freedom in which he gave it. If Jesus did not die for us willingly, if he did not with the joy of loving us freely embrace the suffering, then how deep is his love? This is why Jesus wanted all to know, then and now, with clear words, **“No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”** This is my choice, not one put upon me by circumstance. I did this out of the joy and freedom of my love for those the Father calls.

Jesus is stressing in this passage the freedom of his love. Jesus knows that the evil one will work through fallen men to corrupt the purpose of his sacrifice. The evil one had pleasure in Jesus' death and complete despair when Jesus rose from the dead signaling his defeat and the limiting of his power and it was just a matter of time until he will, for eternity, be cast into the Lake of Fire. Jesus knows that men will work to place a dark shadow over his joy and freedom of his love. They will work to convince people of the evil one's lies, they will say something along the line of, “Jesus does not love you he was forced into this, he was ordered by God and had no choice. God, if there is a God, is cruel and forces people to suffer and die. I think Jesus knew this wrapped approach was coming for he knows all, so he wants those who have been given new spiritual life to stay on the straight and narrow road of truth, so he says, **“No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”** Jesus wants us to understand the joy he has in the depth of his love that he freely gave so we might be called the children of God and be his brothers and sisters that will inherit all that has been created by God.

As we are increasing our awareness of the joy Jesus had in freely loving us and his desire to suffer for us let me try to deepen our understanding and appreciation further with a few more illustrations of this great truth. The truth that no one took his life, he chose to give it, he had joy in loving us to the point of suffering death for us. Jesus was eager and willing and had joy to die for us, so that we may live.

The first example of Jesus' deep love. Remember back to our study of Luke, to chapter 4 where Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth where he had grown up and everyone knew him and his family. Jesus reads from the scriptures and says they had been fulfilled in the people's hearing that day. At first, they marveled at his teaching, but as he continued, he pointed out that the blessings of the Messiah would include the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Then the people responded differently, "And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away." (Luke 4:29-30) What happened? What incited the people to act with such violence? The Jews thought wrongly that the Messiah was theirs only, they were special. Even though the prophets had taught the Messiah would come for the people of the world they had developed traditions and laws apart from scripture to elevate their status as the **exclusive** people of God at the expense of others. Amid this violence Jesus walks away unhindered, how, why? The reason he was able to walk away without their having any affect upon him was as John wrote, "no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come." (John 7:30) As Jesus said, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." Jesus acted out of his own choice, no one could take his life before he was ready to give it.

Later in Jesus' ministry, in Luke chapter 13, which we have not gotten to yet in our study of Luke's great historical record, Jesus is traveling to Jerusalem and some Pharisees meet him and tell him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." Jesus responds by saying, ³² "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and

perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.” (Luke 13:31-32) What does Jesus mean “I finish my course.” That Herod may have authority over the people under his rule. But Jesus is the Lion of Judah and he is warning Herod the fox you have no authority over me, I have ministry to do, I will cast out demons and do miracles and my ministry will be fulfilled. On the day I have appointed, when my ministry is finished and not a day before, I will come to Jerusalem. Jesus wants the Pharisees to understand he is in control, as he had said, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”

Ananias sent the temple guards to arrest Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane the night before he was crucified and Jesus says two remarkable things that would seal his death and demonstrated that he was in control and he was acting in his own authority and his power and his freedom in love. As the mob approached Peter rushed forward, drew his sword and cut off the ear of the priest’s servant. Jesus says to Peter, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. ⁵³ Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:52-53) What is Jesus saying to Peter? He is saying, Peter do you not understand that no one can take my life from me, but when it is time, the time I have chosen, I will lay it down with joy and freely give it because of my love for my people. I have chosen this, I have chosen the time, I will give myself freely – so, Peter do not try and stop this, it is my chosen plan. Jesus then heals the man’s ear and says something amazing to the mob, “When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.” (Luke 22:53) It is if as Jesus is saying, “Up to this point you thought you could have stopped me and killed me, but you did not. Do you understand why? Do you think you were in control and you in your plotting and planning would decide the hour of my death? If this is what you thought you were completely – wrong. The reason you have come and are here, is because I have chosen this as my hour, you have had no authority over me until

now and now only because I give it. Jesus wanted his disciples and all gather to remember what he had said, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”

Jesus is telling the Pharisees and guards you thought you could have killed me by now, but it just did not work out. Why not? Because you have no say in the day or hour of my sacrifice. The reason you are here now is because “this is what I have ordained.” For the truth is, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” I have chosen this time for the beginning of the end of my earthly ministry and shortly I will rise in glory and I do this because I love my sheep without reservation, I love them completely and it my joy to do this for their salvation.

Psalm 40 speaks of the coming Messiah, the psalmist writes, “I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.” (Psalm 40:8) the writer of Hebrews expanded the thought behind this Psalm, writing, “You my Father have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law),⁹ then he added, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’” (Hebrews 10:8-9) To offer sacrifice because of the law is not love, but Jesus’ sacrifice is freely given and it is an act of both joy and love. There is freedom based on joy and Jesus rejoiced to redeem us. Like a husband paying the bride price to redeem the bride as his – he sacrifices with joy and does so out of love. As Paul taught, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” (Hebrews 5:25)

Love Raised With Christ

It is time to draw things together. As we are all aware today is Easter or Resurrection Sunday and I want you to understand the amazing love of Christ that is the foundation of this day’s celebration. We go back to verse 18 to connect Jesus’ love and action. “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have

authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” For Jesus to make this statement he is either God or a lunatic. To say one has power over life and death and to say even in death I continue and have the power over life, well that, is amazing. You and I can choose the time of our death; one can crash the car over a cliff or jump off a high bridge, but no human can will themselves alive after they are dead. So, if Jesus were just a mere man to say, “I lay my life down of my own accord” is within human power although to have one’s life ended by others in a process would be extremely difficult. But Jesus does not stop there, he continues, “I have authority to take it up again” or that once he is dead, he is able to bring himself back to life. This is true freedom and power and if Jesus had the power to rise from the dead, he certainly had the power to control when he would enter the grave.

Here in my point, the resurrection of Jesus gives us confirming evidence that he had the power to lay his life down and it is the testimony of Jesus Christ of the freedom of his love. So, of all the things Easter and Resurrection Sunday means the most important is Jesus is God because only God has the power to give his life and once dead bring to back to life and this last week of Jesus’ human life that was filled with disappointment and pain and death, which are all fears of humans, is wiped away by the resurrection. In this there is the power and freedom over life and death and there is joy in Jesus’ willingness and there is his love for our salvation. Jesus resurrection is like the greatest shout ever heard to the world - I am the Messiah and I freely give my love to each of you. Do not waste this love I gave it freely and if you freely return my love you are a child of the everlasting God.

Jesus gave his life and restored his life as the last and final and only true sacrifice and with his resurrection he is shouting to every person in the world, “Come to me all you sinners that need a Savior, for I am he, I will accept you as you are and I will forgive you and I desire to love you for all eternity. Jesus says, come and know my love and know my joy. Do not wait for I have risen. Amen!