

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## Features of Christianity: The Love of Christ

This morning I am going to look at some verses in the Gospel of John which help us to understand the love of Christ. It seems to me in that in chapters 12-17 we have the love of Christ presented in the following ways:

- In Chapter 12 we see the love of Christ sacrifices;
- In Chapter 13 we see the love of Christ serves;
- In Chapter 14 we see the love of Christ sustains;
- In Chapter 15 we see the love of Christ stimulates;
- In Chapter 16 we see the love of Christ succeeds; and, finally,
- In Chapter 17 we see the love of Christ is satisfied.

Chapter 12 has three references to Christ's sacrificial death. The first follows Mary's anointing of the feet of Jesus with the very costly oil of spikenard. In verse 7 Jesus says, "Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial." This verse foretells Christ's death.

Later in the chapter, some Greeks ask Philip if they could meet Jesus and Philip and Andrew tell Jesus about them. In response Jesus says, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." (verses 23-24). These verses illustrate the death of Christ and its fruitfulness in resurrection.

Finally, in verses 32-33, Jesus refers to His own crucifixion, "'And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.' This He said, signifying by what death He would die." These verses refer to Christ's crucifixion and how the cross would ever be the means of bringing people to salvation.

These three references of Jesus to His own death, burial and resurrection show to us that the love of Christ is expressed by the giving of Himself in death upon the cross. No matter how unpalatable this may seem to some minds, the inescapable message of God in the New Testament is that His love has been manifested by the sacrifice of His own Son. Indeed the most quoted verse in John's Gospel affirms this, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Christ expresses His love by His personal sacrifice. "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). This should not surprise us. The highest form of human love is when people sacrifice their lives to save the lives of others. Christ did it for the whole world.

This sacrificial love leads us into the other aspects of the love of Christ highlighted in chapters 13-17. Chapters 13-17 of John's Gospel unfold to us the final words of the Lord Jesus before He went to the cross. These five chapters represent nearly a quarter of John's Gospel – so they must be important! Right at the beginning of chapter 13 we are presented with the love of Christ. "Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

The Lord Jesus knew exactly what lay before Him as He was about to celebrate the Passover with His disciples - the agony of the garden of Gethsemane; His sufferings at the hands of cruel men; His rejection by Israel; His crucifixion; and finally His death. At a time when we would expect Jesus to be occupied with what He would pass through, we discover a love which ministers to those He describes as "His own."

The other Gospels tell us about the debate the disciples were having at the Passover meal about who would be the greatest. It seems that in response to this the Lord Jesus gets up to wash the disciples' feet. This commonplace activity was usually undertaken by household servants.

If you can imagine for a moment what happened - the Son of God kneeling before each disciple to undertake the most menial task. The lowliness of Jesus sometimes blinds us to His greatness. This is the person who in the opening verse of John's Gospel is revealed as the God who created all things, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word

was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:1-3). He is the One whom angels worship. But here, to demonstrate how love serves, He takes the place of a servant in His own creation. Paul writes in Philippians 2: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (verses 5-7).

Peter was the only disciple who voiced his discomfort that the Person he had declared to be "the Son of the Living God" should wash his feet. Jesus explains, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Simon Peter, in his inimitable way replies, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" The answer Jesus gives is a striking description of salvation and sanctification. "Jesus said to him, 'He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean'" (verse 10). The bathing represents a once and for all cleansing - a picture of salvation.

In the plans for the building of the Tabernacle in the book of Exodus a large container of water called the Laver is described. The priests took water from the Laver to wash. Jesus uses washing as a picture of practical sanctification - the need to have our spirits and minds cleansed and refreshed by the water of the word. In Ephesians 5:25 the word of God is described as water which cleanses, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" (verses 25-27).

When Jesus had sat down again He said, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (verses 12-17).

Jesus' love was demonstrated by lowly service. It also shows us how the word of God has both a cleansing and refreshing effect upon those who receive it but it needs to be ministered in love and humility. As someone has said you don't wash the saints' feet with scalding water! We have all had the experience of wise Christian friends bringing God's word to our hearts and minds in such a way that, even when they were correcting or challenging us, we experienced the care and comfort of the love of Christ.

In Chapter 14 we see the love of Christ sustains. He was going to return to heaven but He was not going to leave His disciples without an abiding sense of His love - a love which would support them and future Christians throughout their lives.

First of all He sustains through His person, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me" (verse 1). He would be the object of their faith and be with them through times of trouble. Then His love sustains them through preparing a place, "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." He assures them that heaven is their eventual home. Next His love sustains them through the hope of His personal return, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." He promised them that He would return again. He shows us that in love He came to where we were so that we could be where He is! Added to this assurance of His life for us in heaven now and the hope of one day being with Christ, are three further aspects of how the love of Christ sustains. The first is the power of His name in prayer, "And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it" (verse 13-14). The second is the promise of the Holy Spirit, "If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (verses 15-18). The Holy Spirit sustains us in practical fellowship with the Father and the Son and one another.

The final feature of Christ's sustaining love is His peace, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (verse 27). We can know peace with God (Romans 5:1), we can know the peace of God (Philippians 4:7) and we can know the God of peace (Philippians 4:9) through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus describes a love which sustains His people by first making Himself the object of their faith, by preparing a place in heaven for them, by promising to return from heaven for them and by promising them that they would be with Him forever. In the meantime we have the power of prayer, the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of His peace. In Chapter 15 we see the love of Christ stimulates fruitfulness. "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may

bear more fruit" (verses 1-2). The Lord Jesus introduces the Holy Spirit in chapter 14. Then in chapter 15 we see the process of how Christians produce the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus is the True Vine. True Christians are the living branches. The Father acts to produce a quality of life in His children which will glorify Him. And, although not specifically mentioned here, the Spirit of God acts rather like the sap in a tree providing that living connection between the vine and the branches which results in fruit. This link is vital, "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (verses 4-5).

This fruit is further described in Galatians 5, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (verses 22-26).

In order to produce the fruit of the Spirit we need to practically abide in Christ. This means daily communion with Him through reading, absorbing and applying the word of God, by prayer and, as we have just read, by living and walking in the Spirit. As the Lord Jesus puts it in John 15, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (verses 7-8).

In Chapter 16 we see the love of Christ succeeds. This chapter describes some of the opposition the disciples would face once Jesus had returned to heaven. The extreme would be, "the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service" (verse 2). This is what happened to Saul of Tarsus who believed he was doing the will of God by trying to destroy Christ's church. Then He met Jesus on the road to Damascus and became the apostle who laboured tirelessly to build Christ's church.

The Lord Jesus never expected His disciples to be overcome by opposition but to become overcomers. This would be through the work of the Holy Spirit. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you. And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged" (John 16:7-11).

It is quite remarkable how the power of the Spirit to convince of sin, righteousness and judgement was demonstrated at Pentecost. When Peter preaches he presents Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension and then says, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:36-37). The Holy Spirit convicted them of the need of salvation and Christ's love succeeded in bringing many people to Himself and forming His church on earth.

In chapter 16 Jesus teaches us more about the ministry of the Holy Spirit. "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine. Therefore I said that He will take of Mine and declare it to you" (16:13-14).

The love of Christ succeeds through maintaining our spiritual lives through the abiding Spirit of God. Love has to be communicated. And it is through the work of the Spirit that the love of Christ is constantly affirmed in the hearts of His people. The way the Spirit of God does this relates to the past – what the love of Christ has done for us; to the present – what the love of Christ is doing for us now; and to the future – what the love of Christ will do for us. In this last mention of the ministry of the Spirit it is interesting that Jesus speak of the Holy Spirit telling us of things to come. It is the assurance of the hope we have in Christ that encourages us to become overcomers. This is, of course, by faith as John explains in his first letter, "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:3-5).

The Lord Jesus completes chapter 16 by assuring His disciples of the love of God, "for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God" (verse 27). Then He presents Himself as the great overcomer. "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (verse 33). In spite of all the opposition the Lord Jesus faced, His love overcomes all. "Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it" (Song of Solomon 8:7). We are encouraged to demonstrate the power of Christ's love in our hearts and not be overcome by the influence of sin and selfishness.

Finally, in Chapter 17, we see the love of Christ is satisfied. By satisfied I mean the love of Christ will be completely fulfilled. Everything God's love wanted to accomplish in redemption will be fulfilled. In this chapter, we see the glory of God's love in Christ, we see the glory of Christ's love for His people, and glory into which Christ's love will take them.

Chapter 17 is the prayer of the Son of God to God the Father. First of all Jesus prays for Himself, "Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: 'Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You'" (verse 1). The whole basis of the love of Christ for us is the fact that God is love. It is powerful to note that the first mention of love in the Bible is not the love of a man for a woman, but of a father for his son in the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22. The character of the Godhead, Father, Son and Spirit, is expressed in two words light and love. What Christ was about to accomplish in going to the cross was entirely consistent with that character. He came to do God's will – light was expressed. And in doing so, He manifested the love that existed between God the Father and God the Son. Christ's love for the Father is emphasised in His life of service and His sacrificial death. The Father's love for the Son is emphasised in Christ's resurrection and glorification.

But Jesus also prays for His disciples whom He had kept through His love. He prayed for them to continue to be kept in the love of God as He returned to heaven, "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept" (verses 11-12).

He also prayed that they might know the joy of His love. He did not pray that they might be taken out of the world but that they would be kept by the Father and through the word of God. They would also be Christ's witnesses. "I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (verses 15-18).

The love of Christ extended to future generations of Christians, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me" (verses 20-23).

The culmination of the love of Christ is described in verses 24 to 26, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

That great journey of divine love which began in eternity and was fully expressed in this world led back to glory. And it is the love of Christ that one day will ensure "we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

In Hebrews 12:2 we read, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Here in the John 17, as the cross loomed before Him, Christ looks on to the joy that was set before Him. We are part of that joy. Perhaps Augustine described the best response to the love of Christ when he said, "The Christian should be an alleluia from head to foot."

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