

Love Surpassing Knowledge

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Introduction.

A few weeks ago, one of my old friends from high school posed a question on Facebook. She asked, “What would happen if people actually did live on love instead of on what they ate?” She then went on to gleefully explore the possibility of all the mean people she knew starving to death, which to me kind of defeated the point, but I still thought the question was an interesting one. What if our bodies were sustained by the love others gave us? I think that it would be a pretty quick cure for this country’s obesity epidemic, for one thing. Most Americans today don’t have that many people who love them. They’re not plugged into a church like the one we have here, they’re not really close to anybody at work, and even the families that should love them are often alienated and miserable instead. It’s a tragic way to live.

As Christians, we’re largely insulated from that by the fellowship that we share in here, but even this church is not the primary reason why we would never die for lack of love. Look with me at Paul’s words in Ephesians 3:19. As some of you may have noticed, there’s been a pattern to the sermons for the past couple of weeks. We’ve been exploring the three superlatives of Christianity: peace that is beyond understanding, joy that is inexpressible, and now finally, love that surpasses knowledge. None of these are chopped liver; in fact, the peace and the joy of the Christian are among the greatest blessings that God gives us. However, not even they can compare to the love of Jesus. When Jesus was crucified by the hands of godless men, that was the greatest evil ever done, but it also left us with the greatest example of love. It shines like the sun across the gloomy landscape of human history, inspiring us, ennobling us, and calling us to Him. It is His love that makes us His. Let’s dedicate ourselves this morning, then, to knowing this love surpassing knowledge.

Christ’s Love for Others.

Scripturally speaking, there are two main senses in which we come to know the love of Christ, and the first of these is by learning about the ways He showed His love for others. For example, He demonstrated His love for the Father through **OBEDIENCE**. Jesus Himself makes a very revealing comment about this in John 14:30-31. Jesus didn’t go to the cross because He was compelled by the power of Satan. Instead, He died for two reasons. First, the Father commanded it, and second, because by His obedience to the Father, He revealed the love that He had for the Father.

As we’ve been studying in Mark recently, this was not an easy road for Jesus to walk. When He put on flesh, He also took on the animal instinct to live that all of us share. For all of us, no matter how great our faith is, unless we reach the point of uttermost physical pain, we don’t want to die. We will spend all kinds of money and all kinds of time and all kinds of effort simply to go on living. Jesus loved life no less than we do, but He knew from the very beginning that He was doomed to die for the sins of the people. He was never going to live a happy, fulfilled life and pass on with his great-grandchildren standing around the deathbed. His face was always turned toward Calvary. What a horrible way to live, knowing that every day brought you closer to a horrible, humiliating death! And yet, Jesus faithfully walked the path that led Him to that death. He did so because it was what God wanted, and He loved God enough to obey even in that.

We also see the love of Jesus revealed in the **GRACE** that He extends to us. Consider Paul’s words about this in 1 Timothy 1:13-14. Back when he was Saul, the persecutor of the church, Paul was not particularly lovable. He did not look particularly worthy of divine mercy. However, Jesus chose to be merciful to Him anyway, and the only reason why Jesus would have been merciful to Paul was because He loved Him. In just the same way, we too experience the love of Jesus in our lives when we consider the riches of His grace toward us. Our sins were the reason that Jesus had to die, but even though we were responsible for such dreadful agony on His part, He doesn’t hold it against us. Instead, He uses His power for our good. He allows any sinner, no matter how great the sin may be, to call on Him through baptism and be forgiven. Likewise, once we become Christians, He constantly intercedes for us in heaven, even though we engage in the same ridiculous sins, year after year, decade after decade. He doesn’t do that because it’s His job, as though He were some kind of heavenly customer-service rep. He does it for us because He loves us and desires most of all to bless us.

We even see an expression of the love of Jesus in His **CHASTENING**. He tells us that we can expect to be chastened by Him in Revelation 3:19. This chastening occurs in two ways. First, Jesus chastens us through His word. Not everything in Scripture is pleasant. Often, the word is very blunt when it warns against evil, and many of those warnings hit close to home. Jesus didn’t put all those condemnations in because He wanted to guilt us into misery. Instead, He tells us those things for our good, so that we can repent. The correction of the word is evidence of His love.

Second, Jesus also chastens us by allowing us to face the evil consequences of our own sins. Remember, brethren, sin is sin because sin is bad. When we violate God’s law, we not only offend Him, but we also do things that are not in our physical or our spiritual best interests. The law exists to protect us from those things. Often, though, we’re too foolish to recognize that the commandment exists for our own good, and we sin anyway. In times like that, Jesus doesn’t

shelter us from our mistakes like an indulgent parent will protect a spoiled child. He lets us face the music on our own, so that we can learn from the pain of our experience that His way is best. I can't imagine that Jesus enjoys watching His brethren suffer, even the wayward ones. However, He allows it because He loves us and knows that it's best for us.

Finally, we come to know the love of Jesus when we consider its **PERMANENCE**. Look at Romans 8:38-39. We ourselves can always fall away from service to the Lord, but provided that we remain faithful, there is nothing that can take us from Him. Our lives can fall apart around us, everyone in the world can turn against us, Satan can use every weapon in His arsenal on us, but none of it will have an effect, because Jesus is just that determined to hold on to us. He's not that way because He's a stubborn guy. Instead, it is His love that leads Him to hold on to us like that, and there is no power in heaven or on earth that is stronger than the love of Jesus. He loves us more than we can put into words. He loves us more than we can imagine, because just like it's the nature of the sun to shine, it's the nature of Jesus to love.

Christ's Love in Us.

Of course, the love of Christ isn't something we learn about just by studying the word. It's also something that we discover when we experience His love in us. The more we learn to love like Christ, the more we learn what His love is like. Not surprisingly, we learn more about love through **OBEDIENCE**. Jesus Himself puts this quite plainly in John 14:23-24. In the religious world around us, there are all kinds of people who make noise about how they aren't concerned with all those boring old rules in the Bible. They just want to love Jesus. Brethren, that's a bunch of nonsense. Love and the commandments aren't opposed. They work hand in hand. If we love Jesus, we will keep His commandments, and the more we love Him, the more we will become dedicated to doing everything He said. On the other hand, if we don't keep the commandments, no matter how much fuss we make about loving Him, our actions prove that we really don't.

This is something that we need to remember in our daily battles against sin. When we face some temptation, we shouldn't be thinking about how we want to give in or how God will punish us if we disobey. Instead, we should be thinking about Jesus and how much He's done for us and how much He loves us. We should be thinking about whether we love Him back. If we do, if we love Him too much to hurt or disappoint Him, we'll make the right choice every time. If we ever reach that point, we'll understand why Jesus went to the cross, because His love will then be in us.

We also come to know the love of Jesus through **LOVE FOR EACH OTHER**. Jesus points us in this direction in John 13:34. The subject under discussion here is not our love for people generally. Instead, this is about our love for other Christians, and what an intimidating bar this sets! We know how much Jesus loves the brethren, because He gave His life for every one of us. Every time we greet another disciple, we're talking to somebody whom Jesus loved enough to come down from heaven and die for. That same amazing, astonishing love is the love that we are to have for every Christian we know all the time. Friends, there are times when I don't even want to **LIKE** other Christians, when some brother says or does something that gets under my skin, but this passage says that even at their most annoying, I need to love them enough that I would gladly die for them on the spot. When I think about the difference in this between where I am and where I need to be, it makes me shake my head. If I'm going to love other Christians the way Christ did, I've got a lot of ground to cover. I'd guess we all do. I know I won't get there before I leave this life, either. But bit by bit, as we struggle onward toward that goal, as we slowly, painfully train our hearts to love, when we learn the lessons of putting others before ourselves, that's when we can look into ourselves and see just a glimpse of Jesus.

In marriage, this ought to carry over into the **LOVE OF HUSBANDS FOR WIVES**. Paul brings this up in Ephesians 5:25-27. It is true that wives are also expected to love their husbands, but the Scripture only teaches that the man has the honor and responsibility of bringing the love of Christ to his marriage. Just as Christ was devoted to the purity and honor of the idealized church, husbands must devote themselves to the purity and honor of their wives. Just as Christ dedicated Himself to the service of the church, we must dedicate ourselves to serving our wives. This is not just a Valentine's Day thing. This is all the time. However, as we live this way, we come to better understand Jesus' love too.

Ultimately, this search leads us to the secret of **DEATH TO SELF**. This is the path that we go down once we really come face-to-face with the love of Jesus and what it means for us. Paul describes the consequences of this in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. As we know from other passages, Paul never really felt like he had a choice about preaching the gospel. That was what his life had to be regardless of what he wanted. This is where he tells us why he felt that way. He was compelled by the love of Jesus. Jesus died for him, so He had to die to himself and live for Jesus. It's not enough for us to subordinate our actions to the love of Jesus. It's not enough for us to give our thoughts over to Him. Instead, the greatness of His sacrifice for us demands that we give Him our wills and ourselves. From that point on, we no longer live to do what we want. We become instruments of His great and loving will. We give up everything for Him because He gave up everything for us. He gave up the glory and majesty of heaven for a borrowed feed trough in a stable. He surrendered the praise of angels for the jeers and curses of an angry mob. He exchanged eternal life with God for a painful and humiliating death. The only thing He didn't give up was His love. Ultimately, that's the point we're reaching toward as disciples, where we are only concerned for God and for others, where we have given up everything but love.