

**Ephesians 3: 18 & 19; “To Know the Love of Christ”, A Sermon for the New Year
delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 2nd, 2022,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

This morning when I spoke to you from this passage I set before you the truth that there is a real experience of Christ taking place in your heart if you are a believer. And it is realized experientially by faith in Him. We thought about this together; what it meant to be rooted and grounded in Christ's love so that we might make progress in holiness. It means that you understand that you are separated unto God's purposes for your life. That is, personally, as you live your life, you are living it unto Him. But it also means that you are coming to better understand how to live your life in connection with Christ's Church; that is loving the saints. You are willing to learn what it means to interact with other believers, and you are learning what it means to show love to them all, in practical terms.

When you are consciously striving to do this as an individual who is a part of a local church, you will come to know more and more of the width, the length, the depth, and the height of Christ's love; that is, as Christ is pleased to reveal it to you, so that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. In this regard, our text says that He is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think, according to the power that works in us. And so I would like us to ponder these precious spiritual truths and realities together for a few minutes before we partake of the Lord's Supper.

1st of all – I would like us to think together about the exceeding breadth and width of Christ's love which goes beyond knowledge.

Paul is telling us that the love of Christ is the greatest blessing that can be bestowed upon God's children in this present life. And, apparently, by the way that Paul words it in this passage, it is largely something which we can experience, only in relation to Christ's Church. Therefore, we should understand, that as we grow in our knowledge of Christ's love, we will not only be able to love other Christians, but we will be able to give our ourselves to doing God's will and proving the wisdom of His loving purposes towards us. We saw this fulfilled in the apostle Paul's life, in his experience of being in prison. We saw how wonderful and practical this experience of the love of Christ was to him. It was this that sustained him during the whole time of his imprisonment. It was the love of Christ which motivated him to preach the gospel there. It was the love of Christ which gave him a vision for the salvation of people around him wherever he was.

2nd Corinthians 5: 12-16 – “For we do not commend ourselves again to you, but give you opportunity to boast on our behalf, that you may have an answer for those who boast in appearance and not in heart.” “For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; or if we are of sound mind, it is for you.” “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.” “Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.”

So you see here how the love of Christ was Paul's greatest motivating factor in his living his life to God. He was not going to live to himself, but for Him who died for him and rose again. But Paul's conception of this went far beyond himself alone; it went out to all the brethren. It went out to all the world in his preaching of Christ. In other words, there was great breadth, great width in the love of Christ, which was active in His mind and heart, and this enabled him to live in the way that he did, to the glory of God. He thought often of many people in the church of Ephesus that He loved with the love of Christ. And he thought of the many people that he ministered to in many places. He did not want to commend himself and the others with him who preached the gospel, but he says that he wanted to give them an opportunity to boast on their behalf, so that they might have an answer for those who boast in appearance.

Here was where the love of Christ, the broad love of Jesus Christ, comes into play; it is much more than appearances in people. People, it seems, who do not understand this principle of the love of God being broad, boast in appearances; that is in human wisdom, strength, or beauty. But the Christian

who is walking in the Spirit knows that it is Christ in him who is the hope of glory. It was Christ in him who gave him help, who gave him strength, who was his righteousness, who enabled him to minister to other people and thus he was able to help other believers and minister to them in the context of God's purpose for their life. Sometimes, Paul says, he was beside himself in his concern for the salvation of sinners and the upbuilding of the saints. He was that way, on God's behalf, he says.

Other times he was very calm and composed and of a sound mind, and he said to those at Corinth, this was for them. It was breadth and width of the love of Christ which enabled Paul to preach the gospel to every creature and fulfill his ministry. It was the love of Christ which enabled him to not be impressed with men according to their fleshly strengths or worldly wisdom. He says in verse 16 that this is the right mindset for all Christians, not to regard anyone according to the flesh, because, he says, we know Christ thus no longer. That is, that since Christ was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven, He was glorified now. And in His being glorified, He was given all power in heaven and earth; to rule and reign over all men in all places in all generations, until the end of the world.

Think about John chapter 17, verses 1 and 2 – “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, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.” So you can see from these words that the Son was given authority over all flesh, and He will give eternal life to as many as have been given Him by the Father. This ought to convince us of the breadth of the love of God. It extends to all of God's elect people. And yet, in relation to the outworking of God's divine decree of saving His elect, the gospel is given out freely to all the world through the apostles and all of the Church of Jesus Christ. This shows forth God the Father's love, and His generosity in pledging Himself to save all sinners who will trust in His Son.

The love of Jesus Christ for sinners is very broad. John 6: 37 – “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.” “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all he has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.” Ah, this took very great, a very wide and very broad love between the Father and the Son, between the Triune God, for and all of God's elect people, to accomplish this! The love of Christ is wide enough, it is broad enough, to encompass all of His saints at any given time, both in heaven and earth, and in all generations. We see this from the way that Paul prays in verse 14 of chapter 3 of Ephesians – “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named...”

So Paul had this great realization, of the exceeding greatness of Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and he had the further realization that together as a church, we must be rooted and grounded in His love. He knew that this truth sets the stage then, for our real participation in the purposes that the Father and the Son and Holy Spirit have for the saints; both individually and together, in relation to the forward progress of Christ's kingdom. This is how it was for Paul, when he prayed for the church at Ephesus. And this is also the way that it works out for us as a local church in our lives. We need to think more about how wide the love of God is.

2nd – Let's think of the exceeding Length of the Love of Christ which goes beyond knowledge.

This word length, I believe, should lead us to reflect upon the reality of great lengths that our Lord went to, in procuring our salvation, and the great lengths of patience He exercises towards us in teaching us the holy way in which we ought to walk. It took great love to procure our salvation, and He took pains to teach His disciples about how to love one another, during the time of His earthly ministry. Turn with me over to John chapter 13, verses 1-17. “Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” “And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray Him, Jesus knowing that

the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself.”

“After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.” “Then He came to Simon Peter.” “And Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, are You washing my feet?’” “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.’” “Peter said to Him, ‘You shall never wash my feet!’” “Jesus answered him, ‘If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.’” “Simon Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!’” “Jesus said to him, ‘He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you.’” “For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, ‘You are not all clean.’”

“So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, ‘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.” So we see here that Jesus having loved His own who were in the world, He continued to love them all the way to the end of His ministry, and the end of His life.

In what way? In the way of lovingly serving them in their personal need to have their feet washed. His act of taking the basin and the towel to wash their feet was necessary in order that He could show them what He would continue to do for them spiritually all the way through their lives, even after He had accomplished redemption on their behalf, by going to the cross. They were clean already through the word that He had spoken to them, but they were going to need to be cleansed from the sins that they would commit in mind and thought, and even sometimes in deed, every day. He was telling them that He would do this means of His cleansing them with the application of the efficacy of His blood shed for them. This would be a part of the Holy Spirit’s ministry to them, based upon His intercession for them. He would cleanse them from all defilement of flesh and spirit.

The length of Christ’s love was shown in this wonderful way for them, at the time when He went to the cross. He would lay down His life for them there, in love. And it would be further shown to them after His resurrection, in the time when He would take His seat at the right hand of the Father, where He ever lives to make intercession for us. Christ does this out of love. Not only did He do this as an example to them, as what they should do for each other in that time period of the apostles lives and ministry. He did it as an example for all believers in every generation of Christians all through the Church age, ourselves included.

Christ gave us this example that we might learn by His grace, to serve one another in love. Our love for other believers must suffer long, be patient and kind, even as His was. Even as He laid down His life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. (1st John 3:16) “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us.” “And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

3rd – Let’s think about the Depth of the Love of Christ which goes beyond knowledge.

In thinking about this, I believe that we should think about how Christ’s love reaches to His people at all of the lowest points in their experience. Sometimes, when a believer falls into sin, they wonder if they will be forgiven for that sin. But turn with me over to Psalm 130, verses 1-4. David says here – “Out of depths I have cried to You, O Lord; Lord hear my voice!” “Let Yours ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.” Well, what is he crying about? He is crying about his sins. For he says in verse 3 – “If You, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?” “But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared.” So, we must ask, what gave David that kind of confidence in prayer, that his sins would be forgiven? It was because He knew God’s love to his soul, and to his heart, because of Christ the Messiah, who was his Redeemer. Psalm 19, verses 12-14. “Who can understand his errors?” “Cleanse me from secret faults.” “Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.” “Then I shall be blameless, and I

shall be innocent of great transgression.” “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.”

Christ was David’s Redeemer because He loved him and gave Himself for him. Look also over at Psalm 56, verses 8-11. David says here – “You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book?” When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me.” “In God (I will praise His word), in the Lord (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid.” “What can man do to me?” Now, the reason that David could praise God and trust in God was because God was for him. He was a justified man. God did not impute his trespasses and sins to him. All of his transgressions were covered by the blood of Christ.

God, it says here, numbered all of his wanderings, took notice of all of his tears and put them in His bottle. This means that he remembered the things which caused David, His elect child, grief and pain and stored them up in His great heart. For God knew, that because David was His was his elect child, that He would continue to do him good all through his life. He will do the same for you, dear Christian. And so, let us come down to the front now, and observe the Lord’s Supper together.

4th – Let’s think together of the exceeding height of Christ’s love which surpasses knowledge.

I believe that “height” here in our text refers to the greatness of Christ’s love to reach to those things which go beyond our understanding; why God permits His saints to suffer and to die at the hands of persecutors, and other very difficult things like this. His love is right there with you during such times. And really, we can say that “height” refers to Christ’s ability to show His love to His people during any of those times when they experience anything which goes beyond their understanding; in those times when they might be tempted to ask the question: Why?

Turn with me over to Romans chapter 8, verses 35-39. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” “As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ “Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” “For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, or things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which in Christ Jesus our Lord.” You can see the greatness of the power of Christ’s love which shown towards His people in times of persecution. They are, during such times, more than conquerors through Him who loved them. Nothing can separate them from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Therefore, dear saint, when you are troubled by beholding awful things coming to you or to those whom you love, remember that Christ’s love is right there with you, in your heart and in your mind, to uphold you. Hebrews 13: 5 – “For He Himself has said – “I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” “So we may boldly say: “The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear.” “What can man do to me?” This is why Christ laid down His life. Yes, it was for our sins, to bear them in His body on the tree. But it was also so that by His grace we can experientially know His love to us when all in this life seems lost. It will be that His love which shall sustain you, and His grace will most certainly be sufficient for you. His love will go beyond knowledge, but You will most certainly experience it because of He will be faithful to show it to you. And it will be more than enough; exceeding abundantly, beyond all that you can ask or think.