

The Almighty Power Of Christ's Sacrificial Love

John 18:1-9

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Rev. Greg L. Price

The power of Christ's sacrificial love grows in the lives of those He has saved the more they look upon that love in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The more a Christian gazes at the power of Christ's sacrificial love in His life and ministry, the more a true Christian will reflect the power of Christ's sacrificial love in his/her own life. I submit that we lack the love of Christ in our hearts and lives because we have not stood long enough in front of the mirror of Christ's love. There is one more illustration of the power of Christ's sacrificial love that I want to leave with you before moving on.

Dear ones, the love of human beings is powerless to save and to rescue the one loved from the danger of the most fearful enemies. The love of human beings will no doubt try to protect and preserve the one loved. It may ache and hurt for the one loved. But in the final analysis, the love of human beings cannot actually save the one loved from those enemies that would destroy his soul.

However, the power of Christ's sacrificial love is not a mere wish or desire. The power of Christ's sacrificial love does not simply ache for the one loved when assailed by those who would besiege his/her soul. The power of Christ's sacrificial love actually accomplishes in the life of the Christian what that love intends to accomplish: the complete and everlasting salvation of everyone who embraces Christ and His perfect righteousness by faith alone. The power of Christ's sacrificial love actually rescues every Christian from the guilt and condemnation of sin, and from the enemy of his soul, Satan. The power of Christ's sacrificial love crushes the proud heart of man and melts the hateful affections of man. The power of Christ's sacrificial love will produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit in

the life of every Christian. The power of Christ's sacrificial love will discipline every child of God with trials and affliction, but it will never place the child of God in a trial or affliction so severe that he/she would not be able to endure or bear it by God's amazing grace. The power of Christ's sacrificial love opens what no man's love can open (the very gates of heaven to an undeserving sinner) and closes what no man's love can close (the very gates of hell to the same undeserving sinner).

As we shall see from our text today, not even the darkest moments of Christ's life could alter the power of His sacrificial love for His weak, frail, and sinful disciples. In fact, the power of Christ's sacrificial love shines the brightest against the dark backdrop of the weaknesses and sins of His disciples. For our sins reveal that He does not love us because we are loveable. He does not love us because we are holy and deserve His love. Nor does He love us because we first loved Him. He loves us because He chose from all eternity to set His love upon us as guilty, undeserving sinners. It is all of grace and has nothing to do with us. And He set that everlasting love upon the ungodly knowing the worst about us, and yet determining in love to save guilty sinners from the wrath and condemnation which we abundantly deserve and working in love to conform us to His glorious image through all the trials and affliction of this life.

Let us explore the power of Christ's sacrificial love from our text in the following main points: (I) The Power Of Christ's Sacrificial Love In The Betrayal Of Christ (John 18:1-6); (II) The Power Of Christ's Sacrificial Love In The Preservation Of His Disciples (John 18:7-9).

I. The Power Of Christ's Sacrificial Love In The Betrayal Of Christ (John 18:1-6).

A. As our text begins, Jesus has just finished His final words of instruction to His disciples after having eaten the Lord's Supper with them (John 13-17). It is late at night, and the Lord knowing the immeasurable trial and suffering He is about to experience (in the hours to come), leads His disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane (a frequent place of prayer for them) for a time in which to pour out His heart to His Father as He faced the horrors of God's righteous wrath that He would suffer on behalf of sinners (chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began).

B. We are told in the three other parallel Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) that Jesus walked farther beyond the point where He left three of His disciples that He might pray alone there in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:41-44). He came back to find Peter, James, and John fast asleep. He told His sleepy disciples, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:40-41). This happened 3 times. The Lord then told His disciples that they had slept away the opportunity to be prepared for the temptation that was now upon them, for the betrayer had now arrived at the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:45-46).

1. Dear ones, is temptation to sin an enemy (a betrayer) to you? If you and I believed there was an enemy of flesh and blood just waiting for us to let down our guard, so as to attack us or our family when we were most vulnerable, I dare say, we would be very vigilant and watchful. Does our lack of desire to watch and pray with the Lord Jesus daily, reveal to us that we really do not believe that the temptations of the enemy are as real as the temptation that awaited the disciples the night in which the Lord Jesus was betrayed? If we take temptation to sin seriously, we must continue to watch and pray that it not surprise us and overwhelm us. The Lord makes it clear to us, that temptation to sin is

always just around the corner, so that we not rest or let down our guard in regard to sin, lest we be overcome by it as were the disciples here. Take heed when ye think ye stand, lest ye fall.

2. Let me ask you, who trust alone in Christ alone: If you knew in advance the specific temptations that you would face tomorrow, would you spend more time in prayer preparing yourself for those temptations today? I dare say you would. But the Lord has not given us that specific information because He desires us not only to be prepared for crisis situations that lie ahead of us, but to make prayer and communion with our God as necessary to us as our daily food. People are always ready to cry out to God when there is a crisis, but only Christians can love and enjoy the sweet communion with Christ that comes from spending time with the Lord when there is no immediate crisis of which they are aware. Even more important than preparing for the next temptation that is to come into our life, let us use prayer as a means of enjoying that blessed fellowship and communion with our Savior. As we do so, we will be truly prepared for the temptations that come our way.

D. Now immediately as the Lord spoke these words to His disciples, Judas appeared. But he appeared not alone (John 18:3). Where our English version states that Judas received a “band” of men, the Greek word used here specifically refers to a Roman cohort, which was about 600 soldiers. In addition to these hundreds of armed Roman soldiers, there also joined them Jewish “officers” of the temple police (“great multitude” Matthew 26:47). They came not empty-handed, but were armed to the teeth, as if they were ready for a battle (John 18:3; “with sword and staves [clubs—GLP]” Matthew 26:47). It is amazing how many men were sent to take one man. Perhaps the chief priests and the Pharisees feared an uprising from Christ’s followers. Or perhaps because they were well aware of Christ’s miraculous power that raised the dead, healed the sick, and multiplied food, they believed it necessary to have a

mighty company of soldiers in order to arrest Christ.

1. Now when Judas and this horde of soldiers arrived in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ did not flee. Ordinarily, as a means of self-preservation, God tells us to flee persecution, if it all possible (Matthew 10:23; Matthew 24:16). However, the Lord does not flee, but goes out to meet those whom He knows will be the human agents of such great bodily suffering (John 18:4).

2. Here is a remarkable demonstration of the power of Christ's sacrificial love. Why did he not flee? Because of the infinite and everlasting love He had for undeserving sinners like you and me. Dear ones, Christ did not go blindly out to meet this great multitude. He knew what was coming, but He willingly and voluntarily submitted to the cruel torture that was about to be heaped upon Him. It was the power of His love for undeserving sinners chosen from all eternity that led Him to drink of that bitter cup of suffering. When the multitudes in John 6:15 would have forced Christ to be a political King reigning in Jerusalem, he withdrew from them and hid Himself (because this was not the will of God), but when the multitudes of soldiers came to arrest Him, mock Him, spit upon Him, beat Him to a bloody pulp, drive a crown of thorns into His skull, and hang Him upon a cruel cross to slowly die, He willingly offered and humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (because this was the will of God). That's the power of Christ's sacrificial love for you He has loved and saved.

E. I just stated that Christ was not taken captive against His will, but voluntarily out of an infinite ocean of love became the sacrificial lamb for His people. There is not a better demonstration of that fact than what now follows when Judas and the hundreds of soldiers appear to arrest Jesus. What an awesome display of the divine power of the Son of God we see here in John 18:4-6! Jesus asks who they seek, to which they respond, "Jesus of Nazareth." The Lord then replies, "I am he." As soon as

the Lord says, “I am he” (literally “I AM”), hundreds of the best trained soldiers in the world, who are armed for battle, helplessly fall backwards like a row of falling dominoes. If these soldiers had questioned in their minds why it took so many of them to arrest one man, it became very clear that they were not forcing Christ to do anything against His will. He was voluntarily laying down His life a ransom for many. Why? Because of the everlasting love wherewith He loved His own. That’s the power of Christ’s love. It forces the enemies of God to the ground to prove that no man took His life from Him, and yet the power of Christ’s sacrificial love saves helpless sinners by His voluntary sacrifice for them.

1. Christ literally said, “I AM”, which is the divine name by which God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). God told Moses to tell the Israelites that “I AM” had sent him to powerfully deliver them from Egyptian bondage. Here the power of Christ’s deity as the great I AM is manifested for all to behold (see also John 8:58).

2. The Lord Jesus could have destroyed these soldiers on the spot. He could have opened up the earth to swallow all of these soldiers, as He did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who rebelled against the authority of God that was given to Moses (Numbers 16:31ff). The Son of God could have consumed these soldiers with fire from heaven, as He did the two consecutive companies of 50 soldiers, who came to take Elijah by force (2 Kings 1). But instead He reveals His power to destroy them all, but yet willingly lays down His life for His disciples He has loved from all eternity.

3. Dear Christian, that is the very power of Christ’s love that was manifested for you at that very moment in the Garden of Gethsemane. You whom He love and would suffer the curse of God to save were upon His heart and in His mind as He showed His divine power to destroy His captors and as He showed the power of His sacrificial love to willingly drink the bitter cup of suffering in order to save you.

II. The Power Of Christ's Sacrificial Love In The Preservation Of His Disciples (John 18:7-9).

A. After these humiliated soldiers begin to pick themselves up from the ground, the Lord asks them again who it is that they seek. And again they respond that they are looking for Jesus of Nazareth. It seems to me that if they had truly understood the power of God that was just displayed before them, they would have not repeated the same answer at this point. Again the Lord declares, "I am he", or literally "I AM." This time the Lord restrains His power and leaves them in their obstinate unbelief. But note the power of Christ's sacrificial love for His disciples at this point.

B. In spite of the holy wrath of a righteous God that He was soon to suffer and in spite of the bodily suffering He was about to experience at the hands of these soldiers and officers, His everlasting love was firmly fixed upon His disciples (and upon you who are His disciples). For Christ continues in John 18:8: "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." Why? John 18:9 provides the reason why the Lord said, "Let them go their way." Christ's answer comes from His prayer in John 17:12. Do you see the significance of John 18:9? The Lord was preserving and protecting His disciples from a temptation that (theoretically) would have destroyed their faith had they also be taken captive and been crucified along with Christ at that time. They were not spiritually prepared, nor had they grown in the faith to such an extent that they could have endured such a trial. You will recall that these very same disciples of Christ had just three or four hours earlier stated along with Peter that they would never forsake the Lord, even if it meant dying for Him (Matthew 26:35). But here we see the sad reality of the weakness in which we all share. We speak well by way of our profession. We may even mean well, but oh how weak we truly are when facing the onslaught of trials and afflictions

that come our way.

1. What a remarkable demonstration of the power of Christ's sacrificial love. For now faced with a trial of faith which Christ knew His disciples were not ready to bear, He delivers them from that trial in order that their faith be not destroyed. They could not withstand the test before them, but Christ would withstand it for them. "Let them go. Take me."

2. Couldn't the Lord have given the disciples the grace to withstand temptation and persecution for Christ's sake at that precise moment? Absolutely! But the Lord Jesus reveals to us the power of His sacrificial love in that He will not put any of His sheep into a situation that would try them beyond what they were able to bear at that precise moment (for Christ has promised that He will not lose even one of His sheep, John 6:39). Not only does the Lord pray for Peter (and for every Christian) that their faith be not destroyed, but our Savior here assures us that He will not put us in any trial where our faith would be destroyed.

3. What is interesting about the words of the Lord here in John 18:9 is that nearly all of these very disciples did eventually die violent deaths at the hands of their persecutors. They were presently not ready to do so, but later on by God's grace and at God's appointed time, they would be ready to do so. The Lord did not place His disciples into that situation until they were prepared to face that trial in fulfillment of the promise in 1 Corinthians 10:13. We saw in the previous sermon that the Lord lovingly chastens and disciplines every child that belongs to Him for their good, even at times with severe discipline that feels like a whip. But here we see that God's loving discipline never ever puts us into a trial, affliction, or tribulation that will destroy and abolish the faith of His dear beloved children. In fact, He will sooner remove you from such a trial, affliction, or tribulation, than allow you to pass through it. That's the power of Christ's sacrificial love.

4. Are we stronger than these disciples of Christ? Are we able

to face the trials of faith in our life better than they? No, we are as weak and frail in our flesh as they. We too have lips of brass, but feet of clay. But the Lord comforts all who will look away from their own sins and look away from their own works of righteousness to the forgiveness and righteousness of Christ that He will not lose even one of those who come to Him in faith alone. Dear ones, your faith in Christ may be weak a times. You may struggle with certain sins throughout the week. You may face the onslaught of the enemy who seeks to devour you and to destroy your faith. But the Lord Jesus in the power of His sacrificial love says, "Let these go their way for I will not lose even one who embraces Me as his/her only hope of eternal salvation. I have suffered God's infinite wrath in order that I might set free all who trust in Me." This is the power of Christ's sacrificial love.

5. Is the power of Christ's sacrificial love effective in your life in standing for His truth when compromise would be easy, in spending time in prayer when there is so much to do, in reaching out to the lost, in showing mercy to the needy, in loving and pursuing the peace, purity, and unity of Christ's Church, in laying down your life for the brethren? The power of Christ's sacrificial love was not only spoken, it was powerfully demonstrated in His life. Dear ones, we are so much like Peter and the other disciples in our profession of love for Christ and our brethren, but is the fruit of that sacrificial love being produced in our lives? The Lord Jesus will test the quality of that love for Christ and for one another (that's guaranteed), but He will never do so beyond what you can endure (that is also guaranteed). May the power of Christ's sacrificial love be more than mere words, may it be seen in our lives, in our families, and in our Church.

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