

The Standard: Love Like This

Date: January 28, 2018

Scripture: John 11:17 - 43

God in heaven, we're thankful we get to gather and worship you. Jesus, we make this morning about you. This is about knowing you, about seeing you, about being changed into your likeness. God, I pray for every person here. I know some of us come with all types of religious baggage and some of us come having never experienced the nearness of God in our real lives. So I pray that today you would awaken us and transform us. We pray that today, you would build a church that looks like Jesus. In Jesus name, Amen.

LOVE LIKE THIS

"My mom gave birth to a legend." I saw that once on a t-shirt in a store. It was a little kid t-shirt emblazoned with, "My mom gave birth to a legend." We dress our kids in statements like this. Little girl t-shirts proclaim "supermodel" or "princess;" little boy shirts say, "chick magnet." Recently, I saw one that said, "I can't hear you over the sound of my own awesomeness." It might be kind of cute to wear a shirt like that if you're 3, but it's a little less cute if you're 13, and even less cute if you're 23. And it's just downright awkward if you're 43. The older you get, the more ridiculous those shirts become.

Sociologists tell us that we live in the most self-absorbed generation in U.S. history. In the 1950s, the average American family displayed three photos in their home: a wedding photo, a school photo, and then sometimes a military photo. Things have changed since then. Today, the average American family has 85 pictures of themselves on display in their own house. A one-year-old kid in the United States has more images of himself than a 17th century French King. The truth is, we are a little self-obsessed. The younger generation spends an average of 32 hours a week on media and social media. Researchers call this the narcissism epidemic.

Sometimes this self-obsession is very obvious. Kanye West says things like, "I am the number one human being in music." His opinion is that any other person that's living or breathing is number two. He goes on to lament, "My greatest pain in life is that I will never be able to see myself perform live."

Sometimes our self-absorption is as overt as this, but most of the time it's subtler. Yet it exists in every one of us. In fact, it's the air we breathe in our culture. Most of the time we don't even realize the degree of our own self-absorption, but it can be seen. It's that obsession you have with your hair. You stand in front of the mirror to check it and fix it and look at it again and again. Or maybe it's your compulsion to check your phone. You feel like you always have to be in the know and up-to-date, so you check this media or that outlet again and again and again. Or maybe you're one of those individuals that dominate 85 - 90 percent of conversations. Someone is pouring out their heart or telling you about their desires, and, without even realizing it, you plow right in and start talking about yourself...again. No matter what the other person is saying, you have an incredible gift to navigate the conversation back to you.

The danger is, that when we're like that, we don't see it. Preacher Tim Keller said, "We are so instinctively and profoundly self-centered that we don't think we are." We are so self-centered, that we don't even think we are. This is the environment in which we live. And the danger of this condition is that it becomes easy to start seeing people as only objects in the way of somewhere you want to go or something you want to do.

Recently I took my wife away on a little getaway. We went to a really nice hotel and I spent extra money to get a very nice room. We get to the hotel, check-in, go up to the room, and I notice it is not the hotel room I paid for. It's a standard small room and I paid for a suite. So I go back downstairs to sort it out. I say, "I need to speak to a manager. I think there was a mistake." So the manager comes. He's a very nice man in his suit. I say, "Sir, I paid extra for a better room. See, here's my receipt right here. I paid extra, but the room you're giving me is a lot less money than the room I paid for, so either give me a refund or give me a better room, but I'm not going to pay the extra price for the smaller room." I'm talking through this with him, explaining, "I booked two weeks ago... I was well prepared. I planned ahead..." And the manager responds, "I'm sorry. There's nothing we can do. That's the way that you booked it... You didn't do this right or that right. Or you didn't jump through this hoop." So I counter, "No, no, you don't understand. This is your mistake, right?" We're going back and forth and I'm trying to be respectful, but as we continue to talk, in my mind, I watch as he becomes just an object. I'm no longer thinking about him as a person. I'm not thinking about his feelings or his family or his story. I am just seeing him as a roadblock between me and justice.

Have you ever been there before? Where a person becomes an object? Perhaps you're driving in your car and someone cuts you off. And now they are no longer a human in a car, they are a Honda Civic that must get out of your way. They are just an object between you and getting to work on time. And you're screaming at them as if they could hear you, "#1@!%, you idiot!

Or perhaps it's the waitress who messes up your order. You wanted it over-easy. She gave you scrambled. When you get the order, you're upset. Suddenly she's no longer a human being with kids and a job and a life, she's just an object between you and the breakfast you wanted.

It happens in our minds without us even knowing. They just become objects. A telemarketer calls on the phone and they're not a human being. (Half the time, they're actually not even human, but when they are real, we don't treat them that way.) They are just an object in the way of my comfort and my peace. Often, even the nicest people in the world will get on the phone with a telemarketer and you'd think they were talking to Satan. There's no conscience anymore. They blast, "Never ever call me again! How dare you!" Click. To us, they are not a human. They are just an object. And every time this happens, it's evidence of how self-absorbed we really can be.

Jesus lived in a culture that was not too different from ours. There were different cultural practices, but the same self-focus existed. In fact, in Jesus' day, if you went to a big party, you typically would be seated in order of your net worth. Those that had more money and more influence had better positions at the party than those with less money, who were given lesser positions. It was that obvious.

In that day, Emperor Augustus Caesar displayed his (gross) self-absorption in a book he wrote about himself called, "The achievements of the divine Augustus."

Three times I triumphed in oration. Twenty-one times I was named emperor. The Senate voted yet more triumphs for me, but I declined because of the victories that had already been won by me...The Senate voted thanks for me to the immortal gods. A Golden Shield was given me by the Senate on account of my courage, clemency, justice, and piety. At this time I excelled all in influence.

The Son of God comes into this environment. Jesus is the only human in history who could justly glorify himself, but he doesn't. When he steps onto the scene of humanity, he doesn't come with a parade. He doesn't come blowing the trumpets. Instead, he's born in a manger. He lives the first thirty years of his life unrecognized and unnoticed, all along knowing who he was and what he was called to do, all along knowing that he was God incarnate, the one who created the stars and the mountains and the trees and the sky. Yet he lives among humanity unnoticed. What type of self-control does it take to not announce that you're God? Yet Jesus does this for thirty years. And when his public ministry does finally begin, it begins without fanfare. He recruits poor, insignificant fisherman to be his disciples. He spends his time with the rejects of society, the people for which nobody else cares. He befriends tax collectors. He takes time to touch the lepers. And when the little kids surround him and the disciples say, "No, this is Jesus. He's the savior. He doesn't have time for children." Jesus rebukes his disciples and says, "Stop it. I have plenty of time for these kids. Bring them all to me." And he holds them in his hands and he blesses each one of them.

I love the story when the Pharisees send the soldiers to arrest Jesus. (John 7:32-46). They're told to bring him in but come back without him. And the Pharisees say, "What's the deal? Why didn't you arrest him? We gave you authority to do it. Why didn't you arrest him?" But the soldiers couldn't provide an answer, other than, "There's nobody like this guy. He's so different. Nobody's ever spoken like him before."

Kanye glorifies himself. Little kids wear 'I'm awesome' t-shirts. Everybody fights for their own attention and promotion, but not Jesus. He's more worthy of it than anyone else, and yet he looks for it less. There's something about him that is so different. I've never met anyone like him. He's driven, but at the same time spontaneous. He's tender, but at the same time never weak. He's confident, but at the same time, not at all self-absorbed. He's fearless, and yet he's humble. He is holy, and yet so approachable. There's just no one like him.

Jesus came to redefine how we interact with people. He came to change us on the inside so that we would have a divine confidence to act towards others in a radically different way. I spent all week reading dozens of examples of how Jesus interacted with people and I was flabbergasted by the glorious example he set: interacting with the rich young ruler; interacting with the Canaanite woman; interacting with the Roman centurion; interacting with a little girl who died; interacting with the woman with the issue

of blood. In all these different stories, I was just blown away by the incredible winsome glory of Jesus, but I landed on John 11 as an example of how Jesus sets a new standard for how you and I interact with others.

CARRY HOPE INTO THE MOMENT

The story begins with the news that Jesus' friend Lazarus is very sick. Lazarus has two sisters, Mary and Martha, and they're all very close friends of Jesus. Lazarus is sick, so a message is sent to Jesus to come and pray for Lazarus to be made well. But, interestingly enough, Jesus does not come right away. And by the time he gets there, Lazarus is already dead.

Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus already had been in the tomb for four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

"Your brother will rise again." Do you feel in those words the pregnant hope that he speaks? Now at this point, Martha had been waiting for days for Jesus to show up. If I were Martha, I would have been frustrated. I would have been disappointed. I would have been in a place of despair. I knew Jesus was a miracle worker. I knew he was powerful, and yet he didn't show up on time. So now my brother is dead and I'm left with this hopeless situation.

Then Jesus walks on the scene and says, "Your brother will rise again." And Martha responds, "I know that he'll rise again in the resurrection on the last day." She's thinking, "Okay Jesus, that's fine. I get it. I believe that he will rise from the dead one day in the future. I have hope in the future. I know that my brother is in heaven and one day I'll see him again. I believe all that Jesus and I have that peace." But that's not ~~what~~ (all) Jesus intended for her to believe. Look at how he responds in verse 25:

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.

Did you notice how Jesus took Martha's future hope and forces it towards a present hope? She is saying, "One day I'll see my brother again." Martha has future hope and that's important. If you've lost a loved one or if difficulties have hit you, you can confidently say, "I know there's not going to be any pain in heaven. Christ is going to wash away all my sins. He's going to give me a resurrected body. I get to live in eternity with God." That's beautiful and, if you're a follower of Christ, it's true and it's good news for your soul. That's future hope, but Jesus says to Martha, "I don't want you to live just with future hope. I'm setting a different model for you. I want you to live with present hope. I want you to live your life hopeful in the now."

Jesus lived in a time where people suffered just like they suffer today. He was surrounded by suffering, but we see, in dozens of stories in the New Testament, that Jesus carried an attitude of a present hope everywhere he went. He was always hopeful in the moment. Why? Well it builds on what we said last week. He was hopeful in the moment because he knew that God had a plan — even when he couldn't see it — and he knew that God was a good father. He knew that deep in his core. And because he knew that, it enabled him to live with a very present hope.

Some of you have despair in your soul: despair about your loved one who's far from God; despair about an illness that hasn't been cured; despair about a financial situation that you can't seem to figure out no matter how hard you try. In order to have hope, you don't have to have the answers to every question; you only need to know who God is and his motive towards you. That's the glory and the mystery of the cross. That's why Jesus said, "I am the resurrection." He was saying, "I am going to die for the sins of the world. I'm going to rise again from the grave. And I'm going to do it so that you can be cleansed of all your sin. Now you can have a confidence and assurance for all time that God is good; that he loves you; that you're forgiven; and that he is for you. So don't just have a future hope, have a present hope."

Right now you can have hope. You've been bound in fear; God wants to set you free. You've been suffering with an illness; the Lord is the one who heals. You've been battling with anxiety; God wants to give you peace. Present hope. You might think that this person or that person will never change, but God

can change any heart. Present hope. Present hope. Once you receive it and that hope gets inside you, it starts to define you. And as it defines you, it changes who you are to the people around you. This is the model of Jesus. Here's the standard: *Carry hope into the moment.*

I believe that we can be a community that is defined by hopefulness. If ever there should be a people on planet earth who are hopeful, it should be us, because we don't just have a future hope, we have a present hope. We have present hope in a God who is working right now.

All of us have moments of hopelessness. We slip, we fall, and we lose sight. Have you ever had a moment in your life when you felt hopeless and someone injected hope into your spirit? That's what Christians should do one for another. That's what you should do for someone this week.

I remember years ago, I was battling with intense anxiety. I was not sleeping well and all these different physical ailments were popping up. I don't know if you've ever done this, but I went on Web MD and found out that all of my physical symptoms were probably going to kill me. I was convinced I was going to die and not be able to raise my kids. All these terrible thoughts ran through my mind. A sentence of death loomed like a cloud over my heart and fear started to get inside my soul.

One day, I was particularly anxious. I couldn't sleep. I could barely eat. I was talking with my father-in-law on the phone and telling him how I was struggling and about all the worry, and he just stopped me and said, "Listen to me. You are not going to die!" It was like taking a needle and stabbing hope into my bloodstream, hope that said, "Wake up! You're not going to die! God's for you! He's with you! He's in you! And He loves you! He's got a good plan for you. Let hope start to come out of your soul today."

Who can you encourage with hope? Think about the office you walk into on Monday morning. Think about the people you work with at the construction site. Think about walking into your mother's house. Think about all your different interactions, the individuals and the situations. Could you be a person that carries hope? Because that is Jesus' call, that's His standard

ENTER INTO THE BROKENNESS OF OTHERS

Jesus just interacted with Martha, now he is going to interact with Mary:

Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep. When Mary had come to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." And when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept.

I don't know if you noticed this, but Mary says the exact same phrase to Jesus that Martha had said: "Lord if you had been here my brother would not have died." It was the exact same words, but Jesus' response to each of them is very different. Sometimes we think God is like a machine, cranking out the same card for every person. But the God we see here in the person of Christ does not interact with Martha the same way he interacted with Mary. With Martha, he says, "Hope. Hope. Hope. You have to hope," because Martha needed hope. But with Mary, he says, "Where have you laid him?" and he weeps, because Mary needed company. She just needed company, so he enters into her pain.

My wife has had to teach me this. Some of us men are a little stubborn in this area. My wife comes to me with a problem and says, "This is a struggle and that's a problem." And I say, "All right. Let me tell you the seventeen ways to fix that. Let me give you step one, two and three..." And after about step number fifteen, she will stop me and be like, "Hey, shut up stupid. I just want you to sit here with me...silently." So I learn, this is not a moment for me to outline my 25 reasons to hope, this is a moment for me to enter into her sorrow. This is a moment to listen. This is a moment to do what Paul said, "Weep with those who weep." And this is exactly what Jesus does with Mary. He steps into her moment.

In studying this text, one scholar put it like this:

Jesus gives Martha what we could call the Ministry of Truth. That is what she needed most in the moment. Because of His divine identity, he is high enough to point her to the stars. Then, when he gets to Mary, he gives her what we could call the Ministry of Tears. That is what she needed most in the moment. Because of his human identity, he is low enough to step into her sorrow with complete sincerity and integrity and just weep with her.

Jesus' response is amazing because we know that Jesus already knows he is going to raise Lazarus from the dead. If that was you, and you already knew you were going to raise Lazarus from the dead, and you saw Mary crying, wouldn't you say, "Hey. Hey. Hey. Don't cry. Don't cry. Don't even worry about it. Just watch this. Watch what I'm going to do." BAM. "Check it out." That's how we would be, but Jesus doesn't do that at all. Instead, knowing the miracle he's about to do, he still takes the time to enter into her pain, to feel what she feels, to hurt with her, and to weep.

That's a real encouragement, because it means we serve a God who meets us where we are. From Mary's perspective, in the moment, her pain seems overwhelming. But from Jesus' perspective, all the pain she feels is temporary. Every pain we have — whether it's an illness, fear, struggle, or relationship — it's all temporary. If you're a follower of Christ, you're going to blink your eyes and be in eternity with him. All of the pains are temporary from Jesus' perspective, yet he doesn't just write them off. He doesn't say, "You silly person, why don't you get a better perspective?" Instead Jesus is the type of God and the type of person who steps into your problems and fears, and feels them with you. He's not detached. He's not far. He feels our pain with us and with it teaches us something profound about how we are to interact with others. This is the second standard: *Enter into the brokenness of others.*

Who in your life is going through a situation or struggle, and God has called you to enter into their brokenness? Now it's one thing to enter into someone's brokenness when there's been a loss or when they've suffered something greatly, but isn't it a lot harder to enter into someone's brokenness when their broken because of their own stupid decisions. When somebody messes up their own life and they are broken, it's our tendency to sit back and think, "You deserve that dude. Your own dumb choices, that's why you're all messed up. I don't have any pity for you."

But when we study the life of Jesus, we see that he doesn't just enter into the brokenness of worthy people, he enters into the brokenness of unworthy people. We see him with the prostitute and the adulteress, and it's incredible because he enters right into their brokenness and he hurts with them. We often think that having compassion on an individual means that we are endorsing their behavior. We think that if we feel sorry for a person and enter into their pain, we're somehow endorsing the stupid decisions that they've made. But Jesus says, "No. No. That's not true." You can have compassion, but not endorse. You can feel the hurt of someone and not endorse their problems, because you're able to see who that person could be. And when you see who they could be, you can then enter into their brokenness, even if it's brokenness caused by their own decisions.

PUSH BACK THE BOUNDARIES OF DEATH

Jesus understood who the real enemy was in the situation and he reveals it to us in verses 38 - 39:

Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb... Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead for four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I know that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." And when he had said these things (here's our verse), he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." And the man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

~~Can you imagine what it would have been like to be standing at that gravesite and see a man who had died four days earlier walk out? What a rush! What an incredible moment in the scripture!~~

Twice in this passage it says that Jesus was "deeply moved." I don't usually argue with the translations of great scholars, but many commentaries agree that this particular translation is pretty lousy. When we read, "deeply moved," we think it means he's very very sad, which he was. But the text does not infer that he was only very sad. The word can also be translated as "filled with indignation" or "filled with rage."

Jesus was angry. In fact, John Calvin says this word is one that describes a wrestler entering into a contest with a hated foe. In that time, it was a word that people used to describe an animal that was snorting at a person and about to attack, like a bull or a horse. This is the word that is being used to describe Jesus. The question then becomes, who is Jesus so angry with?" Is he angry with Martha for her unbelief? Is he angry with the disciples for not stepping in and trusting him? Is he angry with the religious leaders who are standing back and watching? Who is Jesus angry with? Interestingly enough, commentators agree that he was not angry with any one of those specific individuals. If you want to understand who Jesus was actually angry with, you have to consider where Jesus aims his aggression.

Jesus was angry at death. He was angry at death and sickness and sin and brokenness. Jesus knew who the real enemy was. This is why he had such compassion on Martha and Mary and everybody else. He understood that he had come to earth for war. He had come to earth, and there is a true enemy on this planet. There is a spiritual force that would seek to blind your eyes, deceive your heart and drag humanity into hell. It is real. It is present. It is powerful. Jesus hates death itself. He hates death. In fact, in first John 1 it says this, "The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil." In John 10:10 Jesus says this, "The thief comes only to steal kill and destroy. I came that you may have life and that you may have it more abundantly."

Jesus came on a mission to extinguish the power of hell and sin and death in your life. He came with a power in his spirit to overcome sin. He became your representative, died on the cross to pay your debt, conquered sin on your behalf, rose from the dead and then took the resurrection seat of life and planted it inside of you. He put resurrection inside of you so that right now, if you're a believer in Jesus, the same eternal resurrection life that raised Jesus from the grave lives in your spirit. It's in you. Which means that you and I get to participate in the mission of Jesus to bring the dead to life. (This is sacred ground.) We get to participate in the mission of Jesus to push back the boundaries that sin and death would have on this earth.

We live in the now and the not yet. The day will come when Christ returns and we will see all things put under his feet, but in the meantime, in the in-between, in the days in which we live, we have the authority of God to see the will of God advanced on the earth. So what does this mean? It means that every time a person puts their faith in Jesus, the boundaries of sin and death get pushed back. Every time someone

accepts eternal life, every time a marriage that's on the brink of breaking up gets restored and a family is made whole, you and I — by the grace of God — just pushed back the power of death. Every time a mind is delivered from oppression and condemnation and fear and guilt, we just pushed back the power of death. Every time a poor person is helped and served, we just pushed back the power of death. Every time a sick body is prayed for and God works a miracle and their strength is restored, we just pushed back the boundaries of death. This is the sacred privilege of the believers of God. You have no idea how much power God has put in your prayers and your faith.

So we see that the standard of Jesus modeled for us is that we, the church, are called to *push back the boundaries of death*.

There is nothing more exciting in life. For some of you, your Christian life is boring. This is because you're not on mission with Jesus. You can't think of the last time you saw someone's spiritual eyes open, their heart turn to Christ, and their entire life change. They were dealing drugs and, all of a sudden, they're no longer dealing. They were sleeping around, and, all of a sudden, they stop. They were addicted and, all of a sudden, God breaks the power of addiction. Their heart starts to fill with joy. They discover God as Father. Peace starts to flood their soul. Their family tree is transformed. The great adventure of life is to *push back the boundaries of death*.

PURSUE JOY THROUGH PREFERRING OTHERS

After all the celebration and joy because Lazarus has risen from the dead, the story ends on a strange note. The religious leaders start to get insecure because Jesus is a powerhouse and his name is spreading all across the nation. They are afraid that they'll lose their authority as leaders if people come and trust in Christ. The Bible tell us that it's actually the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead that tips the scales in the minds of the religious leaders and convinces them that they must plot Jesus' murder. (John 12: 17-19)

From that day on (from that day on the day that he raised Lazarus from the dead)... From that day on they made plans to put him [Jesus] to death.

"From that day on..." So it was this miracle that led the religious leaders to plan to murder the Son of God. And you know what? Jesus knew that. Jesus knew that, if he was going to interrupt Lazarus's funeral, he'd be starting his own. Jesus knew that, if he was going to bring Lazarus out of the grave, he'd have to put himself in it. Jesus knew that doing this miracle would cost him his life. And he did it anyway. Why did he do it? Jesus modeled for us a mindset that is so challenging in our self-absorbed culture, a culture where we're obsessed with promoting and satisfying self, where we're hunting for the next comfort and always looking to add value to our own lives. In that type of society — where that's the air we breathe — the phrase that I'm about to share is almost cliché. We hear it and we think, "Yeah, my grandma said that," but its truth doesn't get into our souls. "It's more blessed to give than to receive." Jesus believed that it really is more blessed to give than to receive. He believed that there was more joy attached to sacrificing than there was in insulating his own benefits.

One commentator explained it like this:

Yes, there is a doctrine of self-denial in the Bible. We must deny ourselves sand, so we can build on rock. We must deny ourselves praise of men, so we can enjoy the approval of God. We must deny ourselves moth-eaten treasures, so we can have eternal wealth. We must deny ourselves safety among men, so we can enjoy security in God. We must deny ourselves drunkenness and gluttony, so we can become guests at the biggest longest banquet in the universe....Never, NEVER does God ask you to deny yourself a greater value for a lesser value. On the contrary, always, ALWAYS God always calls us to surrender second-rate, fleeting, unsatisfying pleasures in order to obtain first-rate, eternal, satisfying pleasures.

In other words, he's saying that the highest joy in life is not found in receiving, it is found in giving. When you learn that, you feel inspired to give because it increases your joy. That's what drove Jesus to the cross. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross." So we see in Jesus, that he was this hope-carrier. We see in Jesus, that he entered into the pain and the brokenness of others. We see in Jesus, that he pushed back the boundaries of death. But we also see in Jesus, that we must *pursue joy through preferring others*.

Pursue joy. This is the essence of the life of Jesus: *he preferred others*. This is a revolutionary way to live. It is a way that is so contrary to the self-seeking, self-promoting DNA of our culture. It is a way that says, "We will live to be a blessing. We will serve to be a blessing. We will give to be a blessing. And we will find joy in that most." Maybe you've been searching for happiness for a long time, searching a thousand different avenues to try to be happy, this person or that job. But it's always not enough. You're never going to get the highest blessing by seeking your own advantage. You only receive the highest blessing when you seek the advantage of your brother. And when you do that, you discover that it really is more blessed to give than to receive. Church, I want to do this. I want to do this with my life. I want to be a person that injects hope into every situation. That's who I want to be. I want to be a person that pushes back the boundary of death everyday, and knows how to have compassion for those that are broken. I want to be a person that really does serve others and experience the highest joy. Do you want to do this with me? What would it look like if hundreds and hundreds of us actually lived like this?

TO LIVE OUT THE LOVE OF JESUS, LIVE ON THE LOVE OF JESUS

So the question then becomes, "How do I do this?" Do I just try harder?" I know that doesn't work well for me. I find that when I try harder, I usually slip back into my own self-absorbed perspective. So how do I really live this way? The scripture teaches us that, functionally, we can't. We can't, unless something or someone radically changes our heart. Jesus did not just provide the church with the pattern to follow; he provided the church the power to follow. This is why he said, in John 13, "A new command I give you: love one another." We can't do that very well, so Jesus helps us understand how. "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Did you see it? "As I have loved you." In other words, what he's teaching us is, that before you loved Christ, Christ loved you. Before you were at peace with God, when you were enemies with God, Christ loved you. He wasn't obligated to do it. He wasn't required to do it. He chose to prefer you over himself. God chose to prefer you over himself. When the love that was displayed on the cross through the blood shed by God incarnate for your sins, when this love goes from your head to your soul, when it gets deep into your being, when you begin to experience the fact that God deeply loves you, then that love becomes a force to change you. That love becomes fuel for you to be able to love your brother. When you believe the love of God, you experience the love of God. And when you experience the love of God, you are propelled by the love of God. This is the power to live the model and the standard of Jesus.

Let me sum it up in a simple phrase: *To live out the love of Jesus, live on the love of Jesus.*

I've been praying for you all week. Praying that today is a day where he unveils his love to you in deeper measure than ever before, so that, in that love, you and I can go out and love our neighbors as ourselves.

COMMUNION

The scripture says that when supper ended, Jesus took the cup and said, "This is my blood, the blood of a new and everlasting covenant. As often as you drink of it, do this in remembrance of me." Jesus handed us his cup because he, on the cross, drank our cup. I deserved judgment. I deserved condemnation. I deserved to pay for my sins. But Jesus takes what I deserve and then freely gives me what he deserves.

Close your eyes right now. Receive the unconditional love of God. You say, "How do I know it's real? How do I know it's true?" The cross of Jesus Christ proves that he only wants your good. He's a good father. It's a broken world. It's a sinful existence and yet God has displayed his motive towards you: love, love, love. I'm praying that today he would peel back the self-absorbed perspectives that dominate our minds, that he would shed like skin off our body that layer of self-focus that so dominates our mindsets that we don't even know it. I've been praying for you and for me. That right now, we would have an encounter with God, that we would see his love and we would realize at the core of our being, that life's not about me, life's about him. And he loves me. He loves me.

Holy Spirit of God, I pray for every single one of us in the room — those that have followed Christ for thirty years, those that have not yet turned their life over to Jesus — I pray that right now you would unveil for our inner being the reality of your love for us. That we could live on the love of Christ right now. Come Spirit of God. Come Spirit of God.

I really believe that today communion is a divine encounter with God. I really believe that today is your moment that God sheds that self-absorbed perspective and you experience the love of Christ in such a satisfying way that you can now go love your neighbor as yourself. That's my prayer of faith for our church: a moment of maturity for every one of us by the encounter of the Holy Spirit.

As we say yes to communion, what we're saying is, "God, I say yes to the sacrifice of Christ. I say yes to your broken body. I say yes to your shed blood and I receive it afresh. And as I do Lord, reveal your love to me, so that I can love you and my brother the way you intended me to love." That's the prayer today. Are you ready to pray that with all your heart?

"God, today's the day. Take the blinders off my eyes and open my spirit to you. Father in heaven, we ask you for divine encounter today. We ask you that you would awaken us, transform us. Jesus, I pray that you pull back the layer of self-absorption that exists amongst all of our lives, all of our hearts, and I pray that you reveal the love of Christ in a profound and purposeful way. So we say back to you today, "Jesus, you brought hope into every situation, so will I. Jesus, you entered the brokenness of others, so will I. Jesus, you pushed back the boundaries of death, so will I. Jesus, you pursued joy through preferring others, so

will I. Jesus, you loved unconditionally, and so will I. Jesus, you gave your very life, and so will I. Jesus, let our response this morning be, "so will I" as we place our faith in you."

ALTAR CALL

If you're here today and you've not trusted in Christ, this is your moment. You say, "Justin, I'm far from God. I've heard religion, but I've never known Jesus." Today's your day to turn your life to Christ. Don't run from him, run to him. He's a Father with his arms wide open. He loves you. He doesn't reject you. He doesn't condemn you. He receives you and he transforms you by the power of his love. He'll change the things you want, align them to his will, all to make you happy. Because his glory and your good run parallel. He wants to bless you. He wants to show himself to you. He loves you like a father, not a broken father, not a selfish father, like a perfect father.

Do you need to turn your life over to Christ? Do you need to open your heart to God? Would you whisper this prayer of surrender with me right now if that's you? Just say, "Jesus, take my life right now. I surrender. I give you everything. Forgive my sin. I believe you died for me and you rose again. Right now, I receive new life. Fill me with your Holy Spirit. I trust you."