

## Title: “How He Loves”

Chris Ryan

Col. 1:13–20 & Luke 23:27–43

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### Overview:

*This last Sunday of the church year provides us an opportunity to reflect on the year and to prepare for the coming Advent season.*

### Lesson:

God loves us with a love that is unimaginable. We reflect on this love and renew our obedience to Him.

### Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

On the wall, in the home office that my wife and I share is a Bible verse from Corinthians. And in script font it says, “Let all that you do be done in Love.” It’s a verse rich in meaning but becomes even richer when we refer back to the Greek language for the word love. In English, we can use this same word several different ways to portray different meanings:

- I love my friends
- I love my wife
- God loves me

The connotation of each word is different even though the same word is used. In the Greek language, three different words are used and the one that is recorded in this verse is the most intimate, most immeasurable, and most impossible for us to fully understand and appreciate. You have probably heard the word, *agapē*, and it means the love originating from God to us. It is the word for God’s unconditional love that he bestows on us. It is the same word used in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” I don’t understand it and never will this side of heaven. Immeasurable. Complete. Unconditional. That is how He loves. Today marks our last Sunday of the church year and as we enter into Advent next week, and then into Christmas, I wanted to spend time reflecting on all of the ways that God’s love is illustrated in the Epistle and Gospel readings.

These two passages are tightly coupled; Luke describes the crucifixion of Jesus and his words of forgiveness to those who acted against Him. We can then turn to Colossians and begin to understand God’s motivation to sacrifice His son. Our passage starts with verse 13:

<sup>13</sup>For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup>in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

And then continues to describe how God’s love is manifested throughout the universe and within our lives. These are the verses that I would like to focus on this morning, and you can follow along if you want using the chair bibles or the ones on your phones. I promise you that this message won’t

be longer than any other one I have preached but it is important to sometimes slow way down and really reflect on the meaning of each verse.

Let's start at verse 15

<sup>15</sup>The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Before the universe, before even time, Jesus was and is and is to come. He has always been, just as God has always been. Just as the Holy Spirit has always been. And God loved Him, and He loved God; a love that is incomprehensible to us. And even at this time God knew what he would have to do. Even before he spoke the words of creation, He knew that Adam would fall into sin and mankind would need rescue. He knew that it would take the sacrifice of His son, to redeem us and restore us to Him.

Verse 16:

<sup>16</sup>For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

And with full knowledge of this future and the full understanding that we would reject Him, and that he would have to sacrifice His Son, he still created all things: in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. Everything was created through Jesus.

Don't miss the last three words: all things were created for him. Everything that was created exists *for* Christ; it exists to display the greatness of Christ. There is nothing - **nothing**, from the highest mountains to the deepest oceans, that was created for its own sake. It was all created to make the greatness of Christ more fully known.

Let's continue to verse 17:

<sup>17</sup>He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And after creation, God wasn't done. Through Jesus he created everything and through Jesus he continues to hold it all together. In Christ's sermon on the mount, He states that

<sup>13</sup>"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

Salt preserves and without it, especially in that time, food would spoil and rot away. In the same way we, Christians, the true church, are the salt of this earth. We are the reason that Christ continues to sustain everything. And He continues to work through us, his salt, to reach the unchurched. But He won't sustain it forever. The end will come, as recorded in 2 Peter:

<sup>7</sup>By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

We are in verse 18, now.

<sup>18</sup>And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

He is preeminent, superior, over everything and we acknowledge that; not simply because He is God and can crush us but because it is our willing response to the agapē love that Jesus exhibited when he was crucified for our sins. He is superior to us, but we rejoice in that fact, we submit to him, because we know that his love for us is so great, so immeasurable. We sing praise to him, make way for him, and pray to him, that he would be the head, the lead of our church and our lives.

We have reached the last two verses:

<sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

And God was pleased. He was pleased with the perfect obedience of Christ. He was pleased with the willingness of Christ to make his way to the cross and to be forsaken by God, his father. And we cannot even understand the pain that Jesus must have felt as he was beaten by the fists of man and whipped almost to the point of death by steel balls and sharp bones. And even though his skin hung in painful, bloody strips from his body, he willingly made his way to the cross where nails pierced through his skin and bones. But through all this he forgave those who crucified him and promised the repentant thief entry into heaven. And as he hung, dying, he experienced an unimaginable pain as he was forsaken by God. The agapē love that he had enjoyed with God and the Holy Spirit for eternity was severed completely. We may not be able to comprehend this perfect love being broken but we can understand the pain of losing a loved one, especially a family member. I still remember every detail of the events leading up to my mother's death and even after 18 years the memories still illicit pain. Or the pain a parent feels watching their child's life crumble because of drug use. Seeing the relationship disintegrate and finding that they are powerless to repair it. The deepest pains, those that hurt the most, are from the severed relationships of loved ones - spouses, parents, children, and friends. They are sourced from a loss that we are powerless to control, are powerless to reverse. And because it hurts so bad, we know that if we could reverse it, if we could restore the relationship, we would do so immediately. We would repair the damage and experience wholeness once again.

But here is the point: Jesus *could* do that; he *was* in control. He didn't *have* to die on the cross. He didn't *have* to experience the excruciating physical and emotional pain. He *could* have lived. But he didn't. He accepted the pain, he accepted the separation from God, the Father. He didn't reverse it - he voluntarily traveled to the cross in full knowledge of the consequences.

His perfect life, his blood, his separation from God, all of it, was done for us.

And this, this is agapē love.

As the church year ends, I would like to ask you to take a moment to reflect on how you have responded to this love over the past year. Have you tried to return this same love back to God by staying in constant contact with Him through daily prayer and devotions? Or, have you simply taken for granted all that he has done? And, have you tried to return this love by asking Jesus to work through you as you walk through your life? Have you been intentional about looking for opportunities where you can join Jesus in the work that he is doing? Have you given to Christ your first priority of time, money, and talents or have you offered to him that which is left over or convenient? I ask these not to demean you or put you to shame but to help you, and me, prepare for the next year. Next Sunday is the first week of Advent and it is a time of renewal, reflection, and preparation for the coming Christ. What is more wonderful than this opportunity to identify where we might have fallen short and then to recommit our first fruits of time, talents, money? Advent is the perfect time to renew our obedience, our commitment, and our love to God.

Let's pray.

In your name we pray. Amen.