

What Love Does

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command – John 15:9-17 (12-14 printed)

Background

Jesus is giving the disciples his last words before he is crucified. In this, he is doing a full download of things they need to know, need to do and most importantly, the mindset they are to have while they are doing it.

For 3 years, the disciples had been with Jesus, in close relationship with him, and at times were even given the ability to venture out “unsupervised”. From this point forward, however, things were going to be different. The lives they had come to know as the standard were going to be radically changed. Jesus was going away.

The potential for the disciples was both good and bad. Jesus had just told them that they would do greater works because he was going to the Father. If they didn't handle this responsibility correctly, however, it could have been disastrous. Jesus needed to make sure that the disciples were not just willing to hear what he was saying, but would step into the path that he had laid out for them. Similarly, he calls us to step into that same path of action, doing what he says with the heart that can only come from him.

Inside the Vine

The disciples had been following Jesus for 3 years. In their mind, they were in an apprenticeship program. As such their relationship with the Master had to be close in proximity, but they didn't understand how close Jesus was truly calling them to be.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself – it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me – John 15:4-5

For Jesus, the disciples were not just associates or apprentices. This was not a “college level course” so they could go off and start their own following or religion. They were not just closely connected with Jesus: they were to be **in** him. Jesus used the analogy of a vine and branches to demonstrate the ongoing relationship they were to have. Branches **grow out of** the vine - they are not just attached to it. Because of this, the branch cannot do anything outside of the vine. Furthermore, the

branch has to consistently rely on the vine for anything it wants to do. If that were not enough, the vine has to supply everything the branch needs to do anything.

Jesus was telling the disciples that even though he was going away, **he was not going to be separated from them**. They were to continue to rely on his word, his direction, and his filling for what they were to do. Jesus' own life was a demonstration of this – separated in physical proximity from his Father, yet having constant communion and communication with Him and only doing what pleased Him. This was the life Jesus was calling the disciples to have - one that drove them deeper into the Vine, such that you couldn't tell where one stopped and the other began.

What Is Love?

Often defining love is difficult, because we expect we know what it means and how it is expressed. We “love” puppies and ice cream, and “love” each other.

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

*“Yes Lord,” he said, “**you know that I love you**”*

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs”. – John 21:15

Peter was one of the closest to Jesus. He was one of “the 3”, the one called on to go with Jesus further than the others. Surely, because he was in this position his love should not have been questioned. Jesus however was not so much **questioning** Peter's love, as he was **calling him to it**. Peter's love was there, no doubt, but it was there at Peter's level. Jesus was calling Peter to love at Jesus' level.

Feed my lambs...

Jesus' response to Peter was a call to action. *If you love me, demonstrate it. If you love me, love what I love, and how I love it.* Peter had an opportunity at that point to go deeper in the vine, but, like puppies and ice cream, he didn't understand the love that Jesus was talking about.

Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

*He answered, “Yes Lord, **you know that I love you.**”*

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep”. – John 21:16

Jesus called. Peter responded. Jesus repeated the call to action. Peter failed to respond. Since all of this was at breakfast, Peter could have taken that to mean that he wanted him to give fish and bread to the other men. For Peter, *Jesus knowing* about Peter's love was enough. For Jesus, it clearly was not. Jesus kept calling Peter to **demonstrate his love by following his command**.

*The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, **do you [treat me affectionately] (show signs of your affection to me; befriend me; show signs of your love to me)?”***

*Peter was hurt because the Lord asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord **you know** all things; you know that I love (show signs of my affection to you).”*

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” – John 21:17

Three times Jesus, as the Vine, tried to bring the branch deeper in, but Peter couldn't see past the possibility that his love was in question. Very likely this was because the last expression he had toward Jesus was only a couple days ago when he denied him. Regardless, Jesus was unrelenting in his call to Peter. *If you love me, do what I said.*

I'll Die For You... I'll Live For You

Jesus next words to the disciples can seem a bit cryptic, and even disconcerting depending on how you look at them.

*If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept the Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. **My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.** – John 15:10-13*

The disciples, and we also, could get legalistic after hearing this. *All we have to do is do what he said and we will be fine.* He said to preach the gospel, so I'm gonna do it regardless of whether they get it or not. He said feed the poor, so I'll volunteer at a soup kitchen so I can feel better about myself.

While globally Jesus could have tied our love of him to everything he said, in this context he was trying to make a point. It was not the full counsel of the Lord he was getting to. Much like with Peter, he was calling the disciples to go deeper in the Vine - to respond to Jesus in the way that Jesus responded to the Father.

Keep my commands, and my command is this: love each other.

We tend to stop there: *ok, all I have to do is love my neighbor.* It's the “all I have to do” that gets us in trouble. For Jesus, it wasn't enough for the disciples to love each other. They needed to do it *to the degree* that Jesus did.

There's no way I can do that. He's Jesus. I cannot love like him...

This would be our expected response, yet Jesus did not suggest it – he commanded it. This was not optional for the disciples, nor is it optional for us. If this is not

enough for us, Jesus “ups the ante” and gives us the degree to which we are to love each other:

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.

Jesus said this just as he was about to make the ultimate sacrifice and die for the sins of the world. He told the disciples that night about betrayal, arrest, torture and death, and that he willingly came to the earth to express his love for the world by going through all of that.

Jesus was willing to, in human terms, be martyred for us. He said to love like each other like that.

*Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone **might possibly** dare to die. **But God demonstrated his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** – Romans 5:7-8*

Jesus gave himself to people who were not looking for his love. This is the standard he called the disciples to, and is the same standard he calls us to.

I Am Yours

Jesus was not just advocating martyrdom however. “Laying down one’s life” was actually much stronger than that, for it involved **getting involved with, spending time with and continuing with the person.** This phrase is also translated as:

- To make (or, to make/craft my life for others)
- To appoint (think, blocking out your calendar for someone else)
- To kneel down (giving others honor; submitting to others)

Laying down my life then is taking my thoughts, my focus, and my desires and putting them aside to pour into the thoughts, focus and desires of others. This is how Jesus loved, and how he called the disciples to love. In Jesus’ most critical time, right before the agony of the garden, right before the trial and torture, he poured himself into the disciples. He continued to call them deeper into him, continued to be the Vine for them, feeding and nourishing them so they could continue to bear fruit. When we do that for each other, we then love as Jesus loved.

Love In Action

Jesus called Peter to a higher standard of love – higher because it was love in action. *Feed my lambs.* He called the disciples to the same. *Love each other as I have loved you.* He calls us to that same standard, but it is not a standard that we are to attempt on our own. We can only attain it by staying in the Vine. The more we get from him, the more we are one with him, the more we will be able to fulfill his command, to love as he loves.