

---

## CONNECTED TO CHRIST BY LOVE

John 15:9-17

May 9, 2021

Would you agree that it is can be such a struggle sometimes to maintain a positive outlook on life? The pessimist in me looks at the cup and sees it half empty. The optimist in me struggles to see the cup half full. The new person I am in Christ looks at the cup of blessings and sees them always running over. With David in Psalm 23 we can say, "My cup runs over" and "Goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life."

Today we listen to Jesus tell us to remain in his love. Last week we heard Jesus tell us that we are branches connected to him as the true vine. In these words we hear Jesus plead with us to stay connected to him and the love he has for us.

Love is kind of a tough word in English. There are so many different things that love means in different situations. We think of the love that a mother has for a child or the love that we have for our mothers on this Mother's Day. Then there is romantic love, a beautiful blessing from the Lord when it follows God's plan instead of the Hollywood version. The Greek people used the word "eros" to describe romantic love. They used the word "phileo" to describe the love friends had for each other. The highest form of love was "agape." When this word is used in the New Testament it takes on the higher meaning of sacrificial love, the kind of love that we know from "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." When Jesus tells us to stay in his love he is speaking about this sacrificial love that led him to give his life at the cross for us. That's where we want to be 24/7.

Nothing will sustain you in this life more than the love that Jesus has for us. How deep is that love Jesus has for you? Our Savior tells us how deep it is with these words, "As the Father has loved me, so have a loved you. Now remain in my love." Jesus compares the love he has for you to the love that Father has for him. Could there be any deeper, more beautiful love than this? I Remember singing a song at Vacation Bible School when I was younger that described Jesus' love, "Wide, wide as the ocean, High as the heavens above, Deep, deep as the deep blue sea is my Savior's love." We cannot even begin to fathom the depths of love the Father had for Jesus his Son. That's the depth of love Jesus says he has for you.

Have you ever felt undeserving of someone's love? I have. I know that you have as well. On this Mother's Day we think of our moms and how often we did not deserve the love they showed us. Jesus spoke these words to his beloved disciples who certainly did not deserve his love. Only a few hours after Jesus spoke these words Peter, one of his closest disciples, would curse and swear

that he never knew Jesus. All the disciples would run and hide like scared rabbits. They were hardly worthy of Jesus' love, nor are we. We could spend the rest of the morning looking back at times this past week that we were unfaithful to the love of Jesus that has rescued us. We sing in one of our hymns, "What punishment so strange is suffered yonder. The Shepherd dies for sheep that love to wander."

Jesus gives us a strong command to stay in his love because his love is the only way we can have forgiveness for all the times we have rebelled against our God. He says, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love." The heavenly Father gave Jesus the command to love people like you and me by living the perfect life we could never live and dying the perfect death on the cross to save us. Jesus gladly and willingly carried out the wishes of the Father. Now Jesus gives us the command, really a gospel call, to stay or remain in his love. With these words Jesus invites us to believe with all our hearts that his love for us is the best blessing we have going for us in our lives. He says this because we will be tempted by the devil to think other things in life are more important than his life and that would be a huge tragedy.

To appreciate even more this command of Jesus to stay in his love I would direct to a prayer in Ephesians 3 that helps us appreciate what Jesus is telling us in these words. Paul offers this amazing prayer: "And I pray that you being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide, and long and high and deep is the love of Christ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you might be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God." Jesus wants you to see how wide, and long and high and deep his love is for you. If you were the only person in the world who had ever sinned, I believe that Jesus would have personally given his life just for you. Such is the depth of his love.

Because of the love that he has for us Jesus is able to say that people like us who were once enemies are now his dear friends. "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." Jesus wants you to remain in the love he has for you, because that is the only way that you can continue to be his friend and be close to him. Jesus isn't your friend because of your loyalty and friendship to him. You can only have him as your friend because he loved you and was willing to give his life for you.

No one will be a better friend to us than Jesus. A good friend will always be there for you. A good friend will listen to you. A good friend will even tell you their deepest secrets. Jesus is such a good friend for us. Your Lord and God laid down his life for you so you could be his friend. As your friend he will always watch your back and protect you with his love.

Romans 8 says, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died, more than that, who was raised to life- is at the right hand of God interceding for us. And then the important question is

asked, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Then the answer is given, "Nothing else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Jesus your good and faithful friend will even tell you special secrets. He told his disciples that they were no longer servants but friends. "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I have learned from my Father, I have made known to you." I just love reading the book of John. In John's Gospel we hear Jesus speak about his heavenly Father in such close and personal terms. Because of what Jesus said about his Father his enemies wanted to put him to death. It was Jesus who unveiled the depth of our Father's love for us when he said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Jesus takes the secret things that belong to him and the Father and make them known to us. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever."

How could Jesus ever take a person like me or you and call us his friends? He certainly could not find anything in us that could ever make us worthy to be his friends as Paul confessed, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh." Jesus tells us the reason why we have become his friends, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." The friendship you have with Jesus this morning and the love that you know he has for you has nothing to do with who you are and what you have done. Jesus chose you to believe in him. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works so that no one can boast."

This special love that Jesus has for you sustains you in this life and for all eternity. It also changes you because his love bears fruit in your life. You want to love people the way Jesus loved you. Jesus said, "I have told you this so that your joy may be complete." When you know someone loves you it fills you with joy. It makes you want to sing for joy. When Paul and Silas were beaten severely and thrown into a prison in Philippi they sang hymns at midnight. The prisoners heard them singing hymns about Jesus' love for them. In Paul's letter to the Philippians. He wrote these amazing words while he was a prisoner in Rome. Here is how he expressed his joy. "I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from this day until now." When you are around other Christians who see their cup of blessing overflowing in the love Jesus has for them, they share that joy with each other in words and songs and expressions of faith. Jesus commands us to stay in his love so our joy will be full.

He commands us to stay in his love because that will be the source of the strength and power we need to love other people, especially our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Jesus says, "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you." Where do I get the power and strength

to love other people with a sacrificial, agape love? It comes from the love that Jesus has for me. He is the vine and I am the branches. He has chosen me to bear much fruit from him.

Because you are so tightly connected to the love that Jesus has for you, you have the privilege of being children of your heavenly Father. That opens the privilege of going to your Father in prayer. Oh, how Jesus encourages us to pray to our heavenly Father not because we have earned enough points to merit his favor. No, we pray to our Father because of Jesus' love for us. Jesus offers us this assurance, "Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name." Because of this amazing close connection to Jesus' love, you will ask the heavenly Father for things that Jesus will use to draw you closer to his love. You will not ask for things that will take you away from his love. "What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear. What a privilege to carry everything to him in prayer." Your cup of blessing is running over. Jesus wants you to stay in his love. Amen.