

Advent 2021: Love – John 15:12-13

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[0 : 00] Good morning. So we have reached the Advent theme of love. We've had three weeks of lighting candles. We have sang so many Christmas songs.

! We've probably seen so many Christmas lights. We've probably gone to a number of Christmas parties. I woke up this morning to text from three different guys of just explaining some hard things that happened at Christmas gatherings. And so whether we're coming this morning with joy, with excitement of what this season is, what it means, or whether we're coming with just feelings of difficulty and tough things going on, I just hope in this time and I pray in this time that we're able to give some good focus to God's Word and to the Spirit working in our hearts this morning. So if y'all will, go ahead and turn with me to John chapter 15. John chapter 15.

We're going to look at a number of texts this morning, but this one will be the main one we start with and the main one we end with. We're just going to look at a couple of verses here to begin with, and those are verses 12 and 13. Verses 12 and 13 of John chapter 15. Let's go ahead and read it. This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. So that's our text this morning, a very short one, but an incredibly weighty one. Now let me give you a little bit of the context here, and then we'll read that text one more time with that context in mind. So here Jesus has been speaking a lot of rather intense words to his disciples. This section of scripture, looking back a couple chapters up till here, is often called the farewell disclosure. Jesus is speaking important words to his disciples. Now that he's been fully rejected by the Jews, his crucifixion is coming soon. And so he seems to be wanting to give full attention to them right now and build them up for what is coming soon.

His death, his resurrection, his ascension. Back in chapter 13, we have Jesus washing his disciples' feet and then stating that one of them there would eventually betray him. And then we have one of those very strong claims that he makes that he is the way, the truth, and the life, that no one can truly come to the Father except through him. And then midway through chapter 14, Jesus begins making it so, so clear that he is soon to be going to the Father. Look at John 14 just for a moment. Let's look at verses 15 through 21. It says there, If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever. Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.

Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

[3 : 35] I read all that this morning to show that this is a very changing time for the disciples. The Lord is explaining so much to them that he will soon no longer be with them physically, but the Spirit will come and dwell in them.

And so then moving into chapter 15, where our verses that we just read a minute ago are, we see the comparison of Christ being the vine and we the branches. The branches either bear fruit, those are the true believers, or they don't bear fruit, they're cast aside, they're not real believers at all. And then the Lord hones in on what the best representation of truly bearing fruit is. That's our text this morning, verse 12 and 13 again. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. So the Lord's commandment to his disciples here is that they would love one another, but not just love one another, but love as he has loved them and as he has loved us.

And then the Lord explains that love, that greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. This is the love that we are called to give. And I'm hoping all of us at this point are beginning to realize how intense that is.

[4 : 53] But we see that command throughout all of Scripture. You might be thinking of all kinds of texts that sound super similar to that one. Even a couple chapters earlier in the same section, in chapter 13, verses 34 and 35, Jesus says, A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Notice that emphasis there as well, that we will be known by our love for one another.

And so with all that in mind, I want us to note now that the Lord simply is just calling us to show love in a really intense form of love, the same that he has shown to us.

So this morning I want to talk about that love, and then I want to talk about how we can express that love. And I'm going to break that down into five points. So five points. They are the Advent love expressed in Christ's birth.

That's the Advent love expressed in Christ's birth. The Advent love expressed in Christ's life. The Advent love expressed in Christ's death. The Advent love expressed in Christ's resurrection.

[6 : 07] And the Advent love we should express. I thought Nathan had stolen my notes this morning in the opening. I was like, wow. That was great. Now, I don't intend this sermon at all to be exhaustive on any of these points.

As I wrote it, I ended up thinking of more and more and more and more scriptures that we could pull from. And I think we'll all feel a little bit by the end that we've been all over the New Testament. I think it's impossible to unpack all of those and see all of the Lord's love for us.

It's the hymn that I grew up singing this hymn a lot called The Love of God, where it says, The love of God is greater far than tongue or pen can ever tell. And another verse that says, Could we with ink the ocean fill and were the skies of parchment made?

Were every stock on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade? To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, nor could the scroll contain the whole, though stretched from sky to sky. I think that rings so true. We cannot fully comprehend, we cannot fully explain the love of God, but let's savor it a little bit this morning. Let's jump in a little bit and let's go ahead and start with the Advent love expressed in Christ's birth.

[7 : 21] I think initially, and I think rightfully so, we tend to think of God's love most as expressed in the cross. I think that's a good thing, that that's what we think of first.

Even by our text this morning, we know that that is the greatest love that can be shown, that someone give up their life for their friends. But I think it's going to be helpful this morning for us to think about all of those aspects of the Lord's incarnation and how they show his love, especially since at Christmas time, what we particularly tend to focus on is the coming of Christ as a baby. Now let's think about the birth for a moment. I think we immediately are drawn to think of animals, to think of shepherds, to think of wise men, think of people coming to visit, bringing gifts.

Even as Jesus being laid in a manger because there was not room for them, in the end that Jesus' parents were truly staying in an area that was meant for animals because there was no other space because everyone had come to be taxed.

And I think that all is good, that our minds are drawn there. We do truly see the love of God in Jesus' humble birth. I think so many of our songs capture this particularly.

[8 : 29] Think about what child is this, where we sing, Why lies he in such mean a state where ox and lamb are feeding? Or even in the new song, I think it was last week that we did, Joy Has Dawned.

Let me read those lyrics to you. Joy has dawned upon the world, promised from creation. God's salvation now unfurled, hope for every nation. Not with fanfares from above, not with scenes of glory, but a humble gift of love, Jesus born of Mary.

Sounds of wonder fill the sky with the songs of angels, as the mighty prince of life shelters in a stable. Hands that set each star in place shape the earth in darkness, Cling now to a mother's breast, vulnerable and helpless.

Shepherds bow before the lamb, gazing at the glory. Gifts of men from distant lands prophesy the story. Gold, a king is born today. Incense, God is with us. Myrrh, his death will make a way, and by

his blood, he will win us.

Son of Adam, son of heaven, given as a ransom. Reconciling God and man, Christ our mighty champion. What a savior, what a friend, what a glorious mystery.

[9 : 40] Once a babe in Bethlehem, now the Lord of history. So yes, this Lord of eternity, this Lord of history, he was born as a baby.

An actual baby, just like many of those that are in the room now. So vulnerable, so helpless. Not born with heavenly fanfare and glory, as the song just expressed.

But instead, born helpless and stable. Because the town didn't have room for him. Now these were certainly humble circumstances physically. I think that is definitely true.

Whether we picture a birth at home or in a hospital, this was neither of those things. I think that is clear. Not what we would picture. But I want us to think more about the spiritual humbling that the Lord was going through here.

Y'all turn with me to Philippians 2. Philippians 2. Here in Philippians 2, we're going to read the first 11 verses.

[10 : 47] Familiar passage, but maybe not as familiar in this context. Let's read the first 11 verses here. It says, So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So Paul's aim here in this text is to encourage believers here to share in affection and sympathy and love. He's encouraging them to truly embrace and express that unity they have as believers in our Lord.

[12 : 09] So that's the drive of this text. But what I want to note here is the reason he is giving for that. He's saying that this mindset is ours in Christ Jesus, and then he expresses how Christ displayed the mindset himself.

Let's look at verses 5 through 7 one more time. Again, we see the Lord of the universe choosing not to consider what was true of him for a time, choosing to set it aside, not counting equality with God a thing to even be grasped.

And so he emptied himself of that. He was born in the form of a servant, born in the likeness of men, setting aside that position he had with being with the Father from all eternity past.

This Lord of the universe choosing to be born as the most helpless form of a human. He didn't show up here as an adult, just ready to conquer the earth.

He showed up as a baby, totally helpless. So this Lord who created everything we know, chose to humble himself, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, and was born here as a baby.

[13 : 34] Such great love for us in that. Now let's go to point two. The Advent love expressed in Christ's life. The Advent love expressed in Christ's life. I think this is a point that at times can be a bit overlooked, overshadowed by either the birth or the death.

But I think it's important for us to think about the love that he showed throughout his life. Firstly, let's think about what it really meant to be walking into this world becoming fully man.

Yes, he was 100% still Lord of the universe, but he was also 100% a man. I think when we were back in studying Hebrews a couple years ago, I guess, this hit me pretty hard in Hebrews 4, verses 14 through 16, where it said, Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God.

Let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who is in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Our Lord understands.

[14:48] It says here that we have a high priest who is completely able to sympathize with our weaknesses. It's not as if our Lord is up in the heavens looking down and saying, Oh my goodness, why are they still struggling with sin?

That is so dumb. Think about everything I've done for them and they're still struggling. That's not the mindset that the Lord has for us. Praise the Lord, right? That's not what he's doing at all. And while we do truly act very terrible, for lack of a better word, we truly act as dogs returning to their vomit when we return to sin.

The Lord understands. He knows our weakness because he has experienced those temptations firsthand. Because he became a human. But notice, without sin.

We've likely never even experienced the full amount of temptation that our Lord did. Because we give in to sin so easily. We give in to our flesh constantly. Think about Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

[15:48] Go ahead and turn with me again to Matthew 4. Matthew 4. Going to look at his temptation here. Matthew 4. Matthew 4.

Picking up in verse 1. Says, Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

And the tempter came and said to him, If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But he answered, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple. And said to him, If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written, He will command his angels concerning you. And on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against the stone. Jesus said to him, Again, it is written, You shall not put the Lord your God to the test. So again, the devil took him up to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

[16:57] And he said to him, All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, Be gone, Satan, For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, And him only shall you serve.

Then the devil left him, And behold, Angels came and were ministering to him. Jesus went through the greatest temptation that we could imagine. Tempted by the devil himself here, Not like us just, you know, Giving in to our own flesh as we so often do.

And what did he do? He fought the temptation with bringing to mind scripture after scripture after scripture. Our Lord did not have to go through this temptation or come and live a life here with all its hardships at all.

But he did. He chose to. And why is that? Because he considered our interests more important than his own. The Lord of the universe came to serve rather than to be served because of his great love for us.

Because he wanted to show it to us. To truly love, not just in word, but in deed, in what he did, his work. And think about his ministry just for a moment. Our Lord was not popular.

[18:07] He didn't hold punches. He cut right to heart issues. He cut straight into religious hypocrisy. And why did he do this? He did this because he loved us.

He considered our interests higher than his own. He cared about us knowing the truth and not just what we'd like to believe about ourselves. We know he was eventually accused of blasphemy and condemned.

He was then put to death. Death on a cross. Because of false accusations. That will get us into our third point. The advent love expressed in Christ's death. The advent love expressed in Christ's death.

This is likely to be our longest point. And I think for good reason. Our text this morning, John 15, 13 says, Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Our Lord expresses his love in the greatest way possible. By laying down his life for us. But I want to take a minute and try to remember, why is that so important?

[19:08] We've got to remember for it to mean anything that we need his death in order to be in right standing with God. I think last week our guest preacher, Seth, from Emmanuel Community, did

a wonderful job of thinking about people in two groups.

Thinking about believers in two groups. Of prodigal kids. Those who may have what they consider more of a rough background. Or church kids, he called them. Those who have grown up in the church and have been around the gospel their whole lives.

And I think it's true that those groups do tend to think in different ways at times. While the prodigals may seem to struggle with guilt of past sin more. The church kids may seem to struggle more with needing a reminder that their good deeds don't earn them any favor with God.

And they're just as sinful as anyone else. We all need the grace of our Lord. And because we're all sinful, we have to remember that because of that sin, without Christ, we are therefore forever separated from God.

Forever. Forever. Because of God's holiness, he is committed to eradicating sin and making sure sin has just punishment. And so because of that, we have no way to be in God's presence.

[20 : 21] Because as all humans, we have sinned and are by our own nature sinful. So Christ's death is massively important. To note that a little bit more, let's look at Romans 5.

Romans 5. Y'all turn with me there. I warned y'all. You're making y'all turn everywhere. So Romans 5.

I think everybody that preaches an Advent topic is always tempted to use this text a lot. Probably the ultimate Advent text. I just want to look at verses 6 through 11 here.

It says, For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person. Though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die. But God chose his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since therefore we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

[21 : 25] For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

So looking at the early parts of this text for a minute, we see that Christ died for the ungodly. Simply those totally unlike God. Then we see a note that it's rare that someone will even die for someone they consider to be a good person.

I think a lot of us in here would say that we would die for our family. I think a lot of us would say that. Those close to us or maybe even someone we know to be a really great person.

But realistically, in our hearts, I think that list of people that we would choose to die for is probably relatively small. Notice what the text goes on to say.

That the Lord chose his love for us and that he died for us while we were yet sinners. Not somebody he was close to. Not someone that he thought would do great things or had already done great things.

[22 : 32] But he died for the ungodly. Christ showed his love for us and that while we were still sinners, he died for us. Christ died for people that were dead in their sins, right?

Couldn't do anything but sin. We were not a good people to choose to die for. And that makes Christ's love so much greater. When we consider that he died for a people that were dead that he would have to make alive.

To change our hearts of stone into a heart of flesh. To make us new creations. Didn't die for perfect, put together Christians. But while we were still sinners.

Praise our Lord for that love. And let's remember why that death is so important. It's because it wasn't just a very hard physical death.

Although it was a very hard physical death. Harder than any of us can likely imagine. But that terrible death that man meant for evil. God in his infinite wisdom meant for good.

[23 : 31] When Jesus was dying on that cross. And he said, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? The Lord was pouring out the wrath that was due our sin. That our sins deserved.

Our perfect Savior dying there who had done no wrong, committed no sin. He suffered the wrath of God for our sin. For those of us who have placed our faith in the completed work that the Lord has done.

Jesus said right there as he was dying. It is finished. We no longer have the wrath of God hanging over us for our sin.

We are forever forgiven. Because of Jesus' blood shed on our behalf. Right there. We are not justified by anything good we have done. But simply by his blood being shed on our behalf. And that being the punishment for our sin. Such great love that he has shown us in his death. That has made us free. Not because of anything good in us. But all by his grace in his death.

[24 : 31] So our debt is forever paid. We no longer suffer the wrath of God. Because his punishment. Our punishment was placed on him. But I would wager to say this morning.

That we are all here because our Lord didn't stay in the grave. If he had stayed we would have truly no hope. And that gets us to number four.

The advent love expressed in Christ's resurrection. The advent love expressed in Christ's resurrection. So let's read verses 9-11 of Romans 5 one more time.

It says since therefore we have now been justified by his blood. Much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son.

Much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life. More than that. We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through whom we have now received reconciliation.

[25 : 30] So yes we have been justified declared righteous before God. By the Lord shedding his blood on our behalf. And that's wonderful. Now we are saved from the wrath of God.

Because our Lord took the wrath of God on himself. There's no more guilt. No more offense. Remember Colossians 2 14 15. And you who were dead. And your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh.

God made alive together with him. Having forgiven us all our trespasses. By canceling the record of debt. That stood against us with its legal demands. That he set aside. Nailing it to the cross.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities. And put them to open shame. By triumphing over them in him. The truth of the gospel in his death. Is truly wonderful. That we are fully forgiven.

That there is no debt. That there is no more separation. That even our current sins. Our future sins. Are fully forgiven in Christ. But the resurrection is so important.

[26 : 30] Notice what verse 10 is saying. Now that we are reconciled. We are truly being and will be saved by his life. Chapter 5 of Romans continues after this text.

And into 6. We don't have time to do all of that today. But reminding us that Adam our forefather sinned. And therefore sin passed to all. And because sin passed to all.

Death passed to all. But now in Christ. We see his act of righteousness. On the cross. And remember that that gives us his righteousness. Our sin is placed on him. But notice this.

His resurrection. That life talked about. Is also passed to us. So that now we are no longer dead in our sins. But alive to God. Think about what we say.

Every time there is a baptism. We always say. You have been buried with Christ in baptism. As they are coming up we say. And now raised to walk. In newness of life.

[27 : 28] Think about how rich. How sweet that picture is. When we remember what it is picturing. Christ's death. His burial. His resurrection. Because of Christ's life.

We now have the ability. To walk. In newness of life. Romans 6. Really gets into this. And I encourage y'all to read that. Later on. Follow that flow in it.

But it's clear. That we now have the ability. To be new creatures. And truly are. New creatures. With new natures. Because of Christ's life. But I want us to be real with ourselves.

Here for a minute. We don't always walk. In this new nature. The freedom from sin. We don't always walk. In that newness of life. That the Lord is empowering us to have.

We struggle with what we often call. The old man. Or the indwelling sin. We must battle against our flesh. Constantly. And I want us to think for a minute.

[28 : 25] About the Lord's perspective. On that. Think about. What the Lord has done. The Lord ransomed. A people. Took the wrath of God. For that broken people. Made them have right standing with God.

Even gave them a new nature. By the spirit. So that they could truly choose. To actively follow him. And what do these people. That were before. Destined for eternal punishment.

Without any hope. And now. Have a perfect hope. In the Lord. A new nature. What do they do?

They still struggle with sin. They still. Want to run back to their own vomit.

But what does our Lord do. By the spirit. He promises that. He will bring us to completion. He will work that sanctification in it. He doesn't hold our sin. Against us. Even the sin. We struggle with.

Now. But he has. Unending patience. We will be saved by his life. We are adopted. We will be fully sanctified. We will one day. Be glorified. Even.

[29 : 24] As we struggle. The Lord is continuing. The work. In us. In his resurrection. We have that new nature. We have that new life. And even as we struggle. He will not.

Give up. On the good work. That he has begun. In us. We have been loved so well. By our Lord. In his birth. In his life. In his death. And in his resurrection.

And how do we respond? This will get us to number five. Last point. The advent love. We should express. It is the advent love. That we should express.

So we have been all over the place. This morning. But I want us to get back. To John 15. I am going to read. Read the text. We started with. One more time.

John 15. Verses 12. And 13. Says. This is my commandment. That you love one another. As I have loved you. Greater love.

[30 : 18] Has no one than this. That someone lay down his life. For his friends. I am hoping this morning. As we have gone around. And around. And thought about. The Lord's love for us.

That we have all experienced. Some joy. As we remember. That love. I think this sermon. Has been one. That I have been most excited. To prepare for. And preach. Because I think the Lord.

Has been reminding me. So much of his love. In my preparation. Jordan Bell and I. Are in a core group together. And Jordan on Wednesday night. Prayed for me. That I would. Experience.

The love of God. This week. In my preparation. And I think the Lord. Answered that. So thank you. And. I hope we've all been reminded. A bit. But I also hope.

That a bit of the weight. Has started to set in. Because notice. What the Lord. Has commanded. That we love one another. With the same love.

[31 : 09] That he has shown to us. Remember that love. That we have just spent. So much time. Thinking about. How wonderful it is. That's the same love. That we are called.

To express. Our high expectations. We are called. To even lay down. Our life. For the sake of each other. This is what we are.

To be known for. As Christians. As John 13 expressed. It's a love. That we have. For one another. To consider others. Interest above our own. To truly. Always have the mindset.

Of seeking to serve. Rather than to be served. To forgive. As he is forgiven. And remember. What he has forgiven. Even for yourself. To forgive. When it's hard. When we have suffered.

Because of the sin. Expressed. To still truly. Seek to forgive. Our Lord. Did this perfectly. And I would like. To remind us. That the Lord. Will give us.

[32 : 02] The strength. To do. Whatever he calls us to. Going back to James. For a minute. If we lack. Wisdom. On how to do. Something like this. We're to ask. And he will give it. Right.

He will give. That wisdom. So let's truly. Seek to love. As he is loved. To forgive. As he is forgiven. To forgive. Without keeping a record. Of the wrongs. To always seek.

To serve. Rather than to be served. And even to be willing. To give up our own life. For the sake of others. So let's pray.