

## The Love of Jesus Christ

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A few months ago, back in May to be precise, I preached a sermon about who Jesus Christ is. As a reminder I'll summarize what we talked about back then, because it is important for us to know who He is. All of this is part of a branch of theology known as Christology, the study of Christ. So, people, such as Jehovah's witnesses who deny the deity of Christ, or anyone that denies the humanity of Christ would be guilty of a Christological heresy. They believe and teach wrongly about Christ.

Indeed, it is important for everyone to not just know who He is, but also to know Him personally. And anyone who does not cannot be rightly called a Christian. It's like a married couple. Traditionally the wife takes the name of the husband. So, my wife is called Mrs. Bush. If she was not really my wife, she could not rightly be called Mrs. Bush but rather would still be using her maiden name. In the same way we take the name of Christ when we believe in Him and accept Him as our Savior and Lord and become His disciples and are therefore called, Christians. That moniker was once used as an insult, first in Antioch as we read in the book of Acts. But as believers we don't worry about the world's insults, we wear them as a badge of honor. Just like the term, Jesus-freak. Recall that DC Talk has a song about that. Same thing, we don't worry about the world's insults, because they mean that we are rightly following the Lord. So, what was used as an insult in the first century became instead an honorable description of who we are as "followers of the Way" which is what Christians were called before Antioch.

Jesus Christ is the second person of the trinity. He is co-eternal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. As the Nicene Creed states, "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through Him all things were made."

He is also fully God and fully man, as it says in the creed of St. Athanasius,

For the right faith is, that we believe and confess, that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man, of the substance of his mother, born in the world; Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father, as touching his manhood. Who, although He be God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ;

As Paul stated in Colossians 1:15, Christ is, "the image of the invisible God." Christ reveals God to us both His nature and His character. He "fleshes that out" so that we can understand and know Him. I use the illustration of a painter. Imagine if Bob Ross (the painter on the PBS show "The Joy of Painting" who has the afro) were here telling us that he had an

idea of a landscape in his mind. Well, that's all well and good, but if he were to paint that landscape for us so that we could see it, then we would better know what he is talking about. It makes it more real to us. That painting would be the image of the landscape that was in his mind. We could see the peaks and valleys and all the happy little trees and clouds.

In the same way we can understand the nature of God and the character of God by looking at Christ, who is fully God, and is in the Father just as the Father is in Him, which is what Jesus said in John 14:11. So as good as a Bob Ross painting might be as an image, Christ is greater. We can talk with Christ and hear from Christ. We cannot do those things with a painting. Most importantly, Christ is God, he is not a created being, which could never be said about a painting. And God is greater than the idea of a landscape, therefore the image of the invisible God, Christ, is greater than the image of the idea of the landscape, the painting, and in fact greater than any creative idea we could ever have.

A lot of people have this idea that God hates us and is angry at us all the time, and that He just loves to yell at us when we mess up. But the reality is that is not God's character. In fact, if we look at the readings for today, we can see the very character of God with respect to how He feels about us, the people that He created.

All of the readings for today are about Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. We'll start with Isaiah 53:4-12. This passage is commonly entitled, "The suffering servant." Usually, we read this passage on Good Friday because it talks about the crucifixion of Jesus. What is amazing about this Scripture is the number of times the words 'our,' 'we,' and 'us' are used, 9 times, and the number of times 'He,' 'Him,' and 'His' are used, 37 times. Clearly this passage is about Him, meaning the servant, and what He has done for us and on our behalf. We get a clear picture of the character of 'He.'

First, notice what rightfully belongs to us as a result of our turning our own way (Isaiah 53:6). Beginning with verse 4, "our griefs", "our sorrows" and verse 5, "our transgressions," "our iniquities," and our chastening. All things that are ours as a result of the fall. Not pleasant at all, yet they were earned.

If God truly hated us, He would have left us in that condition. But the truth is that because of His great love for us Christ redeemed us. Look at the work that Christ did. Everything He did for us is attached in the passage to the words "He," "Him," or "His." The first one is in verse 4, "He Himself bore." What did He bear? He bore our griefs! Next, "He carried" what? Our sorrows! Verse 5, "He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell on Him." He took what is rightfully ours so that we don't have to have it ourselves.

Verse 6, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him." The Lord there is a reference to the Father and Him is a reference to Jesus Christ. Verse 7, "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth." Remember that Jesus did not speak in His own defense during the trial even though He was innocent. In fact, Pilate asked

Him to speak up, remember? But Jesus did not. He had to go to the cross for us, it was His mission.

Sounds to me like God really really loves us! His love for us is NOT performance based. We don't have to do anything to earn the love of God, and we cannot do anything to earn the love of God. Romans 5:8 states that, "God demonstrates His own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us." Christ died for us while we were His enemies because of His love for us! He wants us to be in relationship with Him and the relationship with Him is greater than the sin problem because of the work of Christ on the cross.

Scripture is equally clear that not only can we do nothing to earn the love of God, but we can do nothing to be separated from His love. Romans 8:38-39 states, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

God is for us! God did for us what we could not do for ourselves by redeeming us by the blood of God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and demonstrated His power over death by His resurrection, and demonstrated that Christ is indeed the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

God is the perfect Father. He loves us so much that He sent His Son for us. I love you people, but I'm not like God at all. I would have a really difficult time sending my son for you. The love of God is so great that He sent His Son for us.

And that's the other thing. We tend to view God in human terms. We base our thoughts about Him on how our earthly father is/was because that we can see and understand. God is the perfect Father. I had a good earthly father, but God is better. I am, I hope, a good earthly father. But God is better. But God is greater than we can understand. We only understand what God has revealed to us. And what we know, we know because of Christ.

Jesus explained this to the disciples in John 8. Beginning with verse 7, "**7** 'If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.' **8** Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' **9** Jesus said to him, 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father;'"

I've talked about who Jesus Christ is. I've talked about His mission, which was to die on the cross for our sins, and then rise to life again. I'll close with the impact of Christ's example on our lives and on our relationships.

The biggest impact should be on our attitude. Listen to what Paul told the Philippians,

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.      Philippians 2:5-8

Christ wasn't thinking about Himself when he went to the cross. He was thinking about all of humanity. He was selfless. He was motivated by His love.

Christ set that example for us, and He emphasized this point to the Disciples in Mark 10:43-45, "whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; <sup>44</sup>and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. <sup>45</sup>For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." This was the memory verse for our youth four weeks ago. Memorizing this Scripture is important, and the first step towards applying it to our lives. But they are young in the faith and need an example to follow. Yes, Christ set the example for all of us. But they need to physically see an example. And if we tell them to apply this Scripture and don't do it ourselves then we are being hypocrites. That means that we need to memorize this Scripture. We need to apply it to our lives. We need to live out our faith. Otherwise, how can we help them to do so?

There is a missional aspect of applying this Scripture. We apply it so that we get closer to Christ, and can be more Christ-like, but who knows we might just be the only Christian some people ever know, and they will base their thoughts and opinions on what they see in us. What attitude will we display? One of selfish ambition or one of service and selflessness?

That is the point Jesus is making with the disciples. There needs to be a contrast between Gentile leaders and the disciples. There is disunity and conflict between Gentile leaders because they lord their authority over the people. They are selfish, they are haughty. They are all about themselves. The disciples need to be united in mission. Not about seeking after glory for themselves, but rather seeking to glorify the Lord. Not lording their authority over the people, but rather serving the people. That keeps them all of equal importance, no one of them greater than the other. It keeps them of one mind and mission with no room to be indignant with one another, as the ten were with James and John.

Jesus is reminding them of who He is and that He is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. And if He, the Son of God, came to serve the people, and to give His life for them, that certainly the Disciples, and us also, can follow that example and dedicate our lives to serving others. That is in total contrast with how the world thinks and acts. And when we do that, when we have that same attitude which was also in Christ Jesus, you watch how many people come to faith in Christ and accept His free gift of salvation and follow Him as their Lord.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!