



Week 7: He Loves Us to the End

Based on “Gentle & Lowly” by Dane Ortlund
NCAC Adult Sunday School
February 27, 2022

How have you seen evidence that human love has its limits?

“The Christian life, from one angle, is the long journey of letting our natural assumption about who God is, over many decades, fall away, being slowly replaced with God’s own insistence on who he is.” (*Dane Ortlund, Gentle and Lowly, p. 151*)

Jesus describes himself as being “gentle and lowly in heart”: ²⁸ *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”* (*Matthew 11:28-29*)

Is this consistent with the rest of Scripture? Sure, Jesus says he is “gentle and lowly in heart,” but is it possible we’ve grabbed a phrase out of context and run too far with it? While we need to remember that Jesus is not *only* gentle and lowly—and that not *everyone* will experience Jesus as gentle and lowly—the gentle, lowly heart of Christ *towards his people* is seen throughout Scripture:

- **Christ is now our sympathetic high priest.** (*Hebrews 4:15*)
- **Christ will never cast out his own.** (*John 6:37*)
- **Christ is presently interceding for us.** (*Hebrews 7:25*)
- **Christ is our Advocate** (*1 John 2:1*) **and our Friend.** (*Matthew 11:19*)

What about the rest of the Trinity? Many of us have a tendency to view Christ as compassionate and the Father as harsh. But Christ himself said that if we’ve seen him, then we’ve seen the Father (*John 14:9*). The Holy Spirit also reflects this same heart of Christ toward his people (*John 16:13-14*).

Why do we so easily struggle with our view of Christ? One reason our view of God’s love and mercy is often too small is that we instinctively assume God is like us. That is, we assume he loves us *as we love others*. Thus, we need to learn to let Scripture inform our understanding of who God is:

- **God’s compassion is of a magnitude far beyond our own:** *Isaiah 55:7-9*
- **Even as God disciplines his people, his heart still yearns for them:** *Jeremiah 31:20*
- **God is rich in mercy—far beyond what we can comprehend:** *Ephesians 2:4*
- **God’s grace is not only the door to the Christian life, it is also the pathway of the Christian life:** *Galatians 3:10-11*
- **God is just as glad to forgive present sins as he is our past sins:** *Romans 5:8-9*

TODAY’S FOCUS: What does the death of Christ mean for us throughout the rest of this life—and throughout the rest of eternity?

WHAT DOES CHRIST'S DEATH MEAN FOR US THROUGH THE REST OF LIFE IN THIS WORLD?

“What we are seeing in these past few chapters is that the heart of Christ for sinners and sufferers does not flash with tenderness occasionally or temporarily, sputtering out over time. Gentleness and lowliness of heart is who Christ is steadily, consistently, everlastingly, when all loveliness in us has withered. How do we know? We know because of what John 13:1 says.” (*Gentle and Lowly*, p. 197)

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (John 13:1)

What is John telling us about who Jesus is and how Jesus loves us?

WATCH VIDEO: SESSION 10a

Though we know Jesus willingly went to the cross “for the joy set before him,” that does not mean the cross was a joyful experience. Consider the following verses:

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:6)*

*And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means,
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34)*

*And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, “My Father, if it be possible, let this
cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39)*

How would you explain in your own words what Jesus endured on the cross on our behalf?

“What happened at the cross, for those of us who claim to be its beneficiaries? It is beyond calculating comprehension, of course. A three-year-old cannot comprehend the pain a spouse feels when cheated on. How much less could we comprehend what it meant for God to funnel the cumulative judgment for all the sinfulness of his people down onto one man.

“But reflecting on what we feel toward, say, the perpetrator of some unthinkable act of abuse toward an innocent victim gives us a taste of what God felt toward Christ as he, the last Adam, stood in for the sins of God’s people. The righteous human wrath we feel—the wrath we would be wrong not to feel—is a drop in the ocean of righteous divine wrath the Father unleashed.

“After all, God punished Jesus not for the sin of just one person but many. What must it mean when Isaiah says of the servant that ‘the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:6)?

“What was it for Christ to swallow down the cumulative twistedness, self-enthronement, natural God hatred, of the elect? What must it have been for the sum total of righteous divine wrath generated not just by one man’s sin but ‘the iniquity of us all’ to come crashing down on a single soul?

“It’s speculation, but for myself I cannot believe it was physical extremity that killed Christ. What is physical torture compared to the full weight of centuries of cumulative wrath absorption? That mountain of piled-up horrors? How did Jesus even retain sanity psychologically in absorbing the sum-total penalty of every lustful thought and deed coming from the hearts of God’s people—and that is one sin among many?

“Perhaps it was sheer despair that broke him down into death. If he was sweating blood at the thought of God’s abandonment (Luke 22:44), what was it like to go through with it? Would it not have been the withdrawal of God’s love from his heart, not the withdrawal of oxygen from his lungs, that killed him? Who could hold up mental stability when drinking down what God’s people deserved?

“‘In the presence of this mental anguish,’ wrote Warfield, ‘the physical tortures of the crucifixion retire into the background, and we may well believe that our Lord, though he died on the cross, yet died not of the cross, but, as we commonly say, of a broken heart....’

“His was the true Psalm 22:1 of which ours are the shadows. As the people of God, all our feelings of forsakenness funneled through an actual human heart in a single moment of anguished horror on Calvary, an actual forsakenness. Who could possibly bear up beneath it? Who would not cry out and shut down?

“When communion with God had been one’s oxygen, one’s meat and drink, throughout one’s whole life, without a single moment of interruption by sin—to suddenly bear the unspeakable weight of all our sins? Who could survive that? To lose that depth of communion was to die. The great love at the heart of the universe was being rent in two. The world’s Light was going out.

“And in venting that righteous wrath God was not striking a morally neutral tree. He was splintering the Lovely One. Beauty and Goodness himself was being uglified and vilified. ‘Stricken, smitten by God...’ (Isa. 53:4). So that we ugly ones could be freely beautified, pardoned, calmed.

“Our heaven through his hell. Our entrance into Love through his loss of it. This was what loving to the end meant. Passing through the horror of the cross and drinking down the flood of filth, the centuries of sin, all that is revolting even in our eyes.” (*Gentle and Lowly, pp. 199-202*)

Why would Christ endure all this?

“John’s point in 13:1 is that in going to the cross, Jesus did not retain something for himself, the way we tend to do when we seek to love others sacrificially. He does not love like us. We love until we are betrayed. Jesus continued to the cross despite betrayal. We love until we are forsaken. Jesus loved through forsakenness. We love up to a limit. Jesus loves to the end.” (*Gentle and Lowly, p. 198*)

Why is it so important to correctly understand the love of Christ for us?

Despite knowing what Scripture says, many of us still struggle to believe that Christ loves us. Why? What might cause us to feel this way?

What might help us get past this and become free to believe that Christ really loves us?

WHAT DOES CHRIST'S DEATH MEAN FOR US IN THE NEXT LIFE?

What are some of the ways we can glorify God?

According to Jonathan Edwards, God made the world so his Son's heart would have an outlet for his love—and it is in Christ's love for sinners that his glory is most preeminently seen and enjoyed:

*“The creation of the world seems to have been especially for this end, that the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse, towards whom he might fully exercise the infinite benevolence of his nature, and to whom he might, as it were, open and pour forth all that immense fountain of condescension, love, and grace that was in his heart, and that in this way God might be glorified.”
(Jonathan Edwards, in “The End for Which God Created the World”)*

Consider how the Bible ends:

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:1-4)

In light of all that has happened and will happen between God and man throughout history, what does this Revelation 21 passage tell us about Christ's heart?

Ephesians 2:4-7 also tells us God saved us so his “grace in kindness” might forever be on display:

*⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ **so that** in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

What is the significance of Ephesians 2:7 for us?

“What does this mean, for those in Christ? It means that one day God is going to walk us through the wardrobe into Narnia, and we will stand there, paralyzed with joy, wonder, astonishment, and relief. It means that as we stand there, we will never be scolded for the sins of this life, never looked at askance, and never told, ‘Enjoy this, but remember you don’t deserve this.’ The very point of heaven and eternity is to enjoy his ‘grace in kindness.’ And if the point of heaven is to show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness, then we are safe, because the one thing we fear will keep us out—our sin—can only heighten the spectacle of God’s grace and kindness.” (p. 209)

WATCH VIDEO: SESSION 10b

Why do think Christ wants his people to know the future that awaits them?

WATCH VIDEO: CONCLUDING SESSION

What has stood out to you or what have you been reminded of as we’ve gone through this study?

What would happen to our church if we fully embraced the truth of Matthew 11:29, that Christ is “gentle and lowly in heart”?

“The Christian life boils down to two steps:

1. Go to Jesus.
2. See #1.

...That place in your life where you feel most defeated, he is there; he lives there, right there, and his heart for you...is gentle and lowly. Your anguish is his home. So, go to him.” (*Gentle and Lowly*, p. 216)