

Unto the Least of These

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, November 10, 2019

Main Theme – Considering the love of Christ Jesus and its implications on Christian life and living.

WORSHIP & PRAYER

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Special Thank You**
 - Thank You to Those Who Participated in Our Fall Work-Day
- **Regular Events**
 - WM – Tuesday Evening, November 12, from 6:30–8pm
- **Special Events Pt. 1**
 - O.C.C. Collection Week – Shoeboxes Due on Sunday, Nov. 17 or 24
 - Max & Lauren Brockmeyer – AG Missionaries to Join Us on Nov. 17
- **Special Events Pt. 2**

The Board and I will be hosting an informational meeting after service on Sunday, November 24, concerning some exciting next steps for this assembly and the ministry thereof. Specific information will be shared on this at the close of today's service. Please take note of this invitation and plan to be in attendance.

MORNING OFFERING

I want to call forth our ushers. TWO offerings will be collected:

- 1) The 1st offering goes to support this local work and community outreach
- 2) The 2nd offering goes to support our regular missionaries (foreign/domestic)

May the Lord bless you as you give! May you experience His faithfulness in kind!

Luke 6:38 (NIV)

38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

OCC PRESENTATION

As the offerings are being collected, I would like to share a video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oph9jVV3ldc>

NOTE 1 – God can use the simplest act(s) of love to bring CHANGE to the world for time and eternity. Will YOU be a part of Operation Christmas Child this year? I pray so! May the Lord bless you and your families as you prepare your shoeboxes! Please bring in your packed shoeboxes on November 17 or 24.

NOTE 2 – Should you have any QUESTIONS, please connect with me or Ruth at your convenience.

- **CHILDREN DISMISSED FOR CHILDREN'S CHURCH**

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INTRODUCTION

As always it is wonderful to see you. I look forward to these moments of weekly worship and instruction. I pray that you are ready to receive what the Lord has for you today. Please have your Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

FYI – This morning I will NOT take the time to provide a lengthy introduction or establish a foundation for my thoughts (as is my custom). Rather, I want to launch right into a discussion on the LOVE of God and its IMPLICATIONS in our lives. I want to begin by offering TWO thoughts on the nature of God's love:

1) There Is an Unconditional Aspect to the Love of God

i.e., A love that is NOT founded upon our worthiness, loveliness, utility, etc.

i.e., A love that endures/persists DESPITE our worst failings – callous rejection

Ephesians 2:1–5 (NIV)

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Romans 5:8

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 John 4:10a

10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son [sacrifice for sin] . . .

ILL – A certain medieval monk announced he would be preaching next Sunday evening on "The Love of God." As the shadows fell and the light ceased to come in through the cathedral windows, the congregation gathered. In the darkness of the altar, the monk lighted a candle and carried it to the crucifix. First of all, he illumined the crown of thorns, next, the two wounded hands, then the marks of the spear wound. In the hush that fell, he blew out the candle and left the chancel. There was nothing else to say.

SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

Moreover, . . .

2) There is an Immensity to the Love of God

Though the love of God—as an abstract value—transcends measurement, there seems to be SPIRITUAL DIMENSION to it (for lack of a better phrase). Consider the following text—penned by Paul the apostle to the ancient church at Ephesus:

Ephesians 3:17b–19

17 . . . I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Herein the apostle Paul indicates his PRAYER for these believers. i.e., That they would come to grasp the DIMENSIONALITY of God's love (e.g., its width, height, length and depth) and know this love experientially, that they might know the FULLNESS of life in Him!

FYI – When I consider the width, height, length and depth of God's love, I consider the following:

- His love is WIDE enough to embrace the whole of humanity (transcending race, etc.)
- His love is HIGH enough to reach the greatest among us (i.e., the elite of humanity)
- His love is LONG enough in its timelessness (spanning the whole of world history)
- His love is DEEP enough to embrace the most sinful and the 'least' among us

TRANSITIONS

These rather abstract principles (i.e., the immensity and unconditionality of God's love) are illustrated through the life and ministry of Christ. Thus, if we want to understand the love of God, we must consider the example of the SON! Remember the words of Christ in the Gospel of John:

John 14:9b

9 . . . Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father

NOTE – Specifically, I would like to consider an array of accounts from the Gospel of Luke. Luke—as an inspired author—beautifully captures the immensity and unconditional nature of God's love by spotlighting the TYPES of people Jesus served and engaged.

KEY – You see, every society has THROWAWAY classes of people (i.e., those that respectable people shun, scorn or judge). But how did Jesus treat such people? How did He respond to the least among us? GREAT QUESTIONS – let's delve in and consider the WORD of God:

TO THE WORD

1) Luke 18:15–17 (Jesus & Children)

15 People were also bringing babies to Jesus for him to place his hands on them. When the disciples saw this, they rebuked them. 16 But Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. 17 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”

NOTE – The significance of this text is often LOST to us in modern times, as we prioritize children to the n^{th} degree (or so we believe). But in ancient times, children did not occupy a revered plane in society and culture. In fact, if society and culture could be likened to a ladder, children would be a low rung indeed. Great teachers and people of prominence did NOT deal with/engage children, as such figures had more meaningful ways to spend their time! This mentality is reflected in the attitude of the DISCIPLES (v. 15b).

KEY – But consider the love of God in Christ for those who were the least...Immensity & Uncond.

2) Luke 7:11–17 (Jesus & Widows)

11 Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. 12 As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. 13 When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry.”

14 Then he went up and touched the bier they were carrying him on, and the bearers stood still. He said, “Young man, I say to you, get up!” 15 The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

16 They were all filled with awe and praised God. “A great prophet has appeared among us,” they said. “God has come to help his people.” 17 This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

NOTE – Again, if society could be likened to a ladder, widows would likely be placed on a rung lower than that of children. WHY? Because for a woman to become a widow (i.e., losing her husband and sons), she surely must be accursed of God. And if God was so inclined to punish, such a woman is worthy of NO mercy/tenderness from her peers! How tragic...

KEY – But consider the love of God in Christ for those who were the least...Immensity & Uncond.

3) Luke 5:12–15 (Jesus & the Physically Broken)

12 While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy.[b] When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

13 Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him.

14 Then Jesus ordered him, “Don’t tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them.” 15 Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

NOTE – Consider the predicament and situation of those who were leprosy. What was life like?

KEY – But consider the love of God in Christ for those who were the least...Immensity & Uncond.

4) Luke 8:26–39 (Jesus & the Spiritually Afflicted)

26 They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. 27 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” 29 For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. 30 Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. 32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. 33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

34 When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, 35 and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. 37 Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

38 The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

NOTE – This is a man who was TRULY broken in every spiritual sense of the word. Could it get any worse? One has to wonder if such a man as this would find any rung on the ladder of society at all! One has to wonder how long he was shunned, rejected and unloved...

KEY – But consider the love of God in Christ for those who were the least...Immensity & Uncond.

5) Luke 19:1–10 (Jesus & the Sinful/Outcast)

1 Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. 3 He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. 4 So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

5 When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” 6 So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

7 All the people saw this and began to mutter, “He has gone to be the guest of a sinner.”

8 But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

9 Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

NOTE – The people of ancient Israel hated tax collectors. WHY? Because they were sellouts who worked to sustain an occupying, pagan government. Moreover, they were corrupt, getting rich off of the backs of the people! Such people were outcast and utterly despised, being objects of contempt.

KEY – But consider the love of God in Christ for those who were the least...Immensity & Uncond.

SUMMATIONS

In the course of our time this morning, we have addressed the LOVE of God in Christ for...

- 1) Children
- 2) Widows
- 3) The Sick
- 4) The Possessed
- 5) The Sinful/Outcast

NOTE 1 – There was an UNCONDITIONAL nature to His love (despite worthiness–beauty–utility)

NOTE 2 – There was an IMMENSITY to His love (offered freely even to those who were the least)

APPLICATIONS PT. 1

KEY – Perhaps you are thinking: “Pastor, these are great truths, but WHY are you sharing them?”

1) Perhaps I Am Sharing Them to Stimulate Worship (Previous Series)

-We worship God in RESPONSE to WHO He is. i.e., As we come to understand His love→WORSHIP.

2) Perhaps I Am Sharing Them That You Might Understand God’s Love for You

-It is TRAGIC how many Christians feel unloved by God! Yet maybe IF you realize how much Christ loved the ‘least’ in His generation, you WILL realize how much He can love someone like you in this generation. I can tell you this on authority of Scripture: “You are DEEPLY loved.”

3) I AM Sharing Such Truths So that We Will Recognize Our Responsibility Before God

-If we belong to Christ and are called by His Name, we are accountable to love others as He did. Thus, if Christ loved the least of HIS generation, we are under obligation to love the least of OUR generation. In Christ, there must be an IMMENSITY & UNCONDITIONALITY to our love for others.

KEY – Every society has throwaway classes of people (e.g., the lowly, the poor, the broken, the outcast, the wretched). This was true in Jesus’ times AND this is true in the “here-&-now” (2019).

Q. But how do WE regard such figures? Do WE love such as these? Do WE seek to serve such as these? How does everything we’ve discussed re: Christ inform and impact how WE treat others?

KEY 1 – Every CHRISTIAN must wrestle with these questions & the manifestation of Christ’s love.

KEY 2 – Every ASSEMBLY must wrestle with these questions & the manifestation of Christ’s love.

APPLICATIONS PT. 2

As I close, I must not that the timing of this sermon is NOT accidental. I believe that God has impressed this message upon my heart in light of what comes next for our church body. Please hear me in the following:

For over one year, the Board of this assembly has prayerfully considered, evaluated and researched the establishment of a sober house (designed specifically for women in transition or crisis). In an age when substance abuse, chemical addiction, domestic violence, etc., are at EPIDEMIC levels, the Church of Jesus Christ (i.e., universal and local) must work to provide effective RESPONSE. After a year of discussion, we believe it is time for this church to take a step of faith and bring a long-held dream to reality.

I want to invite you to an INFORMATIONAL meeting after service on Sunday, November 24, 2019. This meeting will touch upon the genesis of this ministry idea, the vision and need for such a sober house, next steps and more. This meeting will provide you with an opportunity get your hearts and head around an opportunity to show LOVE to the LEAST of our culture.

FYI – This informational meeting will likely be followed by formal action at the Annual Business Meeting. Since you can expect to hear more about this in the days ahead, please AVAIL yourself of the opportunity to come to the meeting on November 24.

As we dismiss:

Numbers 6:24–25

24 The Lord bless you
and keep you;

25 the Lord make his face shine on you
and be gracious to you;

26 the Lord turn his face toward you
and give you peace.