

The Powerful Love Of The Good Shepherd, Pt.2

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John 10:17-21

May 4, 2025

I was watching a movie once. Pastors do that sometimes. I was watching a movie once when the main character asks this angelic type being about God and the being replied to this way. "Oh, He's up there somewhere, shouting down that He loves us, wondering why we can't hear Him." I was like, "What is that garbage?" I saw that movie 27 years ago. I don't remember anything about it except I still remember that scene, because of how much it disrespected the love of God. However, I must confess to you that I often hesitate to talk about the love of God, and I wondered about that this week. Why is that? What I realized is I hesitate to talk about it, one, because this subject is so overused today that I don't want to be white noise to you and two, I think God's love has been talked about in ways that are soft and even sappy, not strong. Because of this, the topic of God's love can become irrelevant, like He's just telling us He loves us all the time and we'll hear Him if we want to.

Well, I confess this because the Bible talks about God's love a lot, so I shouldn't hesitate to talk about it at all. I confess it because God's love is so misunderstood that I should teach about it. I should teach about it more. Because the love that God has for sinners is the most wondrous and most encouraging truth that we have. Now, in saying that, love is not God's only attribute, it's not even His highest attribute. I know you might, "Well, wait a minute. God is love." Yes, the Bible does say that 1 John 4:8, but if you search the phrase "God is" throughout the whole Bible, what you also find is that "God is a consuming fire", and "God is great", and "God is gracious and merciful", and "God is one", and "God is faithful", and "God is light", meaning He's holy and without sin. So, God is not like a one trick love pony. Love is one facet of the priceless, radiant, multifaceted diamond that is God's character.

This love is described in the Bible as everlasting. That is it never fails, lasting forever. It's described as generous, abundant, lavish, and it is great and it is a lavish love. It is this lavish love that we're going to see is at the heart of the Bible's teaching about salvation. John, probably Jesus' closest friend, he said this in his first letter, 4:9, where it says, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us," it was made obvious. What is it? "That God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him." This is love, not that we have loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation; that is, the payment that fully satisfies the wrath of God for our sins.

Love is made clear in salvation. Paul, remember him, the religious terrorist that becomes the worldwide evangelist? In a letter he wrote to the church in the city of Rome, he says in 5:8 that, quote, "God showed His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Again, God's love and our salvation, they're one. Salvation doesn't happen without the motive of

God's love. Our salvation, that is, receiving eternal life in place of our eternal death, that was determined by love, by God sending Jesus to pay the penalty that we deserve for all of our sins. Our text today is about God's saving, His rescuing, His forgiving, sacrificial love for sinners. What our text will show us is a salvation by love, as seen in the powerful love of our good Shepherd, the Lord Jesus.

The good Shepherd, that's the big idea at the beginning of chapter 10 here. It shows us that the good Shepherd, He loves His sheep and our text shows us just how much He loves His sheep, and shows us that this love is strong and it's powerful. It is anything but sappy and soft. In fact, it's called "great love" in Ephesians 2:4, and almost 200 times in the Bible, it's called "steadfast love". A love that is so powerful, it cannot fail, it cannot break down, it cannot come to an end. It is strong and powerful. By this love, men and women, boys and girls can be rescued from all of our sins.

As we get into our text, I want to start us out with ***point #1), Know How Love Dominates Salvation. Know How Love Dominates Salvation.*** In our text, you'll see three ways that love dominates. It determines the salvation that Jesus accomplished for His sheep, which He talks about in verse 9 of chapter 10, where He says, "I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved," rescued. In verse 10, He says, "I came that my sheep may have life and have it abundantly." Jesus came to give His sheep life, to save them and to give them eternal life.

Well, this powerful love is seen first in verse 17, which I'll summarize with the first bullet point if you're taking notes, the Father's love for Jesus. Father's love for Jesus. Verse 17. "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." I know I read that fast, but if you slow down for a minute and read that verse, you might notice there's a difficulty in there, right? You see that? Is Jesus saying the Father didn't love Him until He died and rose again? "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life." Did Jesus earn the Father's love by dying and rising again? No. Well, that's not it. The Father loved Jesus from all eternity, in fact. Jesus says as much in John 17:24; He's praying to the Father and He says, "You loved me before the foundation of the world." So, there's never a time that the Father didn't love the Son.

So, what does Jesus mean then by verse 17? "For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again." Since He already has the Father's love, I think He's saying the Father especially loves Him. The love of God is evoked by Him laying down His life and by Him taking His life up again in resurrection. In other words, He's saying, "Because the Father loves me, I lay down my life and take it up again. His love for me is what motivates me to tear my soul away from my body, and motivates me to put them back together again when I rise from the dead." Father loves Him from all eternity, and that love comes out even more because Jesus willingly laid down His life and freely raised Himself from the dead. This highest act of love for us evoked love from the Father for the Son.

I can imagine that this truth is very comforting in the midst of His last day as He's tortured and mocked and ridiculed and rejected. Could imagine Him saying Himself, in the midst of all that,

"For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life." You think about that, how terrible it must have been while on the cross not to experience this love that He valued so much, but instead to experience God's angry wrath for our sin as He takes our punishment as our substitute, our stand-in, our representative. The main idea here in the first part of verse 17 is that the most ultimate explanation, the foundation of Jesus' death and resurrection, is not His love for us, but the Father's love for Him. Meaning that if it wasn't for the Father's love for Jesus, there would be no salvation at all. How we wrap our minds around that, I'm not exactly sure, but that is what He said.

Second bullet point from our text that shows us the powerful love of the good Shepherd is this: Jesus' love for His sheep. Jesus' love for His sheep. Verse 17, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again." Five times in John 10, from verses 11 to 18, Jesus talks about laying down His life, either in general, or in verse 15, He specifically says, "I'm laying down my life for my sheep." I want you to notice three truths in this text about Jesus' love for His sheep.

First, His death for them was purposeful. It had a goal. Verse 17, He says, "I lay down my life that I may take it up again." His goal was to raise Himself from the dead. Raising again was not Him making good out of a bad situation, taking a bunch of yucky lemons and making them lemonade, that's not what that was. It was the plan all along. His death was not a tragedy; it was a victory. He died in order to rise, because in rising, He conquers death forever.

Second, Jesus' death was voluntary. Verse 18, "No one takes my life from me, I lay it down of my own accord." No one took His life from Him against His will, no one forced their will upon Him when He died. No, He would give it, quote, "of His own accord." That is, He died of His own free will. That's what Jesus meant when He said, verse 18, "I have authority to lay it down, I have authority to take it up again." By repeating those words, "I have authority", He's emphasizing His absolute freedom to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin and to raise His own self from the dead. He had the right to act as He wanted, to do as He pleases with the life that He had. It wasn't Pilate, it wasn't the Jews, it wasn't the Roman soldiers; nobody, nothing could make Him do anything that He had not already decreed and decided He would do. Nothing.

In this text, He speaks of His life, death, and resurrection using the same word that we use for taking off a shirt and putting it on again, laying it down and taking it up. The idea being that He was just as in control of His life, His death, and His resurrection as we are when we take off a shirt and put it back on again. It's like, who talks like that? You're like, it's Jesus, so you just kind of expect it, but who really talks like that? It's unthinkable that a mere man would talk like that unless they're crazy. I mean, who has authority over life and death, even their own life and death? Only God has authority over life and death, making these statements by Jesus another in a long line of evidences in the New Testament that Jesus is God, as He does something that only God can do; namely, raise someone, that is, raise Himself, from the dead.

Third, Jesus' death was cooperative. It was cooperative. What do I mean by that? Well, here and in John 2:19, Jesus says He will raise Himself from the dead. But a text like Acts 2:24 says that the Father raised Jesus from the dead, and 1 Peter 3:18 says the Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. So together, the three members of the Trinity raised Jesus from the dead. That's how important that event was.

So the question now is, well, why did Jesus die at all? Well, the Bible doesn't give just one answer for that, it gives many reasons, and one of them is His love for His people. Listen to 1 John 3:16, couldn't be clearer on this. "By this we know love, that He laid down" same word "that He laid down His life for us". Jesus explains what motivated His death in John 15:13, saying this: "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." There's no greater love than dying to save somebody else. Paul also reveals this love motivation that brought about the death of Jesus when he says, Ephesians 5:2, "Christ loved us", and the result of that was He "gave Himself up for us". One more text, Revelation 1:5, John writes about Jesus, the same one who wrote this, that He "loves us" and the result of that was He "has freed us from our sins by His blood."

The powerful love that Jesus has for His people is what led to salvation. I say, "His people" because if you heard it, 1 John 3:16 says, "He laid down His life for us," and John 3:15 says He "lay down His life for His friends", and Ephesians 5:2 says Jesus "gave Himself up for us", and Revelation 1:5 says Jesus "freed us from our sins". His death was for the people that He loved so much. It was not a general like, "Hey, I'm just doing this. Hope somebody takes advantage of it." He died because He loved His people.

Third and final bullet point in our text, what shows us this strong, powerful love to save sinners is this: Jesus' love for His Father. Jesus' love for His Father. Verse 18, "I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." Notice the Father charged Jesus. He commissioned Him, commanded Him, authorized Jesus to lay down His life and to take it up again. So, when Jesus says that He does this of His own accord and He does this of His own authority, we understand that is He does it by delegated authority, authority delegated to Him by the Father, because Jesus does say in John 5:19 that "the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing."

So, what we have here is Jesus' obedience to the will of the Father, taking the Father's will and making it His own. That's actually how He shows His love, that's how He shows His devotion, is His commitment to the Father, and He says as much. Listen to John 14:31. He says, "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that" here's the reason "the world may know that I love the Father." "I do what He says because I love Him." How should we respond to this powerful love that saves sinners, this massive part of the text that we've looked at in John 10? Well, we show our love for Jesus the same way He shows His love for His Father. Not in how loud we sing or how hard we pray or how emotional we get or how many people we witness to or how much of the Bible we have memorized or how right our theology is. All of that is great, don't get me wrong. But we show we love Jesus by doing what He says. That's it. It's that easy.

John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." John 14:21, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me." John 14:23, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my Word." You see, obedience to Jesus is not legalism. Obedience to Jesus is what? It's love. It's love for the Jesus who saved your soul. Watch out for teachers who downplay Christian obedience. While we still sin, obviously we still sin, that doesn't mean God is not concerned with our obedience. Obedience doesn't earn anyone's salvation. It doesn't keep anybody saved either. However, the New Testament is filled with hundreds of commands because it's how we show our love for the one who died and rose again on our behalf. It's how we show other people that He's the real thing and really does change our lives for the better. Our lives become a witness to how wonderful He is when our lives adopt His will as our will.

1 John 5:3 says, "This is the love of God". This is the love of God. I wonder how you would complete that sentence? This is the love of God. John says, "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." Then he says, "And His commandments are not burdensome." This is what we think though, right? Obedience is dull. It's boring. It's not worth it. I just want to do what I want to do. It's going to be much more fun and exciting. No, His commandments aren't there to burden us. They are there to bless us.

Psalm 119 starts with these words, verse 2 "Blessed are those who keep His Word." Blessed. Psalm 1:1, "Blessed is the man who delights in the law of the Lord." Or Jesus, He explains this to His disciples in John 15. We'll get there someday. He's explaining this connection between love and obedience, and then He says to them, verse 11, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you." What joy? His joy in loving the Father by obeying Him. "I say these things so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full." Anybody want a blessed life? Anybody want a life full of joy, satisfaction? Do what Jesus tells you to do in His Word. It's that simple. The Christian life, as I've said before, is about taking the next step of obedience. What we learned today is that when you do, the result is joy. Joy when that obedience is motivated by love for Jesus. Why would you love Him? Because He died and rose again so that you would not pay for your sins in eternal hell.

So, putting it all together, whether it's the Father's love for Jesus, or Jesus' love for His people, or Jesus' love for the Father, in every case, His love was not sappy or soft, but it was strong, and it was strong because it was sacrificial. Think about it. The beginning of verse 17, the Father's love for Jesus led to His death on the cross. Jesus' love for His people led to His death, middle of verse 17 down to verse 18, led to His death on the cross. His love for the Father, end of verse 18, led to His death on the cross. What this teaches us is that at the heart of love is sacrifice. Sacrifice, what is best for us to do what's best for someone else.

This is true of our love for others, we show our love for them by what we sacrifice for their good. But going back to this issue of obedience, we show our love for Jesus in obedience by sacrificing what? By sacrificing what we want to do what He wants when those two things are in conflict. Oh, and that's not easy, is it? When we can't, or better, when we won't sacrifice what we want to do what Jesus wants, it's because we love ourselves too much and Him too little. See, our

commitment to our pleasure and comfort, our love for freedom and independence, our devotion to our way becomes a stronger commitment than our commitment to Jesus, and this is where the battle in the Christian life rages. Jesus won the war, but the battle still rages inside of us.

But this is also the battle in the soul of every non-Christian who hears about this powerful love of God for sinners. See, if that's you, your love for sin, for self, for your own independence can be so strong that the powerful love that we've talked about today, a love that sacrificed not only His physical life, but also His love relationship with the Father to receive His wrath instead, a love that sacrificed everything that was dear to Him for our eternal good, that's just not enough. So, instead of coming to Him, because He loves sinners, for forgiveness and mercy, you reject it, which is sadly what we see happen in our text.

Take a look at verse 19. What we see here is that we should, *point #2), Expect Salvation's Love To Separate People. Expect Salvation's Love To Separate People.* Verse 19, "There was again a division" there it is, a separation "among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, 'He has a demon, and is insane; why listen to Him?' Others said, 'These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?'" That word "blind" is plural. They're talking about lots of blind people. Can a demon do that? No, certainly not. So, after explaining His powerful love that saves sinners like you and me as the good Shepherd, the people listening to Him, once again, are divided about Him.

Interesting it says in verse 19 that the division started because of why? It happened because of His words. His words. Isn't that always the case? What has He been saying about His sheep in chapter 10 though? Verse 3, they "hear His voice". Verse 4, "they know His voice". Verse 8, His sheep don't listen to false teachers because verse 16, they listened to Him. Sadly, this was a real time out working of the truth that these people were not His sheep, and here we see they break off into two groups: those who think that what Jesus just said about raising Himself from the dead automatically makes Him insane and demon possessed. So, they asked the blasphemous question, "Why listen to Him if He's crazy? Like if He's out of His mind, that's the last thing you want to do, right?" However, they ask, "Why listen to Him?" Right after Jesus says in verse 16 what, His sheep listen to Him. Same word again, making it clear that these people sadly were not His sheep.

First group thinks He's evil; the second group think that He could be the real thing, even pointing to Him healing multiple blind people as evidence, because demons, they don't do that. They can't heal people. They can't heal the blind. He's not evil, He might be good. But you notice what's not in this text? Nothing in this text about them what? Coming to Him, believing in Him, following Him as one of His sheep. Not that. This is progress, they're going in a good direction, but this isn't salvation. By the way, as an aside, a cool thing is Psalm 146:8 says, "the Lord gives sight to the blind."

So, these people's testimony here, verse 21, to actual miracles that Jesus performed, that's just another testimony that Jesus is God. It's also a fulfillment of Isaiah 35:5, which says that when the Messiah arrives, one of the things that He'll do is heal blind people. Which we're like, "Oh,

Jesus healed blind people." That's staggering, right? That would be a clear sign. "Wait a minute, that doesn't happen all the time. So, if that's happening, this guy must be the Messiah." They know this; they still walk away.

Verse 19, notice it says this happened "again", because this was a common thing when it came to Jesus. We saw it at the end of chapter 6, where it says, "many of His disciples turned back and no longer walked with Him." They're getting away from Jesus. Chapter 7:43 says, "So there was a division among the people over Him." Chapter 9:16, the text says "there was a division among" the religious leaders about Jesus. Division over Jesus was nothing new, is nothing new. That's because there's no neutral ground. There's no Switzerland when it comes to Jesus. In fact, Psalm 118:22 says about Jesus that quote, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." The idea there is it's an analogy; you're going to build an ancient building; you've got a cornerstone. It's the most important stone in the structure. Everything is based on that stone. They said these builders rejected that stone, but that stone's actually become the cornerstone, the most important stone in the building. Nice analogy and all of that.

But Matthew, Mark, Luke, Paul, and Peter, they all say that that text, Psalm 118:22, is the fulfillment, is the prediction that Jesus would be rejected by the Jewish people, and what we see in the text is the fulfillment. Just after Jesus was born, in fact, a prophecy was spoken about Him. It's in Luke 2:35, and it says this, "this child" talking about Jesus "is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed." Opposed. There was always going to be people who separated themselves from Jesus, most would reject. Notice it says there even in verse 20, many, many called Him demon possessed. Most would reject and some would believe. Oh, and by the way, predicting that the Jews would reject the Messiah that they longed to have for hundreds of years? That simply proves that the Bible's author is God. Predicting that hundreds of years before it happens, and that it happens exactly as says in the Bible hundreds of years earlier, showing that the author of this book is outside of our time domain.

Now, here's the thing. Jesus knew this would be the result of His life and ministry as well. About a year earlier from John 10 are the events of Matthew 10. Here He is preparing His disciples for this, which means preparing us for this, when He says this. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." I don't think He needed to come to earth for that one, but... and He says, "And a person's enemies will be those of his own household." See, expecting that the powerful love that saves sinners would separate people from Jesus, it not only means that we shouldn't be surprised when it happens, but it should also prepare us to separate, too.

I mean, as many of you know, being a Christian can set family against us, friends against us, and even random strangers in real life and on social media against us, all because of Jesus. I mean, we are His followers. That means that we adopt His teachings as the truth. We adopt His ways as our ways. We adopt His thoughts as our thoughts. We do what He wants us to do. He is our highest allegiance. Because of that, people that should love us the most can become our enemies.

But when that happens, Jesus says to His followers, you and I, we have a choice. If we're going to side with those who separate themselves from Jesus, if we're going to leave Jesus to be with them, or if we refuse to come to Him because we know what it'll do to our relationship with them, then we need to take seriously the words that He says after verse 36 of Matthew 10.

Verse 36, "A person's enemies will be those of his own household." I said that, but He continues. "So, whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." What does that mean? "Father or mother, son or daughter would keep you from me. You don't know how valuable I am, how infinitely valuable my love for you is." He continues, "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." What does that mean? Even our lives are not more valuable than Jesus's, and that's because His life was not more valuable to Him than ours was when He died and rose again. He laid down His life to save ours from eternal hell. Why did He do that? Because the Father loved Him, because He loved His people, and because He loved the Father. Love dominated the salvation He offers, but it was a love that sacrificed everything to save sinners like us.

So, I know that giving your life to Him could cause problems for you, but do not assess anything in your life as more valuable than Jesus is, the one who loves you by dying for you and rising again for you. If you're not a Christian, don't be like the two groups in this text, one who rejected and one who didn't come. Be in a third group, the third group that says, "Lord Jesus, I believe in you. Lord Jesus, I trust in you. My life is yours because you loved me that much." If that's you, I would love to talk with you. Like I said, I'll be at that back door when we're done and we're going to spend a moment remembering His death on our behalf even more, because we're going to take Communion. But before we do, let's pray together.

Jesus, as we saw today, there's nothing sappy or soft or sentimental about your love. Your love is strong, it is powerful, because it led to your death and resurrection for sinners, sinners like us. Why you love sinners, people who rebel against you, who want nothing to do with you, is a testimony to your mercy, your kindness, your grace. My prayer is that as we've talked about you, as we've looked at your words and what they mean, their implications, I pray that this lifting up of the truth about you would draw us closer to you, that you would melt away our resistance, that you would overcome, overcome our doubts and our expectations, and that you would do it by your powerful, powerful love for sinners. Please do this work in all of our hearts, I pray, Amen.