

This Week's Theme: Disciples: Loving as Jesus Loved

This Week's Memory Verse: *My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. John 15:12*

Monday, October 6

Scripture Reading: Matthew 9:9-13

We talked Sunday about Jesus' extravagant love, and our need to live out that same kind of love. That was the command that Jesus gave His closest followers: Love the way I have loved. Now there's a tough one . . . love the way Jesus loved. And it's not an option – it's a command. But wait, there's more. If we are to be close followers of Jesus, then it is a command we must obey, too. Rather than look at examples of how Jesus loved, only to become totally intimidated and overwhelmed, we are going to look at a different disciple each day and see how he fulfilled this command.

We'll start with Matthew. Matthew was a tax collector before he began to follow Jesus, and that's really all we know about him. But that is enough for us to see an example of the kind of sacrificial love that Jesus Himself exemplified.

To understand Matthew's sacrifice, you must understand the nature of his job. Matthew was a tax collector. That meant that (1) he was educated, and (2) he was financially secure (a very rare state of existence in ancient Galilee). Of course any time we run across a tax collector in Scripture we assume they were crooked, mainly because most were (they had quite a reputation). We don't know if Matthew practiced his job unethically, but it is irrelevant to the point. Matthew sacrificed a lucrative career to follow Jesus. And why would he do such a thing? It had to be something deeper than being impressed by a teacher. The only thing I can come up with is love. Perhaps Matthew had never received any love like Jesus gave, and perhaps he never felt a greater love than what he felt for Jesus.

The love Jesus demonstrated was sacrificial love, to be sure. Matthew, too, sacrificed his present and future to follow the love He found in Jesus. What about you? If you are to love as Jesus loved, your love must be sacrificial. For whom do you practice sacrificial love? What sacrifices do you make as you practice your love for God, the love that is to be your greatest love?

Love as Jesus loved . . . by sacrificing.

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Tuesday, October 7

Scripture Reading: John 1:35-42; 6:1-15

Andrew is pretty much known for being the brother of Peter, and that's about it. He certainly isn't as prominent as Peter or John, or as memorable as Thomas or Judas. But Andrew has a distinction very few in Scripture do: every time we see him, he is doing something productive for the Kingdom of God. In John 1, he starts out as a disciple of John the Baptist's, and winds up a disciple of Jesus. He was the picture of John's own words: "He (Jesus) must increase, I must decrease."

More than that, Andrew is also seen bringing people to Jesus. In fact, that is all he ever does. First he brings his brother, Peter, saying, "We found the Messiah! You've got to come see for yourself!" Now, of course, Peter goes on to become the leader of the disciples and the early church in Acts. It is not possible to imagine the existence of Christianity without the leadership of Peter, but what if Andrew never brought Peter to Jesus in the first place? Once again in John 6 we see Andrew bringing someone to Jesus, this time a young boy with a small lunch. In the hands of Jesus, that small lunch fed 5000 people, the only miracle recorded in all 4 Gospels. It was a miracle that stirred people to both follow and seek to get rid of Jesus. Truly it is the most known miracle Jesus performed, but what if Andrew never brings the boy to Jesus in the first place?

Andrew brought people to Jesus. It not only demonstrated his love for Jesus, but it also demonstrated his love for others. He was so overwhelmed with what he found in Jesus, he wanted others to experience Jesus, too. He could have selfishly kept Jesus for himself, but love would not let him. Love shares its greatest treasure. And love brings people to Jesus, the One who created and perfected love, and who can alone offer new, eternal life for all who will receive Him.

What about you? Are you sharing your greatest treasure with others? Are you introducing others to Jesus? Are you bringing people to Jesus so they can experience what you have? Love demands that you do: your love for Jesus, and your love for others.

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Wednesday, October 8

Scripture Reading: Luke 9:18-27

No look at the disciples would be complete without including Peter in some way. Peter was the most expressive, emotional, and outspoken of the disciples, so there is no questioning his passion and love. The hard part of examining Peter's life with Christ is isolating one instance to focus upon.

When considering Peter and the love of Jesus, I suppose the passage that comes to mind first is Jesus approaching Peter post-Resurrection. That is their, "Do you love me? Feed my sheep," exchange. It is a wonderful passage, but I believe today's passage is another great expression of loving as Jesus loved.

Jesus is all alone with His disciples and decides to see what the public, and more importantly, what they are thinking about Jesus. After quizzing them about the word on the street, He captures their attention and says, "What do you think?" The surprising part is not Peter spoke first and quickly; the surprising part was that he was dead on with his response: "You are the Christ of God." No one loved Jesus more passionately than Peter. No one more quickly defended Jesus. So, when given a chance to express His deepest feeling and belief, he spoke boldly and plainly.

It is one thing to say, when asked if you love your wife, "Yes, I love my wife." It is something else to say, "Let me tell you how much I love my wife. Let me tell you who she is, what she does . . ." Which response demonstrates greater love? So what if someone asks if you love God? I'm not talking about you taking initiative; I'm talking about if someone asks you. Do you say, "Yes, I love God," or do you say, "Let me tell you how much I love God. Let me tell you who He is, what He does . . ." What is the difference? One is an expression of the mind: this is what I believe. And one is an expression of the heart: this is my deepest emotion, passion, and love. I cannot help but speak quickly, boldly, and plainly when given the chance.

Which response is yours?

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Thursday, October 9

Scripture Reading: Mark 14:32-34; John 17

James and John join Peter as the prominent disciples. Jesus called them, "sons of thunder," but except for a discussion to see who could sit at Jesus' right hand, the thunderous side of their personality is not seen in the Gospels. Still, they were always a part of Jesus' inner circle. The reason we know what Jesus prayed just before His arrest is because they were there to hear His prayer.

Why James and John in Jesus' inner circle? Based on what we see in Scripture, it is hard to know, so we are left to speculation. When it comes to a leader choosing an inner circle, several factors usually come to mind: loyalty, passion, understanding, "buying in" to the vision. An inner circle needs to have people who truly "get it." An inner circle also includes people the leader likes and can work with and open up to; someone the leader personally feels comfortable with. These personal factors are why some people who seem more deserving are not always in a leader's inner circle. And, we also know from the references to John as the "disciple whom Jesus loved," these brothers were dear to Jesus. Jesus wasn't just good for James and John; they were good for Him.

What an honor – to be chosen by Christ as a special friend. And yet, it is not just an honor for James and John. That's right, you, too, can have that special relationship with God. Listen to Jesus' words in John 15: *You are my friends if you do what I command . . . I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (John 15:14-15)*

What was special about James and John was their presence, their faithfulness, their belief and obedience to their belief. Jesus loved them, and He knew they loved Him because they were always there and always obedient. Does Jesus know the same about you? The special relationship is there for us all. It's just a matter of being there and being obedient. Isn't that what Jesus did/does for us? We should love as He loved, and do the same for Him and others.

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Friday, October 10

Scripture Reading: John 20:19-31

Poor Thomas. He faithfully followed and served Jesus for three years of his life; he left everything to be a disciple, and yet he will never be known as faithful Thomas, or sacrificial Thomas, but rather doubting Thomas. Three years of faithful service supplanted by one honest expression. Poor Thomas.

I want you to think for a moment about the situation in this passage. Thomas wasn't Judas. He didn't betray. He loved Jesus, and was no doubt devastated when Jesus died (as were all the disciples). He put the hopes and dreams of his whole life on Jesus, whom Thomas believed was the Messiah, and now Jesus was dead. I know his doubt showed a lack of faith, but I believe it also showed great love. Jesus was his whole life, and he didn't want to joke or trivialize, or fall for some group delusion. Yes, he lacked faith, and, yes, he had an attitude, but I believe his response was still one of passion and love.

And notice Jesus' response to Thomas. First, he did come back so Thomas could see and believe. He didn't exclude Thomas. And the rebuke in verse 29 wasn't so much for Thomas alone; it was a reminder to them all that the blessings to follow must come for those who will not see Jesus the way the disciples did on that day, and for the three previous years.

And finally, don't overlook Thomas' response to Jesus in verse 28. This was authentic worship, and he never did put his hand in Jesus' side. He saw the One he loved (just like the others already had – who knows how many others would have expressed the same doubt?) and he fell down and worshipped Him. Thomas' doubt brought him to the place Jesus wants us all: on our knees in loving worship before Him.

So, we love the doubters as Jesus did. We endure our own doubts and know God will use them, too, to reveal Himself in an awe-inspiring way. And we recognize that our emotions sometimes get the best of us when we're talking about the one we love most. Do you love Jesus enough to overdo it from time to time? Thomas did, and he wound up on his knees in worship. How often do you wind up there? It will be often when you love as Jesus loved.

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Saturday, October 11

Scripture Reading: Philippians 4:4-9

As I am writing this, I am reminded of what a critical time this is the life of our country. As if a presidential election isn't enough, we are facing the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression. I know many of you are concerned; many of you are watching your retirement account drop as quickly as mine; many of you are frustrated that we ever got into this situation; many of you are concerned at the partisan bickering that continues.

And so, I ask that today you spend time praying for our country: for our leaders, for our economy, for the upcoming election. I think this crisis can serve as a wakeup call to us all. How often do you pray for our country and its leaders? Now is a good time to start.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:1-4