

Knowing Christ's Love 1

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[0 : 0 0] Together now to the passage read in Ephesians chapter 3, the letter to the Ephesians chapter 3, and reading again from verse 17.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith, that ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.

Whenever we come to study a piece of complex machinery, it's necessary to actually have more than each individual component, part of that, examined.

Is the outside door open? Angus, can you go ahead and check? Angus, can you go ahead and check?

Whenever we study some complex piece of equipment, let's say something like a car engine or a computer or something like that, it's not simply a study of each and every part of it on its own that you need to actually study.

[1 : 4 1] in order to understand the workings of the whole thing. You can take, for example, the battery or the alternator or the ignition system or something like that.

You can study it, you can break it down, you can see each and every bit of that. But still, even if you know that in all its detail, it doesn't really go very far to help you understand how the whole engine or the whole piece of machinery works.

For that, you need to actually know something of the relationship between the various parts of it that make up the whole. And it's when you understand not only something of each and every piece, but the way that each and every piece relates to the other parts of the whole that you understand the actual working of it.

And it's something like that when you come to study most of the passages of the Bible, especially the New Testament, and especially the epistles of the Apostle Paul.

Because here is one passage, for example, and from it today we're hoping, God willing, to look at the subject of the love of Christ and the knowing of that love of Christ.

[2 : 5 5] But you notice that there are other aspects of salvation alongside that love of Christ in the knowing of it that are necessary to understand in order that we can comprehend something of the whole issue.

He tells us something of what he's praying for here, where he's saying that God would grant you to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.

And then he tells us from that something that's associated with that. Where that happens, he says, Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.

And the result of that is that there then exists a state. You are brought in then, he says, into a state where you are rooted and grounded in love.

He uses both agricultural and architectural terms to emphasise this state that will then be ours if we have the Holy Spirit in us, if Christ is himself dwelling in our hearts by faith.

[4 : 06] You will then, he says, being rooted, firmly setting down roots and grounded, be well founded or on a solid foundation.

You will then, in that state, you will be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height. And there are some people that ask questions about that verse 18.

What does the apostle mean there? He's talking about dimensions, but the dimensions of what? And of course, the answer to that is found in the verse that follows.

Because what he's saying in verse 18 leads immediately into the matter of the love of Christ and the knowing of it. Here he is telling us, here are the various component parts, each together of which leads us into the knowing of the love of Christ.

being able to comprehend what is really ultimately incomprehensible. He tells us it's the love which passes knowledge and yet we are able to enter into it in some measure to know, to comprehend what is the breadth and the length and the depth and the height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

[5 : 26] And then he comes finally to the final part of this whole which is that you might be filled with all the fullness of God.

You see, the wonderful conclusion to the whole thing is that you might be filled with all the fullness of God. Something that you think is impossible.

Of course, it's impossible in the sense of containing, if you like to think of it that way, the wholeness of God which is impossible. But the fullness of God, where is it? Where is it revealed?

Where is it made over to his people? In Jesus Christ. How is it applied to us? By his Holy Spirit. So you see, the whole thing fits together. You can see the workings of redemption in the whole passage where the Spirit inwardly strengthens, where Christ inwardly dwells, where that begins a state of being rooted and grounded in love, where that leads to the comprehension of the dimensions of divine love, where that leads to being filled with all the fullness of God.

Now I don't hope in any way whatsoever to deal with something here today in a few minutes that is in itself incomprehensible.

[6 : 50] It's the love which passes knowledge. It's something that we will spend all eternity exploring these dimensions of the breadth and the length and the depth and the height in knowing the love of Christ.

As Samuel Rutherford said, how much of the ocean can a little child take up in his hand? My dear friends, today I cannot say that I have anything like in my hand the amount of that ocean that Samuel Rutherford had in his.

He was complaining, how little he said, can a little child take up of this great ocean, of the ocean, in his hand. He was applying that, of course, to the love of Christ his Lord.

How little you and I can take up in our hands of the love of Christ. But I'll tell you this, however much of it you and I are able to contain, however much you and I, or however little you and I, are able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height.

There is nothing in this whole world of experience that will refresh your soul like the comprehending of something of the love of Christ.

[8 : 18] and I hope that today, as we look at it both now and God willing this evening, that you and I will come to know it in the way we're going to emphasize this evening, a knowledge of the mind and a knowledge of the heart, where the comprehending is not just in the activities of the mind and the understanding, but also in the motions of the heart in its appreciation.

Evaluation and appreciation that is within this comprehending of the knowing of the love of Christ. But this morning we're going to deal with the love of Christ himself in the way that it is made known to us and this evening as we said we'll come to see how we come to know that.

What is it to know it? How do we enter into the actual knowing of it? How do we explore that knowing of it? What is it in our mind and hearts to know the love of Christ even though we know that it passes all knowledge?

All knowledge. the love of Christ then first of all this morning how do we find it set out for us?

Where is it revealed? Well it is revealed in three things. Again I'm just putting it under these three headings for convenience not in any way trying to be comprehensive about it.

[10 : 02] but first of all it is seen in his condescension. Christ's love in his condescension.

Then secondly you see Christ's love in his sufferings having condescended. And then thirdly you see Christ's love in his continued ministry having condescended and suffered and ascended to heaven.

You see Christ's love this love of Christ that passes knowledge in his condescension. Now we know from the Bible that the fountain or the spring of our salvation is the love of God and it's particularised as the love of God the Father.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish. There is the root of it traced in the Bible's own revelation to the love of the Father.

God so loved the world this disposing fountain if you like this disposing root this dispensing this designing root of salvation is the love of the Father.

[11 : 24] But that design that purpose in the love of the Father is brought to its execution to its fulfilment to its accomplishment through the active love of the Son Jesus Christ himself.

And it is the active love of the Son that the Apostle is here concerned to emphasise and to emphasise in such a way as these Ephesians may come to comprehend something of the breadth and length and depth and height of it.

And you can see something of that love as we said in his condescension. Indeed the very first actings of the love of Jesus Christ to his people is found before they ever existed in his compassion and in his love for them.

That is the very first act of Jesus Christ's love the first actings of his love as the Son of God is in looking out upon us to pity us to pity us in our sins in our state of condemnation.

If you remember Isaiah chapter 63 and verse 9 what it says in regard to the afflictions of God's people it's as true of the love of Christ the Son as it is of the Father and of the Holy Spirit in all their affliction he was afflicted and the angel of his presence saved them.

[13 : 00] In his pity and compassion he redeemed them and he carried them all the time of old.

Where does that take you? back beyond time back into eternity they were being carried in the love of Christ and in the love of the Father they were being carried in the bosom of the one who was to come to be the Redeemer they were being carried in his pity and in his compassion and not only so but as Jesus Christ the Son of God even before he condescended into taking their nature in looking out over them he delighted to use the word of God he delighted in his love and compassion of them.

You know there's a wonderful passage in the book of Proverbs in chapter 8 that deals with the subject of wisdom and we know from the New Testament that the wisdom of God has become revealed and even personified in the person of Jesus Christ so that you can say these things that you read of in chapter 8 of Proverbs have come to us in Jesus Christ to be revealed in his person so that you can say that these things are in fact true of Christ the Son of God who is himself in the scheme of redemption the wisdom and the power of God as Paul says in 1 Corinthians now in this chapter 8 of Proverbs among many other wonderful references we find this near the end of the chapter in verse 13 he tells about how he had been set up before the creation was formed

I was set up from everlasting in verse 23 from the beginning or ever the earth was when there were no depths I was brought forth then in verse 30 he says then I was by him or beside him as one brought up with him and I was daily his delight rejoicing always before him rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth and my delights were with the sons of men now that takes us really into the very depths of the Trinity in its love for each other of the persons within it and the love that extends to those who even then though they were not created were in the eye of God who would redeem them I was rejoicing in the habitable parts of his earth not only is he saying here I was his delight God's delight the father's delight in the son his wisdom but also rejoicing but also rejoicing

I was in the habitable parts of his earth my delights were with the sons of men Jesus Christ before he ever came into the world the son of God the love of God the love of Jesus looking out over that which is yet to be actually yet he says I delight in it I delight in the habitable parts of his earth my delight is with the sons of men and so we ask the question what gave rise to that delight what gave rise to the delight of the son of God and his love regarding his people from all eternity when we know that it was nothing in us that gave rise to his delight when we know that it was nothing in us that attracted his love toward us what was it that gave him delight what was it that he could look out over those that he knew were in a state of condemnation and of sin and of lostness and of poverty and without righteousness and hell deserving why should he concern himself in the midst of all his own divine blessedness why should he who was the father's delight and who delighted in the father why should he concern himself who had in himself all the blessedness of deity from all eternity why should he in the fellowship that was his from all eternity concern himself with sinners what is the reason you cannot see anything other than it is his own love in the nature of it in the blessed and glorious nature of his love he looked out and said

[18 : 08] I will die for these sinners and I will delight to give my son and so he condescended he condescended meaning he came down to us he came down to us in a great act of love it wasn't the end of his love of course as we'll see but in the condescension you can see the love of Christ you can know the love of Christ you can see it as you see him coming down from this glory on high and stepping down into humanity albeit a perfect humanity oh but still a created humanity a human being a human being in conditions of sin and of distress and temptation and pain and ultimately of death you see he's cognizant knowing what that will be before he comes into it it wasn't without knowing that he came to condescend it was in the knowledge and in the love that was his from all eternity that he came to take that step he knew the kind of person he needed to become he knew the kind of nature that he needed to take he knew the kind of conditions that he needed to undergo he knew the kind of situation that it would lead him to and into he knew the kind of death that he must die in order that his own love would reach the peak of its accomplishment but that did not deter him from condescending all that he knew as God of his people of the conditions that would be his own of the kind of circumstances that would be his of the demands that were to be made upon him all of that he knew and yet in love all of that was in no way a deterrent to his condescension he being in the form of God thought it not rather he to be equal with God yet made himself of no reputation and what a great act of love is that making of himself and how did he make himself of no reputation by taking the form of a servant it is impossible for that to take place by anything other than divine love there is nothing in all existence that could have taken that step in those conditions with that knowledge but this love itself in its nature there is no other power there is no other element there is nothing else that could possibly have done this but divine love in all its own glory and in all its own urge to save there is no other instance of it neither will there ever be another instance of it there is never any other incarnation but the incarnation of the Lord

Jesus Christ and there is no love and no other power nothing whatsoever that could have led to this and provided this but the love of Christ the love of God oh what love when it passes knowledge even in such a step whether to be no more in it but that you would have to say of it today that it passes knowledge that it's beyond our comprehension but there my friend look at it see it study it consider it as you see the son of God as you find him revealed in the scripture as you know him stepping out of the heaven of glory that he belonged to into this world of sin and of shame and say behold how he loved me you see him in his love in his condescension you see him in his love in his suffering it's a wonderful point in itself that his love as the son of God to his people was not in any way hindered by the human nature that he took with the limitations that belonged to that human nature the love that he from all eternity had in himself was not in any way hindered or lessened or in any way affected adversely or negatively by the body that he took in fact it's such a wonderful thing to see from the scripture that when you look at the humanity of Christ and what it was by the Holy Spirit that filled him without measure it was in fact furthering the love that was his in its aims and in its purpose that that body was provided for us because of the fact that we know the love of God in Jesus Christ was reaching towards the zenith in his death and resurrection we also know that in order to accomplish that it was necessary as Hebrews puts it that a body be prepared for him he condescended by taking our human nature but we know that the spirit was given to him not by measure that he was filled in terms of his human nature by the Holy Spirit with all the necessary graces that were needed for him as the God man to be furnished with all that was needed to be the saviour of his people and that he was furnished in terms of his human nature with all the love possible in that human nature love to sinners in that human nature and through that human nature and in the actions of that human nature and that therefore that human nature itself became admirably suited to further the interests of the love that took it to himself and so he came into that nature he took it and in that human nature he suffered and he died you know yourselves from the scriptures very well the path that led him to the cross how it was in love in love incarnate in love in his human nature that the son of God suffered and learned obedience by the things which he suffered that it was in love and love in his human nature the love of the son of God

there that he came to give himself into the hands of sinners who could otherwise not have a power to apprehend him how it was there that he gave himself to be tied to the cross how it was there in that condition in that incarnate state that love in Jesus Christ came to die on the cross and there is not a single drop of that suffering that you can say is other than the sufferings of love for his people every single detail of it comes under the wonderful and the most personal description that the apostle gave in his writing to the Galatians he loved me and he gave himself for me supposing there was nobody else in the whole of the universe to be saved but you today but you as an individual put everybody else if it were possible out of view and say that there was to be none other saved but you yourself you would still have to say that the whole extent of this love in every single step of the sufferings of the son of God were for you and you can put it the other way as well that however many are saved and we praise the Lord that there are as the scripture reveals us countless numbers brought to glory by Jesus Christ but you can still say out of all that great number that will be saved that you individually you who know yourself so undeserving of anything from his hand that you who look upon yourself as the apostle did as the least of all saints that to you this grace should be given that you should be able to say today that the son of God loved you and gave himself for you but you can say that when you see him in his suffering scarcely the apostle says in Romans for a righteous man will one die but for a good man some would even dare to die but God commendeth his love to us in that while we were yet sinners

Christ died for us oh what emphasis is in each of these words in Romans 5 what a wonderfully pregnant phrase that is God commends his love to us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us you can see it his own love in his sufferings but let's try and enter a little more into the comprehending of the breadth and the length and the depth and the height because the Lord would have us to enter into something more of the wonder of Christ's person in relation to Christ's love and before we move on to our third point let's try and together consider something of that so that we can hopefully enter more fully into an appreciation and evaluation as we will this evening hopefully of this love that we will know it more than we do now well and what do we mean well this particularly that the love of Christ is not confined to his love as the son of God in his divine nature only neither is it to be confined to him even as we see him having taken a human nature you must not imagine that it is the love of Christ in his divine nature on its own that the bible speaks of the bible speaks of his person made up of two natures two distinct natures but one person now this is important to understand something of his love as well it's not the realms of speculative theology it's practical in the knowing of his love each of these natures of our lord acts according to its own properties the human nature cannot act as if it were divine neither can the divine nature act as if it were human that is why the catechisms the confessions our reform teaching emphasizes that while they are two natures in one person they are two distinct natures and the actings of Jesus

Christ the son of God in terms of his love are also distinct in relation to each of these natures the love is not a different love in his human nature to what it is in his divine nature but the workings of it the actings of it are distinct in reference to each of the natures and yet they are the actings of the one person let me illustrate that for you if I can we've been thinking of his coming down to take our human nature that was an acting a working an activity of his divine nature only he could not have acted in his human nature before he took the human nature in taking that human nature in his coming down in his condescension it was an activity of the divine nature of the Son of God but then look at him in his sufferings themselves and look at him in his yielding himself in death what are the actings of sufferings and the actings of actual death of dying they're not the actings of his divine nature because a divine nature cannot suffer and a divine nature cannot in itself die they are the actings of his human nature and yet it is true to say that all these actings of love are the actings of the one person the

[32 : 50] Son of God incarnate they are distinct actings from each other but they are the actings of man in every case and while the human nature cannot do what is proper to the divine nature nor the divine nature be engaged actively in what is possible only for human nature yet at every step he is the Son of God and he is giving himself a ransom for his people and the devil is dead to say he loved me and he gave himself for me he loved me through the actings of his divine nature he loved me through the actings of his human nature he loved me therefore through the entire actings of his person and he loved me to the end is it any wonder then that the apostle says to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge who is going to measure the actings of a divine nature coupled with the actings of a human nature in the one person that have to be said together to be the actings of love the love of the divine

Son of God in his love for his people is it any wonder that Rutherford asked the question how much of the ocean can you be challenging in his eyes but oh how sweet it is how soul refreshing I hope for everyone who is here to be able even in a little measure to enter into the workings of love on the part of Jesus Christ is that I asked you any subject more important more delightful more soul transforming to you than that is there something that gives your heart a greater lift than that than to be able to say increasingly we hope he loved me with his love and gave himself for me you can see it in his condescension you can see it in his suffering you can see his love thirdly and finally in his continued ministry his actings of love did not come to an end when he ascended to heaven he is now as we saw last

Wednesday evening ministering to his people from there by the holy spirit but it is still he himself the son of God ministered to his people Hebrews 4 and Hebrews 2 tells us something of that here let me just confine it to Hebrews 4 where he says seeing then that we have a great high priest and notice that is passed into the heavens Jesus the son of God let us hold fast our profession for we have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like us we are yet sin let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace who are we going to obtain the mercy from who are we going to receive the mercy from from whose hand are we going to avail ourselves of mercy and of needed and suitable grace the hand of Jesus died

God the hand of the Christ who gave himself the love for us is the hand that openly dispenses the fruits of his own love still in a loving activity to his people lovingly applying them lovingly bringing them to be dispensed so that we might all the more comprehend what is the depth and the breadth and the length and the height and to know the love Christ it's not a love which simply provided and led to some other to dispense what that love provided the same love continues and will ever continue this is a love without beginning and without end you can see it in these few points that I'm raising today but it is something that is unendable because revelation seven tells us that the lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them he shall pastor them he shall shepherd them and lead them to fountains of living waters my friends for all who are saved this love is something that more than more we will be able to enter into the provisions of for all eternity the shepherd will be dispensing through acts of his eternal love everlastingly the fruits of his people and that is true of every way that he takes with us in this life love how much do we lose in our experiences what wonderful experiences of his love do we miss out on because we do not grasp the fact that every single acting of

[39 : 48] Christ saying I must have you as my all and if it means that I must hurt you to wean you from sin my love cleans you so much that it can bear with the hurting of you to bring you to glory would that you and I could see more of it could enter more fully into the experience of it than we do we trust this evening study will help us towards that in the meantime I leave you with words from Samuel Rutherford and would that you and I could reach nearer to the mark that he shows was true of himself at this time whose prison in Aberdeen he said was Christ's palace whose crosses were from the hand of the

I love I am I am persuaded it can climb and not drown and sing in the fire and find no pain and triumph in prisons sorrows exiles disgrace and laugh and rejoice in death oh when will we get our day and hearts fill of this love I will be content of no pawn of heaven but Christ himself for Christ possessed by faith here is young heaven and glory in the Bible all that we have here is scarce the picture of glory should not we young look for and long for the expiring of our minority in other words should we not long to depart and be with

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