

The Rarity of Christ's Love

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into the profound love of Christ as highlighted in Ephesians 3, emphasizing the rarity and special nature of Christ's love for His chosen ones. It explores the contrast between the wrath of God towards sinful humanity and the incomprehensible love of Christ that surpasses all understanding. The sermon urges believers to walk worthy of this great love and to rejoice in being part of the remnant loved by Christ.

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Description

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Transcript

Our subject matter is the love of Christ. And I would have you open your Bibles to Ephesians 3. And I would just like to read once again starting in v. 14. Ephesians 3:14 The Apostle Paul writing to the Ephesian church, For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.

He's praying for these Christians that make up this church in the city of Ephesus, which is modern day Turkey on the coast. He bows his knees to the Father from whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named. But according to the riches of His glory, Paul is praying that God, according to the riches of God's glory, may grant something.

He wants to see this granted. That these Christians would be strengthened with power through God's Spirit in their inner being to have Christ dwell, settle down deeply and richly. That's the idea.

Dwell. It is a word that means to settle in. Into their hearts through faith.

That you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth. And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Father, I pray, please give us this comprehension.

We would pray for the same thing that Paul prays for. That according to the riches of Your glory, please, strengthen our comprehension that we would behold riches. That we would behold such things as perhaps we've never imagined from this insurpassable love, unknowable in its dimensions.

Please give us this. I pray in Christ's name, Amen. The first thing I want to point out is this.

This prayer is not randomly positioned in this letter. It doesn't come at the beginning of the letter. It doesn't come at the end of the letter.

It comes in the middle of the letter. You say, so what? Just this. Have you ever heard it said? Have you ever noticed the reality that often in Paul's epistles, you get doctrine, and then you get a therefore? Look at the beginning of chapter 4. I therefore.

A therefore. Because that's true, therefore, this is how you ought to live. For many of you, that is not strange to hear this.

You know that the epistle that Paul wrote to the Romans, you have 11 chapters largely of indicative verbs. You say, I don't know about that. Indicative verbs are simply verbs that indicate realities.

They're not commanding or exhorting us to do anything. They're simply stating. They're indicating, thus indicative.

They're indicating what's true. And see, then, based on what's true, Paul then says, therefore, because of God's mercies, this is how you ought to live. You see, we are at that point in this letter.

We are at the position of transition. You need to notice that. You say, why? What's that got to do with anything? Just this, Paul is not praying that we would comprehend the love of Christ until after he spent the greater part of three chapters telling us about that love.

And now having told us, he says, Father, according to the riches of Your glory, cause these people to comprehend what I just told them. Because now, I'm going to turn my attentions to them practically living these things out. You see, if you look at chapter 4, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

You see the argumentation? You have been called to something, and I've just been telling you about all the glories of your calling and all the glories of the love that God has for you and what He's powerfully done to save your soul. And now, because of all those things, He says, I want you to walk worthy. And as you move down through here, you can see what's coming at us.

You can see v. 4:17. You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do. This is about how we walk.

And v. 5:1, be imitators of God, His beloved children, and walk in love. You see, this is all about our walk. He's going to tell us how to live.

But listen, the world's ethic, the world's morality... I always remember when I was back late in high school and in my college years, I remember I was doing drugs. I was misusing alcohol. And I remember, you'd go to a bar and you would see in the bathroom just say no.

That was the world's slogan about drugs. Just say no. Well, that's how the world is.

The world starts with its commandments. The world starts with its rules. But that's not how Christianity is.

This is strategic. Because Paul knows this. He knows that if he can get God's people overwhelmed with love, then you know what? The Christian ethic just flows right out of it.

And listen, if you try to live the Christian life without the warmth of the love of Christ, you have dead religion. It's no good. You know, Hudson Taylor was so convinced of this.

You know, he had what? A thousand. He got to the place of a thousand missionaries in the inland regions of China. You know what he did? Do you know what book Hudson Taylor wrote? Now, many of you know there's a two-volume biography, but that wasn't written by him.

Do you know what he wrote? Anybody know? I'll tell you what he wrote. He wrote a commentary on the Song of Solomon. His desire was to encourage his missionaries.

So you know what he wrote on? The Song of Solomon. The allegory, a picture of Christ and His love for the church. You don't want to miss this.

You don't want to miss this. Brethren, we do not want to try to live the Christian life without a sense of the great love that God has for His people. Because if you do, you will have dead religion.

It will be hollow and it will be dry. I'll tell you this, no people have turned the world upside down like the people who have been ravished by the love of Christ. That's just a reality.

Because when you're so moved by that love, you will go to the stake to be burned. You will go to the ends of the earth. Why? Paul said it.

He said the love of Christ constrains me. But that's not the first thing that he said. You know what he said? He said if I'm crazy, if I'm out of my mind, it's unto the Lord.

It's unto God. There were people like Festus who said, Paul, you're out of your mind. Too much learning.

You're crazy. He said if I am, it's for God. He said if I'm out of my right mind, Corinthians, it's for you.

And then he said the love of Christ constrains me. What does that mean? If I'm going to be a crazy man for God, if I'm going to love the people of God, behind it all, I'm constrained by the love of Christ. The love of Christ is constraining.

It is compelling. So you want to feel this. You want to get this.

And I've spent the last days, I think probably this is going to take six or eight sermons, and I want to try to explore the love of Christ from all manner of different perspectives. And I was really thinking, where do you start? Where do you start? Well, I know this, that because of the place in this letter where Paul prays this prayer, he is thinking about the love of God, the love of Christ, that he has already expressed to these folks, especially in the first two chapters. I know that.

And one of the most profound statements that he made to them comes at the beginning of chapter 2. Brethren, I want us to experience this love. How do we go about trying to comprehend the breadth, the length, the height, the depth? And perhaps a good place to start is by reminding ourselves right here at the beginning how unworthy we are of Christ's love. We don't deserve this.

Let us remember the mighty contrast that Paul breaks forth with back at the beginning of chapter 2. Let's look at that. Ephesians 2. And you were dead in the trespasses and sins. You were.

This is reality here. This is where people are. This is where these Christians were before they were saved.

You were dead. See, lost people, people who aren't Christians, it's not a minor sickness. It's an all-encompassing, radical, lostness.

Dead. Dead in trespasses and sins in which you once walked. Following the course of this world.

We were worldly people. Following the prince of the power of the air. That's the devil.

We were devilish people. We didn't believe it, but we were. The Spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

That's us. Disobedient, rebellious, because we broke God's laws. We may not have admitted that we did, but we did.

And we may not have recognized that God disapproved of it strongly. We basically created God in our own imaginations that doesn't care if we break His commandments. But, that's the reality.

We were sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh. Passionate, greedy, hungry, lusting after our sin. Carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

And I want you to remember this. We're by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. I want us to focus on that.

Children of wrath. Verse 4, but God, being rich in mercy because of the great love... See, here's the great love. This is the great love of God with which He loved us.

And He came with that love even when we were dead in our trespasses and made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you have been saved. Now hear me.

Children of wrath. Children of wrath doesn't mean it's our wrath. It doesn't mean we were angry.

It doesn't mean we were wrathful. It means that in the face of the horrors, of the darkness of our deadness and devilishness and lust, God was angry. God was angry with us.

We were children of wrath. One of the lexicons describes wrath as this vigorous upsurge. That's what it was, an upsurge of indignation.

You remember how God said to Abraham concerning the Amorites, the sin of the Amorites is not yet full. When we sin, it's like this sin is building. It's filling up.

It's like this great container is filling up with our sin and proportionate to it is the wrath of God and it intensifies and it upsurges and it increases and God is angrier and angrier and angrier. But here it is. In His anger, He ought to destroy us.

But what happens? God's power to save, and you see it here. God's power to save is coming face-to-face. But what you have here in v. 3 is God... all of mankind, we were children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

That's all of mankind. God is angry. They're children of wrath.

And God is going to destroy these children of wrath. But God being rich in mercy because of the great love, it's like God's power to destroy comes face-to-face with God's power to save. God's love is confronted by God's wrath.

That's what's happening. And here's the thing. Here's the thing, brethren.

If we underestimate God's wrath, you will underestimate His love. It is this backdrop of wrath that makes this love so amazing. But this happens.

This underestimation of wrath, it happens all the time. God's love and Christ's love, it's taken for granted. And I'll tell you why.

You know why. Because people basically think they're not children of wrath. They don't think they're that bad.

They don't think they follow in this course, this following of the Prince of the Power of the Air. They don't believe that they're sons of disobedience. They don't believe that they're carrying out all these passions of the flesh.

They don't believe it. You know what? You've heard it. You've heard it from those of you that have gone out evangelizing.

You've heard it. You always hear it. People think that they're pretty good people.

And you know what? When you think you're pretty good people and you don't think you're a child of wrath, you know what? You will not take God's love seriously because God's love will be cheap. That's the problem. Mankind in general assumes that we daughters and sons of Adam, that we're lovable.

I mean, that's basically how we view ourselves. We think God likes us. We're children of wrath.

Let me tell you something, that means that God's hatred is very much aimed at us. We don't want to underestimate this love. The vast majority of mankind doesn't take death and eternity and judgment seriously for this very reason.

I have talked to so many people that say, you know, they hope to just sort it out. It'll all work out. What craziness! It'll all work out.

Here they are standing there. They are under the wrath of God and every day their sins mount up higher and higher and higher to heaven. And they're filling up the measure of their sin.

And the day is coming when the earth will not bear them any longer and that weight of sin will break through and they will fall headlong into hell. And God will be there to cast them. He detests them and He will cast them away from Himself.

This is the reality of Scripture. We just have as mankind, we just basically have this idea that God indiscriminately, universally throws His love around on all the good people of this world and that there's nothing to worry about. And I'll tell you this, man cannot appreciate the love of Christ until he really appreciates who he is, what he is, who God is, how God feels towards him.

Shall we take a test? Let's take a test. I want you to look at Romans 9. Romans 9, verse 13. As it is written, God is saying this, Jacob have I loved, but Esau I hated.

Oh, how men and women try to reinterpret this. They try to twist this. They try to yank on this thing and deny this reality and do all sorts of somersaults to avoid dealing with this.

A test. God loves Jacob. He hates Esau.

Somebody will say, well, because Jacob was a good guy and Esau was a bad guy. But that's not what's happening here. You know what Scripture says? Before they were born, before they had done either good or bad, that the purposes of God, the purposes of God's election might stand.

God chooses to love one and God's hatred is on the other. You see, until we really come face-to-face with the reality that God hates, that backdrop makes the love of Christ sweet. The test.

The first thing you want to recognize, this is true. Here are twins, two brothers. God loves one.

God hates the other. And so how do you process the statement? Listen, you know what so many men do? They put this verse on trial. But let me tell you something, when you read a verse like this, God is not on trial.

You are on trial. How you respond to this verse says an enormous amount about you. You know what? You pass the test if you look at this statement and you say, Esau is getting exactly what he deserves.

Esau is hated by God and he deserves that. You pass the test if you look at this verse and you say Esau is getting exactly what I deserve. You pass the test if you read this and you marvel that the infinitely holy God would ever bestow His love on the likes of Jacob.

You see, that's when you pass the test. And the thing is, you know what? You know what we can tell by the next verse? Paul expects most men to fail the test. And you see by the next verse what he anticipates most people are going to say? Verse 14, what shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? That's what he expects.

He expects people to say that's not fair. That's what he expects. You can see it.

Injustice. And you know what? They're not saying, oh, I cannot believe that verse. How could God ever love Jacob? That's not what they're saying.

They're not saying that is unjust. How could that ever happen? That's not what they're saying. You know what they're saying? Esau got a raw deal.

That's not fair. And so, that's what Paul imagines. But people immediately feel Esau, he got a raw deal.

If anything in you shouts injustice, it's going to be impossible for you to appreciate the love of Christ. Oh, if we would feel the love of Christ, how necessary it is to feel the hatred of Christ. That.

There's something in you, Christ, that's not just. Because look, what you feel about Esau you will project to yourself. You will feel like you don't know Esau.

You know why people cry out? You know why people shout that's not fair? Not because they care a lick about Esau. They could care less about Esau. The reason they don't like it is because of what it says

about how God deals with them and who God is.

How that affects me. That's the issue. Let's just look at some things.

Psalm 5. Many of you know this. Let's think. Let's think about the tenor of Scripture.

Psalm 5.5. Go back there. Listen, Scripture says we were children of wrath like the rest of mankind. You can just as easily say we were children of God's hatred.

Children of God's indignation. Children of God's anger. That's what we were.

You have to remember the stock from which we came. Psalm 5.5. The Lord hates all evildoers. And what you want to really recognize is that little appendage to evil.

The doers. The doers. There's a common expression that God hates the sin, but loves the sinner.

But you won't find that quoted anywhere in Scripture. It doesn't come from Scripture. Men have devised that saying because that's not what the Scripture teaches.

Who does God hate? God hates not just all evil. He hates the doer of evil. And if you look at the very next verse, the Lord abhors.

That's probably even a stronger word than hatred. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty. The bloodthirsty.

They don't care about other people. And the deceitful. The problem is that we all come from the stock of liars.

We were breathing out lies from the very beginning. Right from our mother's womb. It says that the Lord abhors such.

Or go over a few pages to Psalm 11. Psalm 11 and verse 5. The Lord, what does it say here? His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. His soul hates not just wickedness, but the wicked.

Not just violence, but the one who loves violence. There are verses. Let me just tell you a few verses.

Don't turn to these. But in Leviticus 26, God says this, "Walk contrary to Me, My soul will abhor you." Or this, Hosea 9, "Ephraim, every evil of Ephraim's..." That was basically the way you described the northern kingdom. "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal." There, I began to hate them because of the wickedness of their deeds.

I will drive them out of My house. I will love them no more." Or Jeremiah 12, "My heritage'..." Here He's speaking about the house of Judah. "My heritage has become to Me like a lion in the forest.

She has lifted up her voice against Me. Therefore, I hate her." He's speaking about the people of Judah, of the southern kingdom. In Proverbs 3.32, the devious person is an abomination to the Lord.

Proverbs 6, there are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to Him. And you know what two of them are? It's not just the acts of wickedness. It's a false witness.

God says, I hate, I abominate a false witness who breathes out lies and one who sows discord among brothers. Somebody who's divisive, God hates them. Not just what they do, Scripture says, them.

You can't go but six chapters into your Bible. And what happens? God kills every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth except eight souls. God hates not just the sin.

His hatred. You know, years ago, we had a track that showed the ark. Lightning, dark clouds, the rain is falling.

And there are men and women desperate as the waters are rising trying to get into the ark. And on the side of it is a smiley face that says, smile, God loves you. That track was not made to be funny.

It was made to show how foolish so much of modern-day evangelism is. When you go out into this world and you tell people to smile because God loves them, look, what Scripture tells us is that all of mankind are children of wrath. We are objects of the hatred of God by nature.

We don't deserve His love. God could say this, Noah have I loved, and the rest of the world I hated. You see, we get stirred up.

Paul expects people to get stirred up just when it's Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated. Like we're just one and one. God's love.

God's hatred. But what about when God takes the whole world and His hatred is expressed and He wipes them all out? And He saves but eight souls. This is the kind of God we have.

And let me tell you something, when He wiped out Sodom and Gomorrah, He has Peter tell us He brought them to extinction. He turned them to ashes as an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly now. He spared Lot.

This is all through Scripture. Lot have I loved. Sodom and Gomorrah have I hated.

This is all over. When the Lord hates somebody, in Paul's estimation, it's not injustice. Is there injustice with God? Why? Because Esau was hated.

He said by no means. God said, I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion. Remember this.

Mercy. If you get justice and you get what your sins deserve, it is the full, all-out, deep wrath and hatred and indignation and fury, fierce anger of God. And that is what mankind deserves and we don't think so.

And we have to be reminded over and over of this. And this is the reason why I wanted to go back to it. Brethren, what stock do we come from? We were children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Paul says it is no injustice on God's part for Him to hate Esau. Why? Because it's not unjust. It's just.

That means it's right. It is right for God to hate sinners. And you can be sure of this, if God hates somebody, it's precisely because they're hate-worthy.

If God abominates somebody, it's because they're abominable. If God is offended by somebody, it's because they're offensive. That is the reality, brethren.

God is not unjust to hate mankind because mankind is a hateful thing by nature. It ought to be hated. Evil people ought to be hated by a good and a holy God.

That is only right. God hated mankind. He wiped out mankind in the flood.

Why? Because those people were such character that it demanded that they be wiped out. Justice demanded it. God only damns those who are damnable.

But that's all of mankind. There are no exceptions. You can read there in Romans 3. There's none righteous.

And in case we thought, well, there might be an exception. No, not one. Boy, we have to be reminded over and over.

God, we just have this sense that the world, we don't feel it. We don't hear the thunder all the time and see the dark clouds. But like Pilgrim in Pilgrim's Progress, he recognized there is a storm.

There is destruction. It's coming. It's on the horizons out there.

But we have to be brought back. We have to be reminded. Brethren, by nature, we were children of wrath.

Children of God's hatred. Look, what did we do? We followed the prince of the power of the air. We lived in the passions of our flesh.

We were dead in sin. And what did we do? We were haughty. Have you ever read six things God hates, seven that are an abomination to Him? And one of those things is haughty eyes.

Those were our eyes. Liars. We lied.

Some worse. Some less. But what does Scripture say? Six things that the Lord hates, seven that He abominates? A lying tongue.

That was our tongue. You may look at a child telling, you know, you take the cookie and they're like, mmm, mmm. And you can look at that and it can make you laugh.

You think that's laughable? God says, I hate that. I hate it. Men don't think like God thinks.

And the things that man cherishes, God finds an abomination. We devised wickedness. That was me.

I was thinking of all sorts of ways to appease Myself and gratify Myself and enjoy Myself and devising it all the time. Not caring how many of God's commandments it might bring. There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination, a heart that devises wicked plans.

That was my heart. That was your heart. Do you recognize when people like this die and they come face to face with God, what happens? It is terrible.

It is utterly terrifying. You meet this God, holy, holy, holy. You meet this God and you don't have protection and you don't know anything, really know something of the love of Christ in rescuing your soul and pouring out His soul on that cross for you.

And you come there unprotected. And you come there unloved by Christ. I'll tell you this, you will not sort it all out.

You'll not say like so many people say, well, I'll say to God, yeah, you will say nothing. What you will hear is depart from me, you workers of iniquity. Depart.

It is like God saying, it's Christ. It's Christ saying away with them. Away! I can't tolerate their presence.

Do you know what Isaiah said? Isaiah said that we are all like an unclean thing. And all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. You look that up in the lexicon, there's just one word.

Menstruation. You see, we need to recognize what we are by nature. We are menstruation.

I mean, that's basically a picture of what my life outside of Christ amounted to. Do you recognize what sort of people Christ has chosen to love? The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord.

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord. Thus says Proverbs 15. Brethren, do you hear what I'm saying? Scripture says God hates idolatry.

We loved other things more than God. God hates rebellion. We were the ones breaking His commandments.

God hates robbery. We were the ones. God hates wrong.

God hates pride. God hates arrogance. You and I were the proud ones.

God hates perverted speech. He hates haughtiness. He hates lying.

He abominates the ways of the wicked, the thoughts of the wicked. But more than that, He abominates the wicked themselves. What are we by nature? These were our hearts.

These were our hearts, our feet, our tongues. By nature, we are children of wrath. And you know what Scripture says there in Ecclesiastes? It says because the sentence against our evil deeds was not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

God didn't kill us the very first time we sinned. And so you know what happened? We grew bold in our sin. That's what happens.

We sin. I'm not struck down. We thought that God must not care.

Our sin must not be a big deal. We thought our crimes were small. But make no mistake about it, the measure of our sin was filling up and God's anger... You know what Scripture says? That if you don't obey Jesus Christ, the wrath of God abides upon you already.

It is hanging over you and it is like this heavy storm cloud that is just growing heavier and heavier with the wrath of God. And that's where we were. Because it hasn't fully struck our consciences, and we're such forgetful people, we need to come back and recognize what hateful creatures we were to God.

I mean, hating us with the intensity of His entire divine being. Scripture doesn't say because God knew He was going to save us, somehow we averted being children of wrath like the rest of mankind. That's what we were.

I'll tell you, men provoke God on every side and we were right there in the crowd. We were provoking Him and there is fierce wrath. Brethren, do you see people like this? You know, your neighbor, your co-worker, do you see people like this? Men are highly offensive to God.

That's how man is by nature. By nature, children of wrath. So, you say, man, I visited this church today to hear this.

Look, this is true. And because it's strong, because you may not like it, it doesn't make it go away. But what we have to remember is if God stopped right there just like with the demons and He said, I'm done with you.

You're all gone. But He didn't. You know what we have? We have Ephesians 2 and 4. And this is where you can make a sigh of relief, but you know you can't if you have not passed from verses 1, 2, and 3 into 4. The love.

The love. But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. If we would begin to comprehend something of the love of the Son of God for His people, then we need to recognize that Christ chooses... Brethren, grasp this.

Who are those people that He says depart from Me? Your works are like filthy rags. You know who they are? Children of wrath. In such were we children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Think about the most disgusting thing you can think about. God chooses to set His love there. That's what Christ is doing.

Christ is loving those who should be hated. Look, we're no Cinderella story. I just thought about this.

The love stories of this world. You know, you look at Cinderella. Well, she's getting a raw deal from an evil stepmother.

But she could sing beautifully and she was beautiful, and so when the prince comes along and he bestows his love there... Brethren, when a nation loves its leader or it loves its sports star, or when a prince sets his love on the princess, that love may be altogether real. But you know what? All the love stories of the world, there's something lovable and admirable in the one who ends up getting loved. That's not true with us.

To love the unlovable... Here's the thing. You can pull out your tape measure. Is it not true that the more unlovable the object loved, the greater that love must be? I mean, you can put your tape measure next to this.

You can estimate something of the glory of the love of Christ based on who it is that He loved. To love the unlovable. But we have to come back to that and remember, because that alone will create an appreciation.

If you want to send the people out to walk worthy of their calling, you want to send people out to walk no more like the Gentiles, you want to send them out to walk in love, if we're overwhelmed by that reality, how could He have ever loved me? How could this be? It's that appreciation. But let's measure it in another way. Christ's special saving love.

You have to remember what Paul's doing. He is addressing Christians at Ephesus. He's not addressing the world.

And when he says I'm praying, I'm bending my knee before the Father, he says I'm praying that you might have this strength to comprehend the vast dimensions of this love. You remember. Remember.

It's that they might comprehend with all the saints. The saints, the Christians, the ones who have had this love bestowed upon them. Do you know something? Jesus does not give His love, His saving love, His special love, the love that Paul is praying that these people would be able to comprehend, Jesus doesn't give that love indiscriminately and universally.

And one of the ways that we can measure and get a feel for the love of Christ is its rarity. You know, when I was a kid, I collected coins, baseball cards, hockey cards, basketball cards, football cards, butterflies, stamps. I collected a number of stuff.

And you know this, what is it that really makes a coin valuable? There's something about its rarity. If you just start to think, sometimes it comes over me. Jacob have I loved.

Esau have I hated. Christ's love is possessed by relatively few. Do you recognize that when you go out through this city, if you're one of the ones who is loved by Christ with the same love that these Ephesians were loved with, do you recognize that as you're driving home, it's not like all the cars that are passing you, the people possess that love.

It's not like on the freeway, the people possess that love that you're driving by. Do you recognize that when you walk into an HEB or you are out in the midst of the populations of this earth, those who Christ has set His love upon like this are relatively few. That makes this love so precious.

I'll tell you this, if Jesus Christ after man had sinned had chosen to save all of mankind, that love would be altogether precious. But you know how man would view it? Do you know how we would view it? What would we say? You see, God is concerned about what people say. Do you remember how it was? With Gideon, how was it? Nope.

If you go out there with 32,000 people, you're going to say we got us the victory. God is concerned about what people say. And you know if Jesus saved everybody, you know what man would say? Well, somehow we had it coming.

I mean, somehow we deserved it. Somehow we weren't really that bad. You know what the backdrop of hell does? Especially when the multitudes, it really shows.

That is a backdrop against which the preciousness of Christ's love becomes so vivid. Isaiah in Romans 9, you know what he said? He said, though the number of the sons of Israel be as the sand of the sea, only a remnant of them will I save. Have you ever read that? They may be like the sands upon the sea, like the numbers of the stars.

And God says, a remnant. What is a remnant? A remnant. Only a remnant will be saved.

Or have you ever read this? The gate is narrow. The way is hard that leads to life. How many find it? Few there be that find it.

Or how about this? Many are called. And what? Few are chosen. Do you realize, in a world of 8 billion people, and all through the history of mankind, I think somebody like in some Christian book that I was reading years ago, I remember somebody was basically taking numbers from like the Gallup Poll and saying, look, if we basically believe that people are genuine, who claim to be Christians, who go to evangelical churches, who believe in the Trinity, believe in the resurrection, just some basic tenants, and they work those numbers down across the world.

Have you ever looked at Operation World and looked even at their maybe more liberal estimations, country after country after country, how few true Christians there are in all those countries? And then you think about this, even within the church itself, Jesus says that in the last day there's going to be many from our ranks who are going to say we did many mighty works for God even in the church. He says there's an enemy who sows tares and even in our midst, many are going to turn out to not be true. Do you recognize that if you have this love, how rare it is? Look, I'm not saying that Jesus doesn't offer that love freely to all who will come to Him to have it.

He does. But in the end, Scripture affirms how few there be that find it. Listen, in this very book, Paul's going to say, husbands, love your wives not like Christ loves the whole world.

Love your wives like Christ loves His church. It's a very narrow, very small... Who is it? It's His bride. It's the true church.

It's those who He gave Himself up for. Just like a husband. A husband doesn't indiscriminately love all women in the world.

He focuses that love. And so it is with Christ. The disciples came to Him one day and said, Lord, why do You speak to them in parables? Remember that? Remember what Jesus said? To you, speaking to the eleven of the twelve.

To you it has been given to know the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven. But to them? To who? To the crowds. It has not been given.

You see that? Love gives. And to be one of those objects that have received this special saving love, to receive ears to hear, it's been given. Or how about this? In Luke, Jesus says to those that were returning in the 72, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you.

Rejoice. Rejoice. Rejoice that your names are written in Heaven.

In that same hour, He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and He said this, He says, I thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that You have hidden. I was struck by this. In John 14, I will love You and manifest Myself to You.

Father, You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding, revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will. What I find is this love gives.

And one of the primary things that we find that love gives is a revelation of itself. You think about a man and a woman and as they give themselves to each other, there is a greater and greater revealing. And where Christ loves, He says it's been given to you to know.

It's been given to you to have your eyes open and to have your ears open. It's been given to you to have manifestations of Myself. He says, Peter, but who do you say that I am? Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

He says, Peter, blessed are you. He says, that was revealed to you not by flesh and blood, that was revealed to you by My Father. There's this revelation.

Jesus says, I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends. For all that I have heard from My Father, I have made known to you.

You did not choose Me. I chose you. We're going through life, children of wrath.

We're going through life hating God, following the devil, dead in sins. And Christ comes along. We're detestable.

We're hateful. Such things move in God. How could He do it? How could He love such as us? But He chooses.

And it's a rare love that makes it especially valuable. Jesus said it. In truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, a great famine over the land.

Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath and the land of Sidon to a woman who was a widow. You see how there were many? And God's specific love passes over all of them to this widow. There were many lepers in the days.

Prophet Elijah cleansed none but Naaman the Syrian. And you know what? It filled them with wrath and they wanted to throw him over the cliff. That's the same wrath that people feel.

Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated. There's those words of the psalmist. The loving kindness of God or His steadfast love endures forever.

It seems like we heard about that just recently. But His steadfast love endures forever. It says He wiped out Pharaoh.

He killed all their firstborn. But the steadfast love of God endures forever. Do you see how does it endure forever when He's killing all the firstborn? Because He loves Israel.

It's a very specific love. We're talking about the love of Christ. It's special.

It's special. Do you remember Jesus? He says, Fear not, little flock. Why not? For it's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

You needn't let this grab hold. You walk out in the world, remember the stock from which you came. And remember, if you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, such a love is upon you that is rare.

You are one of the remnant. You are one of the few. You are one of the little flock.

For Jesus to call His flock little, I know that in the end, it's going to be such a number from all the tribes and tongues. I know that. But at any given snapshot, those who truly know His love, I'll tell you what, I can tell you what He told those that came back from casting out those demons.

You ought to rejoice. You ought to jump up and down. If Christ's love is upon you, you have everything.

I mean, what could you complain about? You're one of the few. You're one of the little flock. I mean, when you're gripped with this and you go out, and now you're hearing, walk worthy.

Walk worthy because you're not like everyone else. You are special. Because that special love was bestowed on you because He chose to put it there.

What a thing is this! What an honor! What a gift! What love! That we do such things for such people as us. You think about where you'd be if you'd have died six months before you got saved. You'd be in hell.

And altogether deserving those torments. But He stood in our place and He drank that cup. And now, the benefits of that.

A good deal of us in this room. And I'll tell you, if you find yourself on the outside, don't go out and hang yourself like Judas. The thing to do is hear these words.

Jesus says, Him that comes to Me, I will in no wise cast out. You know what that means? You come to Me and I will love you. I will embrace you with My love and I will not let you go.

Father, I pray, help us to feel this and to be moved by it. I pray in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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