*DEVOTIONAL*

December 11 - 16

*The Love of Christ*

**Monday, December 11 Mark 12:28-34**

*“Love the Lord your God . . . love your neighbor as yourself”*

 Jesus answers the teacher of religious law’s question by reaching back to Deuteronomy 6:4, “The Lord our God is one Lord.” From this foundational truth, he proceeds to the principle of love which connects us to our God by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.” Jesus then applies the principle of love by matching it with the commandment in Leviticus 19:18, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” With scarcely a breath in between these three statements, Jesus has summed up the teachings of the Old and New Testaments and can now say, “There is no other commandment greater than these.”

 A dimension of God’s love is missing if the love relationship is limited to communion between God and humanity. To make love complete it must flow in person-to-person relationships. To love our neighbor as our self is the point of proof that our heart, soul, mind and strength are being transformed by the love of God.

*In the way I love you, my Lord God, may I also love my neighbor as myself. Amen.*

**Tuesday, December 12 1 Corinthians 13:1-13**

*“Love is . . . ”*

 In verses 1-3 Paul argues for the absolute necessity of love, because even the most amazing and wonderful gifts and abilities are worthless if they are not given and practiced in love. Next Paul turns to a description of love in verses 4-8. While it may be hard to define love, it is easy to recognize it by the way it acts.

 In fifteen succinct phrases Paul defines the principle for relating to others which will utterly transform all human life. He is not describing a natural human kind of love but that love which was defined by God’s gift of himself in Jesus Christ. If we were to go through these four verses and everywhere the word “love” appears substitute the word “Christ,” they would still be true because the kind of love being described is love that has its source in God. And as we look at each of the phrases it becomes obvious that we are defining a style of life that is beyond our reach at a human level – something absolutely impossible unless God’s Spirit dwells within us and helps us.

*Today, Lord, I commit to practicing Christ’s love with others. Amen.*

**Wednesday, December 13 1 John 4:7-12**

*“Let us love one another”*

 Love is a word about which we make decisions; it involves our will by which we choose to love others. Why should we make such a decision to love others? Because love originates in God, and all who belong to God practice their relationship with him by choosing to give to others that love which God has given to us. To put it negatively: if we choose not to love others, then we don’t know the God who loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice for us.

 We are to love out of the fullness of God’s prior love. There is no confusion in John’s order; we do not earn God’s love by our acts of love, but rather it is our experience of God’s love that provides the inner motivation toward love for others. It is the kind of love we ourselves receive; the love that forgives our sins and identifies with us in our journey. Therefore we have that experience of love as the “en route” training in love that enables us to express its implications with those around us. Love is not an ideal we strive for; it is a relationship with others that we live, a dynamic and growing result of our relationship with Jesus Christ.

*Teach me to love others, Heavenly Father, as you have loved me. Amen.*

*DEVOTIONAL*

December 11 - 16

*The Love of Christ*

**Thursday, December 14 1 John 4:13-21**

*“As we live in God, our love grows more perfect”*

 God’s love is perfected in us not through our perception of it or our experience of it, but through our expression of it. God’s love reaches completion in us by the degree to which it is shared among us. The most immediate result of this is reassurance. We will have boldness or confidence on the Day of Judgment when we meet God. This is not irreverence but assurance, not flippancy but forthrightness. Because of his love growing in us, we become increasingly confident that despite our continued life in the world, where we are far from perfect, we are becoming more and more like Christ. On that Day, God will see Christ in us and will accept us into eternity.

 John is not saying that we should practice human love in order to grow into divine love. Nor is he saying that human love is the exclusive way we love God. Rather, he is saying that the absence of love for one another betrays an absence of love for God. Those who live with this duplicity, saying that they love God but in their hearts hate some human being, are (in John’s unyielding words) “liars.”

*Perfect your love in me, Lord, as I express it through my love for others. Amen.*

**Friday, December 15 Psalm 36:5-10**

*“Pour out your loving-kindness on those who love you”*

 The psalmist begins with God’s loving-kindness and faithfulness. These fill the earth and reach up to heaven, thereby transcending all human love and faithfulness. He continues with God’s righteousness, comparing it to the mountains which are a natural emblem of immensity. Judgments, on the other hand - that is, particular acts of God’s righteous decisions - are likened to the great deep in their vastness and mystery.

 Then the psalm transitions from the consideration of God's unapproachable excellence to that of his providential care, which extends to every living thing. The thought of these things makes the psalmist exclaim: "How precious is your loving-kindness!" It is valuable beyond all treasure, since it affords such a sure and ample protection for all who take refuge beneath God’s outstretched wings. God is represented as a gracious host who provides for all who come to his house and his table. God is the fountain of all life, both physical and spiritual. He is the source of all light, and apart from him all is darkness.

*Your love for me is amazing, Lord, high and mighty, near and personal. Amen.*

**Saturday, December 16 Romans 8:35-39**

 *“Nothing can ever separate us from Christ’s love”*

 Paul addresses the mighty forces that confront believers and asks whether any of them can separate us from the love of Christ. He answers his question by declaring that there is nothing that can possibly affect the eternal purposes of God or the undying love of Christ. Even death cannot rob the believer because, as Paul says elsewhere, to be “absent from the body” is to be “present with the Lord.” Living is “Christ” and to die is “gain.” Life with all its problems holds no terror for him because nothing can change God’s decision to love him.

 Paul concludes with the words “Christ Jesus our Lord.” It is the reigning and ruling Lordship of Christ that is fundamental to our salvation, and it is the personal aspect of his Lordship, making him “ours,” that brings salvation from the realm of religious possibility into our hearts with life-transforming power. The Lord of all the earth is in us, and there is nothing in all the earth that can overpower his presence. We belong to him today, tomorrow, and into all eternity. Nothing can change that reality!

*I belong to you, Jesus, not because of who I am but because of who you are. Amen.*