

Shared Love

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[0 : 0 0] This week and next week we are going to be thinking in a little more detail about what Jesus did for us on the cross.

We'll focus on that in more detail next week, which of course is Easter Sunday. Today we come to John 17 and we think a little bit about some of the things that lay behind the cross and that led up to the cross just as this prayer itself was prayed in the hours and days that led up to Jesus' death.

Our title as you can see is Shared Love and in so many ways the love of God is the most precious and the most amazing area of theology that we can turn our attention to and when we think about the cross and when we think about Easter and everything that happened, all of that is grounded on God's love.

Of course for so many reasons when we think of the subject of God's love it's a subject where we can just barely even scratch the surface. But I want us to have a look for a wee while and see what we can learn today or what we can be reminded of and we're especially going to focus on the words of verse 24 to 26 in Jesus' prayer where he said, Father I desire that they also whom you've given me, maybe with me where I am to see my glory that you've given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous Father even though the world does not know you, I know you and these know that you have sent me. I've made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you have loved me may be in them and I in them.

[1 : 5 1] Love of course is the characteristic that lies at the very core of who God is. Later John wrote in one of his letters and he said, Anyone who does not love God does not know God because God is love.

And it's amazing how profound and glorious three short words can be. God is love. You ask the question, what is God? The answer, he is love.

But how do we understand that statement when we say God is love? Well, a key thing to notice just as we begin is that the doctrine of the Trinity, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity that God is three in one, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This is a key truth for helping us to understand what these words God is love really mean. Because when the Bible says God is love, it's not making some kind of vague, optimistic or even mystical statement.

And people often can understand that phrase that way, you know, sort of say, Well, God is love as though, you know, everything will be nice. And we can think of it in those vague terms, although today we've kind of changed it from God is love to just love is love, which is even vaguer.

[3 : 1 1] When the Bible says God is love, it's not a vague statement at all. It's pointing us to the fact that from all eternity, God has existed in a bond of love between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

So when you think of God, when we think of God, you know, before the world existed, it's easy to think of him in a kind of isolation, alone, solitary. You kind of imagine just God and nothing else.

And it all seems very isolated. But the doctrine of the Trinity shows us that God has never existed in cold isolation from all eternity. God has been loving the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is and always has been a perfect, united fellowship of love.

And of course, that makes perfect sense because for God to be loved, it has to be someone to love. And in the Persons of the Trinity, Father, Son and Spirit, they are eternally lover and beloved to one another.

And it reminds us that at the core of who God is, is unselfishness. And whenever you think of the Trinity, I want that word unselfishness to always be at the back of your mind because that's what the Trinity is showing us, that at the core of who God is, is never a kind of selfish self-interest.

[4 : 39] There's just the purest, tenderest, most intimate union of love. So I don't know if anybody's ever kind of asked you the question, you know, well, okay, well, if God made the world, what was God doing before he made the world?

And you think, you know, well, as if that maybe kind of undermines the Christian explanation for reality. What was God doing before the world? Well, we can answer that question. What was he doing?

He was loving. God's love is a shared love, shared between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

God is love. But we want to go a bit further than that, don't we? And we want to understand that a wee bit more. And the question we need to ask ourselves, well, okay, what is that love like?

And that's a question that John 17 helps us to answer. It shows us more of what that shared love of God is like.

[5 : 40] And we see four things revealed to us in this chapter that I just want to go through quite quickly. First of all, we see a love that is always there.

Jesus highlights that when he says, you loved me before the foundation of the world. Now here we're being told something about the love between the Father and the Son.

And it's a love that's been there from before the foundation of the world. Now I want you to notice how deep and extensive the language is there. So we think of the word foundation, you think of starting points.

So someone's building a house first thing they build is the foundation and everything else comes on top of that. And the foundation or starting point for the cosmos, for the universe is a question that's always fascinated the human mind.

What was the start? Where did it all begin? What was the foundation of the universe? What I want you to notice is that verse there is not pointing you back to the foundation.

[6 : 42] It's pointing you back behind the foundation even further before the foundation of the world. And the verse is saying, don't just think about where did everything start. Think back further.

Go below the foundation. Go before the beginning. And what are you going to find? Are you going to find the warring gods of pagan mythology?

Are you going to find the isolated solitary God of Islam? Are you going to find the emptiness of nothing? Well, the Bible tells us that before the beginning, you will find a father who loves his son.

God's shared love is an eternal, ever present, ever existing, never fading, never changing love. It has no boundaries, no starting point, no end point, no limit, no threats.

The love of God between father, son and spirit is a love that's always there. The second thing we see is that this love is a love that always knows.

[7 : 56] Jesus says something beautiful in verse 25. He says, oh righteous father, even though the world does not know you, I know you.

And this is reminding us of the fact that the loving relationship between father, son and spirit is a love that knows one another so intimately and so closely.

Now we have to kind of be careful about how we understand that phrase, I know you, because we often use that phrase, I know you or I know him, to kind of express a sort of fairly vague acquaintance.

So you'd say, oh, do you know Thomas at St. Columbus? Well, I know him, as if to sort of say, well, yeah, I know who he is and maybe he's a friend. But the Bible doesn't use it, oh, I know him in that kind of way.

The Bible uses the word know to express the deepest, closest relationship. And very often that's the union between a husband and a wife as close as two people can possibly get.

[8 : 56] The shared love between God, father, son and spirit is a love that knows. And so each person in eternity knows the other. And of course, again, that makes perfect sense because they share the same nature and it's the most perfect example of mutual knowing.

The father knows the son, the son knows the spirit because they all have the same nature. They are one and so their knowledge is unimpeded. It is wholly shared.

Now, I think there's two important explanations for that. One is the fact that God is all knowing. So of course, God knows. We talk about the omniscience of God, the fact that God knows all things.

And so that, of course, is part of the explanation as to why the father, son and spirit know one another. But at another level, at a simpler level, but at an even more beautiful level, that shared knowledge is based on the fact that the father, the son and the Holy Spirit talk to each other.

And this whole chapter is a beautiful example of the many occasions we read in the Gospels of God, the son speaking to God, the father.

[10 : 04] And here, and in the events that come after this prayer and the crucifixion of Jesus, we actually see God, the son pouring his heart out to his father.

So even though the father knows, the son still speaks to him, even though the son knows the father still speaks to him. And so the father, son and spirit know each other. There's this perfect intimacy.

There's the deepest fellowship. And they speak to each other. They share things with one another. They're interested in one another. Again, there's never a selfishness, never a lack of interest or care or concern.

The love between father, son and spirit is a love that knows. But I want to just notice one important thing here just before we go into the next thing.

And I think this is fascinating. We have this foundational truth that God is love. Father, son and spirit love, and they know that they love one another.

[11 : 07] And if anyone knows about that love, it's God, each person of the Trinity knows that they love and they know that they are love. There's no gap in that knowledge whatsoever.

And yet even though the father and the son and the Holy Spirit know that and have always known that, yet the father still tells his son, I love you.

And so even though the son knows that perfectly well, the father just wants to keep on making sure he knows. And we see throughout the Gospels, a voice coming from heaven, you are my beloved son with whom I'm well pleased.

Isn't that an example we should all always follow? Their love is a love that knows. Third, it's a love that always wants to be together.

Sometimes some of the most amazing words in the Bible are the smallest ones and the simplest ones. I think I say that quite often, but I think I'm going to bang that drum for the rest of my life because the wee words in the Bible are amazing.

[12 : 15] And in John's Gospel, one of these beautiful small words is the word with. We find it right at the very beginning of the Gospel in verse one of chapter one, in the beginning the word was the word and the word was with God.

The word was God. And it's presenting us here with a beautiful vision of togetherness. The father, the son and the son towards one another, so close, so united, so bound together, each looking towards the other with devotion, commitment and affection.

John 17 picks up on this by speaking about the oneness of the father and the son, that the glory you've given me, I've given to them that they may be one, even as we are one. In father, son and Holy Spirit, we see a perfect togetherness.

And this, of course, is reminding us of the fact that love and separation are always in tension. So I'm sure you are the same when I say that I find it really hard to be away from my family.

I hate it. Because if you're separated from a loved one, it does not mean that you stop loving. It means that your love is in tension.

[13 : 29] Because when you love someone, you want to be with them. And that is most perfectly true of God. And in fact, Jesus held on to that truth as he prepared for the cross.

He said, the hour is coming, the hour is coming when you'll be scattered each to his own home. You leave me alone, yet I'm not alone, for the father is with me. When you love someone, then you belong together.

God's shared love is a love that's always wanting to be together. And then the fourth thing we see about the love is that it's a love that serves.

One of the many great truths highlighted in John 17 is that God the Son has come to serve his father. I've glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

And one of the great truths about biblical love is that it's never just an inward feeling or an inward disposition. True love in biblical terms is always, always shown in outward action.

[14 : 34] It's never just a feeling on the inside. And we see that in the triune God. The Son outwardly serves his father.

You can see that I do as the father commanded me so that the world may know that I love the father. The father outwardly reassures the son. You can see that in John 12, Jesus says, my soul is troubled where I say father, save me from this hour.

But I've come for this hour, Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it and I will glorify it again. The father outwardly gives the son reassurance and the spirit outwardly works out God's purposes.

You can see that in John 14. The Holy Spirit whom the father will send will teach you all things and bring to remembrance what I've said. These verses are reminding us that the father is always an active, loving, supportive father.

The son is always a faithful, willing, hardworking son. The spirit is always proceeding from the father and the son, accomplishing the purposes of God, revealing and carrying his power.

[15 : 39] God's love is a love that always serves. So the father never falters as a father. The son never wonders as a son.

The spirit never hesitates as he proceeds. So God's love is a shared love.

It's a love that's always there. A love that always knows. A love that always wants to be together. A love that always serves.

And again, all of that is reminding us that at the heart of who God is, is a beautiful, unselfishness. And that's really what lies at the heart of the fact that God is love.

God, father, son and spirit, loves God, father, son and spirit. And it's so important that that always shapes your understanding of God.

[16 : 42] We must never forget that God is love and his love is so perfect. And the reason you must remember that is because the devil's blasphemous strategy is to make you doubt it.

And to make you think that God's love is actually not that nice. Or that God's love is maybe not that reliable. Or God's love is maybe not quite as good as it could be.

The devil wants to undermine your confidence in God's love. Do not let him do it. God's love is absolutely perfect. It's a shared love between father, son and spirit.

Now, I hope that all of that is something that makes you think, wow, when you think of God. But I can probably understand if you think of all that. You think, well, okay, that's all really good, Thomas, and good to know and good to learn.

But where do I fit into it all? We've been talking about God, father, son and spirit. What about you? Well, the amazing thing about God's love is that it's not just shared within himself.

[18 : 04] God's love is shared with you. And these four things that are true about God's love for father, son and spirit, they're true of you as well.

Because God's love for you is a love that is always there. In verse 24 in John 17, we get a glimpse into the standard of God the father's love for God the son.

It's a love that's bigger than the history of the universe. He's loved him before the foundation of the world. It's an eternal. It comes before the beginning and it reaches beyond the end.

That's the standard of God the father's love for God the son. And you think, wow, that's amazing. Verse 24 of John 17 tells you the standard of God the father's love for God the son.

And it's just massive. Verse 23 tells us the standard of God's love for you as a Christian, if you are one or if you become one.

[19 : 24] So you think, well, these are two really important verses because they're going to show us the differences. What's the difference between the way God loves his son and the way God loves you as a Christian? Verse 24 says, you love me before the foundation of the world.

So that's the standard for the son. What's the standard for us? Verse 23 says, you loved them even as you loved me.

And so what's the difference? It isn't one. That actually isn't one. And the astounding thing that's been revealed to us here is that the standard of love reserved for the son is the standard of love being bestowed upon you.

God's love for the son is eternal. No start, no end, no limit, no threat. It is just always there. And his love for you is the same.

And that should take our breath away. But it should also make perfect theological sense to you because at the heart of Christianity is the fact that if you are a Christian or if you become one, you are united to God the son.

[20 : 40] You are adopted as God's own child. And Paul captures this beautifully later on in Ephesians 1 because he talks about how God has treated us and he uses exactly the same phrase before the foundation of the world.

Blessed be God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who's blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world.

God the Father's love for you is bound up with his love for his son. So if you ask yourself the question, will God always love me? Then you have to ask yourself the question, will God always love his son?

And if the answer to the second question is yes, then the answer to the first is the same. And that is where assurance is found, the fact that you are united to Jesus if you are a Christian or if you become one.

God's love for you is a love that will always be there. Doesn't matter when it is, tonight, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, God's love for you will not wobble, it will not fade, it will not weaken, it will not change, it will always be there, always.

[22 : 03] And it never even nudges down, even from 100% to 99.9%. It's never even a flicker or a glimmer, it's always there.

And it doesn't matter what is happening in your life. So if you have a terrible week at work this week, if people give you a hard time, God's love for you is still there.

If you are worrying about stuff, health, family, work, God's love for you is still there. If you're struggling, if you feel weak, or like you're failing, if you feel depressed or heavy or lonely, if you feel full of regrets and frustration with the way you're doing your life, God's love for you is still there.

That's what it means when it says that the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him.

God's love for you is a love that's always there. God's love for you is also a love that always knows. John 17 makes it so beautifully clear that the Father knows the Son, the Son knows the Father.

[23 : 15] But if we go back to John 10, we see that God knows us too. I am the Good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me just as the Father knows me and I know the Father.

And so the principle emphasised in John 17 is applied to us in John 10. And we see that again, the standard of relationship within the Trinity is the benchmark for God's loving knowledge of us.

So that means that God's love for you is never kind of a distant or cold or detached or a mystical love. It's a love that knows you. And that is such a precious truth because so often in life, we are crippled by the fear that if people only knew us, they would never love us.

And that of course is why people are defensive and why people put up a barrier. And that can manifest itself in lots of places in life, especially if it can happen at work. People put up a barrier, they're defensive because they do not want their weaknesses or mistakes to be seen.

And you can find yourself thinking, well, what would happen if people knew that I was actually really struggling with my job? What would happen if people really knew the sins that I struggled with and the doubts that I have?

[24 : 41] What if people knew that half the time as a Christian, I'm scared, I'm worried, I'm stumbling, I forget to pray, I don't understand things as much as I should and even things I have learnt, I can't quite remember them as I should and I really don't feel like I'm making progress.

What if people knew all of those things? Well, God knows, God knows and he still loves you. So you think of all the things you worry about, God knows all of that.

You think about all of your failings, God knows them all. You think about whatever it is that kind of puts that feeling of tension in the back of your neck, God knows. But the fundamental truth is the fact that God knows is not because he's omniscient.

God knows because he loves you. You matter to him. Your thoughts matter. Your worries matter. Your fears, the detail of your life matters to God and in it all he wants you to know and to never stop knowing that he loves you so dearly.

And just as Jesus shows us, God wants us to talk to him about it all. God's love for you is a love that knows.

[25 : 53] And even if you are maybe not yet a Christian, God knows whatever it is that's holding you back.

He is saying to you, I know, but I love you and I will never let you down. God's love is a love that knows.

God's love for you is also a love that wants to be together. As we said, God's love delights to be together. There's a witness at the heart of God's love, Father, Son and Spirit.

And at one level, that kind of intimacy between God, Father, Son and Spirit, that fellowship, that togetherness, it can kind of seem so out of reach to us, can't it?

We often feel like God is far away and we think, well, you know, because of who I am, God probably wants it that way. He wants to keep me at arm's length. But if you go back to John 17, you see one of the most amazing things that Jesus ever said.

[26 : 57] He said, Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me may be with me where I am. Now, in this verse, he is describing Christians, those of you who are Christians, those of you who become Christians if you put your faith in Jesus.

So if you are one, if you become one, he's talking about you. And these are among the most precious words ever written because they're answering the question, what does God the Son want?

What does Jesus want? What desire drives him? What is it that he longs for? What's his goal? Here we even say, what is his dream?

It's that you would be with him where he is. And if you have ever felt worthless or lost or rubbish or that, or like, you know, a waste of space or that you don't belong, then please write these words on your heart.

And this son here is talking to God the Father about you and he's saying, I really want them with me. And that, of course, points us back to the Garden of Eden when humanity was created to be with God and it's pointing us forward to the new creation where we will be with him for all eternity, for all who trust in Jesus.

[28 : 19] And that's what the new creation will be like. It'll be a place of perfect, beautiful belonging. And the most amazing truth is that no matter how much you want that, God wants it more.

And you only have to look at the cross to see how much God wants you with him. God's love for you is a love that always wants to be together.

And then the fourth thing is true as well, that God's love for you is a love that serves. Now here we probably think to ourselves, well, absolutely, you know, the fact that God loves us and the fact that his love is so amazing, that should motivate us to serve him.

And of course, that's true. Jesus said, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. And it's one of the greatest privileges in life for us to go through every week in the service of God that makes for the most fulfilling and satisfying and exciting life.

That's not what makes us Christians, but that's what we do because we are Christians. We want to serve our amazing God. But the truth I want to highlight here is not the fact that we serve God, even though that's true.

[29 : 30] What I want us to recognize is the fact that before we ever serve him, he has served us. Because God the Son did not come to be served. He came to serve and give his life as a ransom for you.

God's love is a love that serves. It's a love that serves in every way that's required. It's a love that serves to the very end. It's a love that serves to the point of dying because Jesus having loved his own, he loved them to the end.

God is sharing his love with us in the greatest display of suffering and service that the world has ever seen. And that is where God's love is most clearly seen. And that takes us back to the words we read at the very start.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us. It was revealed among us that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love. Not that we've loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Now that word propitiation is pointing to the fact that in Jesus' death, he is removing all the stain of our sin. He is dealing with all the fact that that breaks our relationship with God.

[30 : 55] He is restoring our relationship with him through his death. We could say God's love is so great that we serve him.

And of course that's true. But before that we must realize that God's love is so great that he has served us.

He has served us in dying for us. He served us in freeing us from sin. He served us in giving us eternal life in which he can love us forever. He has served us because his love for us will never fall short of what we need.

God's love for you is a love that serves. But the fact that he serves you is not because you are his master. You aren't.

It's because you are his beloved. And our response to that should be to fall into worship and say, oh God, how I love you because you first loved me.

[32 : 15] God's love for you is a love that's always there. It's a love that knows you. It's a love that always wants to be with you.

And it's a love that will serve you to the very end. And that's the incredible thing about John 17 is that you have this incredible prayer between God the Son and God the Father.

And at the heart of it, he's talking about you. That is amazing. Amen. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your love, your amazing, immeasurable love. And how we love you because you first loved us.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the God who is love, we love you. We just love you and we want to live for you and we thank you for everything you've done for us. Amen.