

Extravagant Love

Tomorrow is Valentine's Day. I hope you've already bought your cards and candy or whatever you are planning for your valentine. Remember it was a big deal when you were a child, you bought those cheap little valentines so you could give one to everyone in your class at school. We made big hearts and stapled them together so they would hold all the valentines and taped them to our desk, then you walked around and put the cards in the big heart. Your mom made you buy enough to give to everyone, so you had to give them to the kids you didn't really like. Red hots and those nasty tasting little candy hearts with the little messages on them. I was more of a Russell Stovers fan for Valentine's Day. And I married a woman who doesn't really like chocolate. For the first few years I bought them anyway just so I could eat them, but you can't get by with that forever. I finally wised up so I just go with jewelry now. How can you go wrong?

Thinking about Valentine's Day and the gifts that people buy, I looked at a website for extravagant gifts. Amazing what you can do if you have all the money in the world.

Extravagant gifts. Diamonds. Homes. Cars. The list can go on. But there are some gifts even more extravagant than that. Maybe you heard the story this week about the Wake Forest baseball coach, Tom Walter, who donated his kidney to Kevin Jordan, one of his freshman ball players who would have died without a kidney transplant. That's an extravagant gift.

Webster defines extravagance as **Extravagance "...a spending of more than is reasonable or necessary, excessive expenditure..."** Another definition reads, **"...a going beyond reasonable or moderate limits in conduct..."** I would say that's what the coach did. That is extravagant. But this morning I want to talk to you about the ultimate expression of love. Extravagant love. The kind of love that goes beyond what is reasonable by every definition and criteria. Of course I'm referring to the sacrifice of God's own Son upon the cross to secure our salvation. That Jesus Christ, the innocent One, would suffer upon the cross, bearing our sin and reproach and shame so that we might be saved – that certainly goes beyond what is reasonable. The soul that sins must die and we all sinned. Justice made its' demand, but thank God, mercy answered and we have been redeemed and set free from sin and death.

Such extravagance. The extravagance of the cross. The extravagance of unconditional love. Consider the extravagance of that love with me for a few moments this morning as we prepare our hearts to come to the table of the Lord. Let's look first at:

The extravagant love of God the Father. It begins here. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” John 3:16-17.**

It is amazing when we stop to realize that the cross was the Father’s idea! God the Father loved so much, so extravagantly that he decided to save the world and the only way to do that involved the sacrifice of his one and only Son, the only possible perfect and sinless sacrifice.

Paul speaks of **“the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” 2 Timothy 1:9-10.**

Notice what he says. God saved us because of, or according to, “his own purpose and grace.” And notice when the plan was conceived, when the idea and means of salvation were conceived – it was “before the beginning of time.” God saw the history of the world, before it came to be. He saw all of us, conceived in sin and hopelessly bound to our sinful nature, serving the lust of our flesh, and living in rebellion against God. Yet even while we were sinners, knowing that we would willfully sin against him, God set in motion redemption’s plan. He conceived of this idea of redemption, of sacrifice and substitution that would culminate in his Son bearing the full penalty for our sin and allowing us to be saved and set free. This is the extravagance of the love the Father has for us.

The plan began before the beginning of the world. The Jewish Scriptures testified of the plan but no one could grasp such extravagant love. The Jewish Prophet Isaiah wrote, **“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. But he was pierced (wounded) for our transgressions, he was crushed (bruised) for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds (stripes) we are healed.” Isaiah 53:4-5**

The truth is, he was stricken and smitten by God, but it was not on account of his own sins and crimes, but on account of ours. He was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed, beaten and bruised for our sinfulness, our iniquities. Our peace and our healing was secured

through the wounds he received. God struck him so we could be saved. Can anyone imagine such extravagant love?

There is an amazing story in the Old Testament of a man and his wife who had so longed for a child. God had promised them they would have a son, that the man in fact would be the father of a nation, and yet he was 100 years old without that promised child. You know I'm talking about Abraham and Sarah. Finally, miraculously, this aged couple have a son, Isaac, the child of promise the Bible calls him. And then in Genesis 22 the bible says God tested Abraham. God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." We can't imagine what was going through Abraham's mind. What a horrific thing is being asked of him.

The bible tells us he took Isaac with him up the mountain, carrying wood and fire and the knife. Isaac asked his father where the lamb was for the sacrifice and Abraham told him, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Unbelievably, Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son when the angel of the Lord stopped him and said, "Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked and there was a ram caught by its' horns in a thicket and he sacrificed the ram instead of his son.

What an amazing story, but what is more amazing is that hundreds of years later, God did what he would not require Abraham or any of us to do. On that same mountain range, on a hill called Golgotha, God allowed his only son to die upon the cross so we could become his sons and daughters. The apostle John declared, "**How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!**" **1 John 3:1** That is extravagant love.

Can you even begin to imagine the love of the Father, to love us so much that he would give his son as a ransom for us? It is inconceivable. John Piper wrote, "Oh that we might worship the terrible wonder of the love of God! It is not sentimental. It is not simple. For our sake God did the impossible; He poured out his wrath on his own Son – the one whose submission made him infinitely unworthy to receive it." Such is the extravagant love of the Father revealed at the cross. But consider as well, it was not just the love of the Father we see.

The extravagant love of the Son. While it was by the will and purpose of God the Father that Christ came to the cross, it was only through the willful submission and obedience of

Christ that he laid down his life upon that cross. We see the extravagant love of Jesus for his Father in his submission to the cross – “Father, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.” Jesus said he had only come to do the will of the Father. He only spoke what he heard his father saying. He only did what he saw his father doing. At the cross we see this amazing love expressed for his Father. Not my will but your will be done. But we also see his extravagant love for us as well.

The Father didn't twist the arm of the Son. He did what he did not just because he loved the Father, but also because he loved us. A verse we've quoted often in the past few weeks, the bible says, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.**

There was something powerful and life changing when the early church realized that the death of Christ upon the cross was a demonstration of his extravagant love for each one of them. It was personal. He loved me and gave himself for me. Each one of us could say that. Each one of us likely should say that. **Jesus loved me and gave himself for me!**

What was our definition of extravagant? Going beyond what is reasonable – going beyond reasonable limits or reasonable conduct. Jesus loving me and giving himself for me by dying upon the cross. That is beyond reasonable. That is extravagant love.

This is the way we should understand the cross. Although the bible says “God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself” we should break it down to a personal level. This extravagant love was about us, directed to us, shown to us. We were targeted by his love. Jesus' death upon the cross had to do specifically with me and with you. It was very personal. He loved me personally. You see it was my sin that separated me from God. It wasn't the sins of the whole world or sin in general, it was my personal sin and rebellion that cut me off from God. It was my rebellion that had left me guilty and destined for hell. And it was beyond what was reasonable, beyond reasonable limits or reasonable belief, to think that he would love me so much that he would die for me. His extravagant love was personal.

Allow me to read from John Piper's book *The Passion of Jesus Christ* as he speaks of the personal nature of Christ's suffering. “Surely this is the way we should understand the sufferings and death of Christ. They have to do with me. They are about Christ's love for me personally. It is my sin that cuts me off from God, not sin in general. It is my hard-heartedness and spiritual

numbness that demean the worth of Christ. I am lost and perishing. When it comes to salvation, I have forfeited all claim on justice. All I can do is plead for mercy.

“Then I see Christ suffering and dying. For whom? It says, **‘Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her’ (Ephesians 5:25). ‘Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends’ (John 15:13). ‘The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Matthew 20:28).**

“And I ask, Am I among the ‘many’? Can I be one of his ‘friends’? May I belong to the ‘church’? And I hear the answer, **‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’ (Acts 16:31). ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Romans 10:13). ‘Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name’ (Acts 10:43). ‘To all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God’ (John 1:12). ‘Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16).**

“My heart is swayed, and I embrace the beauty and bounty of Christ as my treasure. And there flows into my heart this great reality – the love of Christ for me. So I say with those early witnesses, ‘He loved me and gave himself for me.’”.....John Piper

Oh what a testimony. What a confession. What a declaration for each of us who have trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord. Here is the powerful truth of the gospel: he loved me and gave himself for me. Behold the extravagance of the love of the Father and the love of the Son. Behold the extravagance of the cross. Together, they did what they would never require another to do. The innocent dying for the guilty. The pure dying for the impure and immoral. The holy Son of God dying for a worthless, rebellious, willful sinner. Me. Oh, **what extravagant love.**

I have eaten at some lovely tables before, spread with the finest of china. I’m always a bit nervous, afraid I will spill something or will pick up the wrong spoon or fork. I remember eating at a restaurant where they spread the napkin on your lap, bring your sorbet to cleanse the palet between courses, bringing water with rose petals in it to wash your fingers. I’ve seen the beautiful tables the ladies here prepare for the Ladies tea. Elaborate, creative, beautiful in so many ways.

This morning we come to an elaborate table from which to eat and drink. May we come to this table with appropriate reverence and awe for you see, something extravagant is here. It is

not the table setting, not the value of the table, the wood or the trays that hold the bread and the cups, it is the extravagance of love that overwhelms us here. It is the extravagance of love that causes us to approach slowly, to speak in reverential and whispered tones, to move quietly and circumspectly. Love beyond reason, grace beyond measure, that's what is present here. This is a table of extravagance.

So let everyone know they are welcome at such a table. But let everyone who comes to this table examine your heart and life. Make sure that sin and pride is dealt with. Make sure you have repented of your sins and placed your trust in Christ, depending solely upon Him alone for your salvation. Make sure you come humbly, with the awareness that it is only because of the extravagant love of the Father and the Son that you can come to this table of grace and be seated as one of the children of God. Come in faith, resting in the knowledge that only Jesus, the bread of life and the living water, can save you, sustain you, satisfy you and keep you. Come in faith and eat and drink with thanksgiving and praise for all Christ has done for you.

Let's take a moment to examine our hearts.

Over the past couple of years I have read this prayer a few times as we've prepared our hearts to receive the bread and the cup. It is taken from a collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions. Allow me to pray this prayer in our behalf once again.

O Lord, No day of my life has passed that has not proved me guilty in thy sight. Prayers have been uttered from a prayerless heart; Praise has been often praiseless sound; My best services are filthy rags. Blessed Jesus, let me find a covert in thy appeasing wounds.

Though my sins rise to heaven thy merits soar above them;

Though unrighteousness weighs me down to hell, thy righteousness exalts me to thy throne.

All things in me call for my rejection, All things in thee plead my acceptance.

I appeal from the throne of perfect justice to thy throne of boundless grace,

Grant me to hear thy voice assuring me: that by thy stripes I am healed, that thou was bruised for my iniquities, that thou has been made sin for me that I might be righteous in thee, that my grievous sins, my manifold sins, are all forgiven, buried in the ocean of thy concealing blood.

I am guilty, but pardoned, lost but saved, wandering, but found, sinning, but cleansed.

Give me perpetual broken-heartedness,

*Keep me always clinging to thy cross,
Flood me every moment with descending grace,
Open to me the springs of divine knowledge, sparkling like crystal, flowing clear and
unsullied through my wilderness of life.*

...taken from The Valley of Vision

A Collection of Puritan Prayers and Devotions

Thank God for the life we find in Christ, our Redeemer, Savior and Lord. Thank God for the extravagant love he has shown to us.

“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. (Take and eat this bread in remembrance that Christ died for you and feast upon him in your heart by faith, with thanksgiving.)

In the same way, after supper he took the cup saying, “this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. (Drink this cup in remembrance that Christ’s blood was shed for you and be thankful.)

On the authority of God’s word I assure you that those sins you have named before the Lord, both privately and publicly, have been covered by the blood of Christ. You have been made clean by his grace. Hear and believe the good news of the gospel: In Christ you are forgiven. Freely you have received his forgiveness now freely go and forgive others.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord: and the blessing of God Almighty, Father Son and Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. Amen