

Objects of His Love

Genesis 43:26-30, August 30, 2015

Trinity Sunday XIII

Sermon Text, Genesis 43:26-31 (KJV):

“And when Joseph came home, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth. And he asked them of their welfare, and said, Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive? And they answered, Thy servant our father is in good health, he is yet alive. And they bowed down their heads, and made obeisance. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son. And Joseph made haste; for his bowels did yearn upon his brother: and he sought where to weep; and he entered into his chamber, and wept there.”

Beloved of the Lord.....There is in the heart of every Christian, a natural hardness of our flesh which must constantly be broken throughout our life, and if it is not broken our faith dies because we grow impenitent at heart. Though all of us have been taught the great love of Christ whereby we are saved, if we are left to ourselves we naturally grow cold within toward God and man. For this reason God does a good work by chastening us from time to time just as a father his son. By many means God causes us to look into the mirror so we see how truly evil we are. When we break down we become afraid of God and His wrath, and then the Spirit moves us to confess our sins and trust in Jesus' blood.

Of course Christ is the only place we can find true healing in this world, because we can only be saved by His love, by His mercy upon us. Remember your first love, dear believer, for you cannot save yourself from sin. But just how exactly are we saved? The Apostle John answers, “God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.”

That is the theme and focus of our sermon today, namely we are objects of God's love. And when you know you are so dearly loved by Jesus Christ, so certainly that our God says “even the very hairs of your head are all numbered”, there is a blossoming love toward God and man in return, and this love is happy to serve. Indeed LOVE IS THE ONLY WAY you can keep God's commandments, and if you don't love your neighbor you don't really love God at all. Indeed love loves to serve, and love cannot be happy without serving. If you want to be served you do not know how to love. But if you want to serve you have a beginning of love. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.” Let us now begin with the question....

I. If you don't feel a strong love for your brother, as Joseph did, where is your heart? In order to learn this lesson let us look at the great love which Joseph had for his own earthly family. Remember that Joseph was once sold into slavery by his own brothers. For a while he was even imprisoned, but God rescued him from his misery. God lifts up those that are cast down. Psalm 37 says, "The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth *him* with his hand." God lifted up Joseph from the depths of prison, to the second highest position in all of Egypt. We immediately see that Joseph was not mad or unforgiving toward his brothers. While he had yet to determine if his brothers were sorry for their sin, at the forefront of Joseph's mind was the welfare of his own father Jacob. "Is your father well, the old man of whom ye spake? Is he yet alive?" So we should remember to be concerned about the welfare of our own parents. We are "to serve our parents and other superiors by gladly doing for them what we can." Especially in their old age. First Timothy 5:4 tells us children should first learn good behavior "at home and to [repay] their parents; for that is good and acceptable before God."

Joseph's love for his family was also very evident by how he treated the youngest of his brothers, Benjamin. "He lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, Is this your younger brother, of whom ye spake unto me? And he said, God be gracious unto thee, my son." Benjamin was the object of Joseph's love, just as we are the objects of God's love through Christ. Joseph's heart yearned to hold him because the last time Joseph saw Benjamin he was only an infant. Joseph and Benjamin were the only two sons of Rachel. Joseph was about sixteen when his mother died giving birth to Benjamin. In this way Benjamin was special to Joseph, a connection to his

dearly departed mother. Now Benjamin stands before Joseph as a young man, around 23 years of age, while Joseph is around 40. Joseph is moved to tears, but he hides these tears from his brethren.

Yet we don't always feel such a strong love for family. Within families there is strife and quarrels, or we don't even want to be around certain members. Sometimes so many sins have been committed back and forth, we find life easier if we do not communicate. Consider each member of your family even now, and there might be one member or in-law you struggle with. Your conscience will testify to the same. Yet God commands you "Love thy neighbor as thyself" and "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Have you loved your brother or sister as God commands you? What about your father or mother? If your love for your spouse is perfect, why is there strife in your marriage? Why are you content not to speak to a family member? Shouldn't we confess our sins? Just as bad, all of us are quite capable of hardening our heart against those we ought to love with all our heart. Yet not only do we bear a grudge, but we make excuses to justify our bitterness. Shouldn't God condemn us even now for such sins? And doesn't His Word say, "Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door." But here is a question worth considering.....

II. What if God loved you the same way you loved your family member.... Your brother or sister or spouse? What if because of our sins, God stormed off saying, "I'm never going to talk to you again because you are nothing but trouble!" What would happen to us if God loved us in the same way we love our neighbor, that one we avoid? All of us have ways in our own minds to justify our evil thoughts against our own brother yet our Lord declares "Let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart." Likewise in marriage we can rehearse our excuses well in our minds as to why we are right and they are wrong, but if God were to stand before us and say "Have you loved your spouse as I have loved you? Have you loved your brother or sister as I have loved you? Have you loved father or mother as I have loved you?"... What will we say? Who does our carnal heart really love more than neighbor, if not self? And isn't it true that because we love ourselves first and our neighbor last, that is the source of our strife? Even if he or she has many sins against you, haven't you learned to pray, "Forgive us this day our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." And here's another thought, have you forgiven your neighbor as God has forgiven you? Have you put away their sins as perfectly as Jesus put away your sins, by suffering your damnation and theirs upon the cross? Even so Jesus said to Peter, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." Even so "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.

Whatever kind of love we have in our heart for our family, even if it is strong like Joseph's for Benjamin, isn't this love shallow, empty, and barren when it is compared to the love Christ revealed to us upon the cross? Human love compared to divine love is darkness before light, yet Jesus said, "I am the Light of the world, he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." When we see that great love wherewith He loved us, aren't we ashamed of our own? And so

III. Christ came only to love and serve us. When I picture Christ coming down from heaven, becoming incarnate, namely entering into the womb of the Virgin Mary so that as a child He can be born and carry our sins to His cross, I do not see Jesus grumbling and complaining and saying, "Are they worth it? Father, must I put up with their sins, their hatred and anger and petty squabbling? Why don't they love their neighbor and serve their weakness? Why don't they put the needs of their neighbor before their own? Why should I bother dear Father? They are not worthy!" Though we are not worthy, Jesus does no such thing because "God is love" and "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins." When Jesus came, because God is love, in the heart of Jesus there was only grace and holiness, mercy for all those who were condemned and lost, as sheep having no shepherd. Yet the Shepherd came to be a Lamb and sacrifice Himself, and in doing so His heart was filled with such a zeal this world barely knows. His love would not allow Him to hold back or give up, no matter how impossible the task, or great the price. His love compelled Him to plow through every obstacle, even the gates of hell, to pluck every sinner out of Satan's darkness and kingdom, and plant us in a kingdom of light which triumphs in heaven. All words spoken on earth fall far short of describing this victory Jesus earned for us by His bitter sufferings and death, yet we can see and know it by faith, and even possess and believe it in our heart.

Even so, "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Jesus didn't come to be served, Jesus came to serve. Jesus didn't come to demand a ransom of us, but Jesus was the ransom Himself. Jesus didn't come to be loved, but Jesus came in love for He could only love. Jesus did not come to live, but to die and rise again. Jesus didn't come to have His holy feet washed, but He came to wash unholy

feet clean. Jesus did not come to rule, but Jesus was subject to all rulers, so he could overthrow the devil's rule over us. This is what love does dear believer, it serves and then serves some more and then if anything is left yet to be done love serves again without asking anything in return. God is love. Jesus is love. He can do no less. And when you see upon the cross your own Almighty God serving you in love by offering up His life to save your soul from death, what resistance to God is left within! How senseless it is to fight against Him who came only with love to save! Suddenly our proud heart is broken so that we confess our sins, but at the same time our heart is healed knowing His grace, knowing His love. For God "who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus."

And so Jesus has forgiveness even for your lack of love to whom God commands you to love. Jesus takes away all your sinful hatred and wrath and selfishness and pride and He gives you a new spirit, a new man. He wipes your slate clean of all sin so you will not be damned and condemned, and He inscribes His own name upon your heart by baptism saying, "Welcome my child into My Kingdom of Grace where I have for you nothing but love and everlasting love and life everlasting in heaven. Be with me in faith knowing I will preserve your faith, and know nothing will hurt you in My kingdom, for where sin abounds, my grace does much more abound."

Finally beloved of the Lord, begin again, renew your heart in works of love and service for your neighbor, knowing Christ loved and served you first. There is no higher calling on earth but to love and serve your neighbor by words and deeds because you want their salvation and you do not want to be an obstacle to their salvation by your sins. Serve them in their weakness by passing over their sins as Jesus has passed over your own. And confess your faults to them also, for you are not the easiest person to live with because of your sins. Love them as Christ has loved you, and "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour" for "God is love, and you are the objects of His love." Amen.

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