

# Demonstration of Christ's Love.

by Edward Payson

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*The sermon demonstrates the greatness of Christ's love for us through various effects and indications of love, including his willingness to submit to privations and inconveniences, suffer pain, bestow gifts, and bear with our ingratitude and unkindness.*

**Scripture:** John 11:36, John 15:13, Romans 5:8, Ephesians 3:18, 1 John 4:19

**Topics:** "Christ's Love", "Divine Redemption"

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## Description

Edward Payson preaches on the profound love of Christ, drawing parallels between the astonishment of the Jews at Jesus' love for Lazarus and the incomprehensible love Christ has shown for humanity. He delves into the visible manifestations of love through Christ's willingness to submit to privations, endure excruciating sufferings, bestow invaluable gifts, and bear unkindness and ingratitude with unwavering patience. Payson emphasizes the unmatched nature of Christ's love, urging listeners to reciprocate this love, return it with gratitude, and not be deterred by feelings of guilt or unworthiness when approaching the Savior.

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## Transcript

"Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!"

John 11:36

exclamation was uttered at the tomb of Lazarus. It was occasioned by the tears which our Savior there shed. The unbelieving Jews, who, in consequence of the pointed manner in which he warned, reprov'd and threatened them, seem to have regarded him as unfeeling and morose, were surprised at seeing him exhibit such marks of sympathizing affection; and exclaimed with wonder, Behold how he loved him! The use which I propose to make of this passage, has probably, already occurred to you.

If the affection which Christ felt for Lazarus, and which was manifested by his tears only, appeared surprisingly great to the Jews; how great, how surprising, should the love which he has manifested for us appear in our eyes! If the Jews exclaimed, Behold how he loved Lazarus! merely because they saw him weeping at his tomb, with how much reason may we exclaim, Behold how he loved us! When we behold him in Bethlehem, in Gethsemane, and on Calvary! Indeed, an apostle tells us, that the love of Christ passeth knowledge; and at the same time intimates that it is exceedingly important to know as much of it as is possible, and that, in proportion as we know it, we shall be filled with the fullness of God.

Let us then, before we approach the table of our Lord, spend a few moments in meditating upon his unsearchable, unconquerable love. I need not inform you that love, like every other affection of the heart, is in its own nature invisible to every eye but that of omniscience. We cannot look into the heart, and see it glowing there. We can discern it only in the effects which it produces, in the external signs which constitute its language, and which manifest its existence. We see it as it exists, not in the fountain, but in the streams; and from the copiousness of the streams, we infer the fullness of the fountain.

Where the genuine effects of love are most abundantly displayed, there, we conclude, love exists in the highest degree. It is by this rule that we are to estimate the greatness of our Savior's love. Let us then inquire what are the genuine effects, the external indications of love, and how far they appear in the conduct of our Redeemer. 1. One of the effects and indications of love, is a readiness to submit to privations and inconveniences for the sake of assisting or relieving the person beloved.

It is by the degree in which our friends exhibit this effect of love, that we estimate the strength of their affection for us. The greater the inconveniences and privations, to which they are willing to submit for our sakes, so much the greater do we suppose their love for us to be. We infer that parents love their children, because we see them willing to make laborious exertions, and to deny themselves many comforts, for the sake of giving them an education, and of providing for their future wants.

Should a servant readily consent, without the prospect of reward, to accompany his banished master into exile among savage nations, or in frozen inhospitable climes, we should consider his conduct as indicating a very high degree of disinterested affection. Should a person sell himself for a slave, in order to redeem his friend from slavery, we should form still more exalted ideas of the strength of his friendship. Now what proofs of this kind has our Savior exhibited of the greatness of his love for us!

The scriptures fully answer this question; yet in consequence of our situation, and our ignorance of heaven, we can understand their answer but very imperfectly. They tell us that, when he was rich, he for our sakes became poor, that we, through his poverty, might be rich. They tell us that, when he was in the form of God, he humbled and emptied himself and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. They tell us that he had a glory with his Father before the world was; that he laid aside this glory and made himself of no reputation.

In a word, they inform us that he left heaven, and lived a life of labor, poverty and contempt on earth. It appears from this account, then, that he submitted to be deprived for many years, of the glory, the society, and the felicity of heaven, of glory and felicity too great for us to conceive of; and that he voluntarily exchanged all this for the lowest state on earth, and cheerfully endured all the inconveniences, privations and wants, attendant on such a state. All this he submitted to because he loved us.

Now were I speaking to angels or to persons who had seen heaven, who know what it is, who know what glory and felicity our Savior enjoyed there, who know how widely it differs from earth, and how exquisitely painful it must be for one so holy, so averse to sin, as he was, to live in this sinful world, to witness the sins of its inhabitants, and to endure the contradiction of sinners; I say, were I speaking to persons who know all this, they would need nothing more to convince them, that our Savior's love was inconceivably great; nothing more to make them exclaim, Behold how he loved us!

But, alas! I speak to those who know none of these things; or, at least, who know them but very imperfectly. Indeed I speak of what I know almost nothing myself. Little, however, as we know or conceive of what our Savior renounced, and of what he submitted to, for our sakes, does it not appear from the

preceding remarks, that the love, which drew him down from heaven to earth, must have been without a parallel great? Is it not obvious that the love, which should lead a monarch to renounce his throne, a servant to follow his master into exile, or a man to sell himself into slavery for the redemption of his friend, would be weak in comparison with the love which Christ displayed for our sinful race, when he exchanged heaven for earth to save them? 2.

Another effect and indication of love is a willingness to suffer pain for the beloved object. Other things being equal, we consider that love as the greatest which induces a willingness to suffer the greatest degree of pain. And this is just reasoning; for self-love makes us unwilling to suffer. Of course, when we are willing to suffer for the sake of another, it proves that we love him as we love ourselves; nay, that our love for him is sufficiently strong to counteract the influence of self-love.

Let us then inquire what Christ's love for us led him to suffer for our sakes. But here we labor under the same difficulty which has been already mentioned; a difficulty arising from our ignorance. We know but little even of the bodily sufferings which he endured for our salvation. We know indeed that he was scourged till the naked bones appeared through his mangled flesh; that he was buffeted, or beaten upon the face; that his temples were pierced with thorns; that he was fastened to the cross by nails driven through his hands and feet, and that, with his whole weight thus suspended, he hung for six hours, bleeding, parched with thirst, and agonizing in the pangs of death.

But though we know these facts, we know but little of his bodily sufferings. It is one thing to read or hear of what he suffered, and quite another thing to form a just conception of it. By what effort either of our understandings or of our imaginations are we to conceive of tortures which we never felt, to conceive of the pangs of crucifixion, to conceive of the agonies inflicted by hanging with the whole weight of the body suspended on nails driven through the hands and feet, --parts of the frame which are, perhaps above others, endowed with the most exquisite sensibility.

One stroke of the scourge, one thorn piercing our temples, one of the many repeated blows by which the nails were urged home, would probably give us more lively ideas of what our Savior suffered than all our efforts can excite. And yet the tortures which his body endured were but a part, and incomparably the smaller part of his sufferings. They wrung from him no groan, no expression of anguish. But his mental sufferings did more. They wrung from him not only groans, but great drops of blood.

Before he was arrested, and while his body was free from pain he was, we are told, in an agony; he exclaimed, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death; and his sweat was as great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Is it asked, what occasioned this mental agony? I answer, it was the curse of the law which, we are told, he bore for us. It was the hand of his Father, the hand of omnipotence which, as the prophet informs us, bruised him and put him to grief. The burden of man's guilt which he bore, the weight of divine wrath which we deserved, was what crushed him down.

He drank the cup which we were doomed to drink, that cup into which, an apostle tells us, was poured the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God. It was of this he said, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. It was the agonies occasioned by drinking this cup which made him cry out, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Now if we cannot conceive the full extent of his bodily sufferings, how much less can we conceive of the nameless anguish of his soul? Who, on this side everlasting burnings, can conceive what it is to drink the fierceness of the wrath of Almighty God, poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation.

Yet under the united pressure of all these inconceivable corporeal and mental agonies, he consented to die, and it was love, love for us, which induced him to consent. Well then may we exclaim, while standing by his cross, Behold how he loved us! He himself says, Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend. And the apostle, pursuing the same thought, intimates it to be possible that for a good man some would even dare to die. This greatest, strongest proof of love, our Savior has given by dying for us.

And this proof was, in his case, peculiarly strong. Should we consent to die for a friend, we should only anticipate a death which we must sooner or later suffer, because we are mortal. But Christ was immortal. He was under no necessity of ever tasting the pangs of death. No man, says he, taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. While we then, in dying for a friend, only give up a life which we must soon part with, he gave up for us a life which he might have retained forever.

And not only so, but gave it up in the most painful manner possible, forsaken by his friends, insulted and mocked by his enemies, and agonizing under a complication of the most excruciating corporeal and mental tortures. Yet he had the same natural aversion to suffering which we feel. How great then must have been the strength of his love for us. Since it could so far prevail over his love for himself, as to make him willing to bear all this for our sakes. Would either of you, were you able to do it, endure equal sufferings for the dearest object of your affections on earth!

If any one replies, Yes, while the scourge, the thorns and the cross are out of sight, yet I cannot but suspect that when they came near, when he began to feel them, and above all, when the bitter cup of divine wrath was put to his lips, his courage and his love would fail. But our Savior's love for us, --blessed be his name, --did not fail. It was stronger than death. 3. Another proof and measure of love may be found in the number and value of the gifts which it bestows on the object beloved.

We naturally conclude that a person, who, without any other motive than disinterested affection, gives us great and valuable gifts, loves us much; and the more numerous and costly his gifts are, so much the greater do we think his love to be. Tried by this, as by all other rules, our Savior's love for us will be found beyond all comparison great. His gifts cannot be numbered, nor can their value be computed. He gives us himself, and all that he possesses. He gives us the pardon of numberless sins, every one of which deserved death.

He gives us divine light to illuminate our minds, divine grace to purify our hearts, and divine consolations to comfort us in our afflictions. Nay more, he gives us heaven, gives us everlasting life, felicity and glory; gives us kingdoms, crowns, and thrones compared with which, the scepter of the most powerful earthly monarch is a worthless bauble. Nor does he give what cost him nothing. No, he paid the full price of all that he gives us; and if we estimate the value of his gifts by the price they cost him, we shall be convinced that they are inestimable.

It would have cost him infinitely less to give each of us a world, or many worlds; for to create a world, costs him but a word; but to purchase the gifts which he bestows on us cost him his blood, his life; cost him all the agonies which I have vainly attempted to describe. If then we measure his love by the gifts he bestows on us, we shall see that it is boundless, and we can only cry, what manner of love is this? Let no one reply, Where are the gifts of which you tell us We have them not.

I answer, Christ offers them freely to all of you, to each of you, even to the meanest and the worst; nay more, he urges and entreats you to accept of them. If you refuse or neglect to accept them, the fault is not

his. The gift is not less real, nor the less a proof of his love, because we do not choose to accept it. All who do accept his offers find that they are not empty words. They enter on the immediate enjoyment of many of his gifts, and receive an earnest which secures to them the final possession of all, so that they may say, Christ has loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall live and reign with him forever and ever.

Lastly. Love may be measured by the provocations it overlooks, and by the degree of patience with which it bears unkindness and ingratitude. Of all the trials to which love can be exposed, this is the most severe. To love those who are kind, affectionate, and grateful for our love, to adhere to them in adversity, to suffer for them, and load them with favors, is comparatively easy; nor does it require a very high degree of affection to do this. But to persevere in doing good to the ungrateful and perverse, who are jealous and suspicious, and who render us evil for good; to bear with the most unreasonable and cruel provocations, continually repeated; to forgive again, and again, and again, and still find new acts of forgiveness called for; to see our very kindness turned against us, and yet to continue to be kind--this is indeed the victory, the triumph of love, strong, unconquerable love.

Among all the effects of parental love, its strength is so clearly displayed in nothing as the manner in which it leads parents to bear with the multiplied follies, the ingratitude and disobedience of undutiful children. But in this, as in all other respects, the love which Christ has displayed for our race, rises far above a father's or a mother's love. For more than four thousand years before his coming, our race were employed, with very few exceptions, in disobeying and offending him.

When he came, instead of being received by mankind as their friend and benefactor, he was hated, slandered, ridiculed, and persecuted with the utmost virulence and malignity. In a similar manner he has been treated by mankind ever since. Even his professed disciples often requite his love with the most cruel distrust, unkindness, and ingratitude. They show little concern for his honor. They are slow to believe, slow to learn, and quick to forget what he has taught them. Every day, and almost every hour, he has reason to say to them, O ye of little faith!

Do ye thus requite my love, O ungrateful and unwise! All this he foresaw, when he consented to die for us; but the current of his love was too deep and strong to be checked or diverted from its course. And notwithstanding the innumerable slights and provocations which he has received, and is daily receiving, it still flows as deep and strong as ever. Sabbath after Sabbath, we make light of his invitations, and treat him with indifference and neglect; but he overlooks it all, and comes again with offers of mercy, again to be slighted.

Year after year he stands knocking at the door of our hearts; and, though he finds them closed against him, waits and knocks still. Generation after generation of our ungrateful race, live and die rejecting him; yet his love does not become cold, and he still visits a thankless world with messages of mercy and offers of salvation. He endured, says an apostle, and he still endures, the contradiction of sinners against himself. Now was there ever love like this, love so perseveringly, I had almost said, obstinately, kind?

Love which could glow with undiminished fervor for so many centuries, with nothing amiable to excite it; no grateful returns to feed it, but, on the contrary, numberless provocations to extinguish it. Had not his love for our race been infinitely stronger than any thing which is called love among men, it would have wholly ceased some thousands of years since, and he would have desisted from making attempts to bless and save us. Well then may we lift up our hands in wonder and exclaim, Behold how he loves us!

Well may we say of such love as this, many waters cannot quench it, neither can floods drown it. We have now briefly noticed the principal ways in which love makes itself visible, and by which we may estimate its strength. From what has been said, it appears, I conceive, evident, that in all these ways, in submitting to privation, in enduring sufferings, in bestowing gifts, and in bearing with unkindness, ingratitude, and perverseness, our Savior has displayed a love for mankind which has no parallel, a love which is infinitely far from being equaled by any thing which the world has ever seen.

In attempting to lead your minds to this conclusion, I have made no appeal to your passions. I have simply stated facts, and left them to speak for themselves. I am however ashamed to offer this to you as a description of our Savior's love for us. I feel, most painfully, that I have done no manner of justice to the subject. Had I the tongue of an angel, I could not do justice to it. God himself, speaking by the mouth of his inspired messengers, could only say that it is unsearchable, that it passeth knowledge.

It is a theme which will employ the praises of saints and angels through a whole eternity. How then can a weak mortal set it before you in the space of a few minutes and in the compass of a few pages? I say not this to excuse the wretched manner in which the subject has been treated. But I am jealous for my Master's honor. I fear that this miserably imperfect attempt to display the greatness of his love, will only serve to lower it in your estimation. God forbid that this should be the case.

Let me beseech you not to judge of his love by what has now been said of it. Rather go and learn it from the bible; and unite with me in the apostle's prayer, that the God of light, the Father of glory, would give us all, the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of his Son, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, that we may be enabled to comprehend what is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

A few inferences will conclude the discourse. 1. Is the love of Christ for us so immeasurably great? Then surely we ought to return it. Our love to him ought to bear some proportion to his love for us. If his love for us is incomparably greater than that of any of our earthly friends, then we ought to love him more than we love any of our earthly friends. If he has done and suffered more for us than any earthly benefactor would or could do, we ought to feel more grateful to him than to any earthly benefactor.

Ingratitude to him must be, of all ingratitude, the most base and inexcusable. A refusal to love him must involve more criminality than a refusal to love the nearest and kindest relative on earth. It is needless to prove these assertions. They bring with them their own evidence. They must come home with irresistible conviction to the bosom of every man who believes what is related of our Savior in the New Testament. There is something in our breasts which tells us, that such love deserves a return of affection, that such benefits justly claim our gratitude.

The most savage nations on earth need no arguments to convince them that parental love ought to be returned, no motive to induce them to detest the character of an ungrateful, undutiful child. But every reason which can be assigned why a child should love and be grateful to his parents, may be urged with far greater force to prove, that the increase of love and gratitude to our Redeemer is an indispensable duty, and that the neglect of this duty is in the highest degree criminal and base.

Would not the Jews have thought it strange, would not you think it strange, had Lazarus, after his resurrection, manifested no affection for the friend who wept over his grave, and raised him from the dead? But, O, how small were these favors, these proofs of love to Lazarus, in comparison with the favors, the proofs of love which the Savior has shown to us. 2. Let me further improve the subject by urging all

who have hitherto neglected the Savior to return his love without longer delay.

Are not your understandings convinced, do not your consciences testify that you ought to do this? And can your hearts then stand out in opposition, not only to the Savior's love, but to your own understandings and consciences? If they can you must surely cease to talk of the goodness of your hearts. You must surely cease to flatter yourselves that you are capable of real gratitude or affection, or that you possess any real sensibility; for where is the goodness, the gratitude, or the sensibility of that heart which can see what Christ has done and felt for it, without returning his affection?

If then you would prove that you are not totally devoid of all these qualities, begin this day to return his love; or at least to reproach and condemn yourselves for having so long neglected to do it. And let all who feel consciously sinful and guilty, and who are deterred by conscious guilt and unworthiness from approaching the Savior, take encouragement from the wonderful love which he has displayed for our race, and approach him with full confidence and without the smallest delay.

Trembling sinner, how can you fear to approach such love as this? What can you have to fear in approaching one, whose love for you has already led him to the cross? Will he, can he, who voluntarily suffered all this for your salvation, hurt you, or frown upon you when you come to him for mercy? O, then come to Christ. Whosoever will, let him come. But whether I am, or am not successful, while pleading the Savior's cause with sinners, surely I cannot, my professing friends, be unsuccessful while I plead it with you.

You profess to know something of his love. You know that all heaven wonders and is astonished while it sees what its Lord has done for you. And will not you then wonder and adore? Can you doubt the reality or the strength of that love which has been so strangely displayed? Can you any more distrust the Savior's love, because he sometimes afflicts you? Do you not perceive that he would much rather afflict himself, than afflict you, were not affliction necessary? Would he not rather wound the apple of his eye, than wound you, did not your own happiness require it?

Most evidently he would; for all that he could suffer in your stead he has cheerfully suffered; and he would have cheerfully suffered all your afflictions, would it have answered the same purpose to you--it would have been adding one drop more to the bitter cup. He never afflicted you to shield himself. Whenever the question was, shall I suffer this, or shall my people suffer it? Shall I drink this cup, or shall my people drink it? he never hesitated a moment to take it all upon himself.

And he would with equal cheerfulness suffer all your afflictions for you, and allow you to live in uninterrupted peace and prosperity, did not your own good require that you should sometimes suffer in your own persons. And he still sympathizes with you in all that you necessarily suffer. His word teaches you that, in all your afflictions, he is afflicted, and he assures his people that whosoever touches them touches the apple of his eye. How can you doubt whether he who says this, he who gave himself, his life, his blood for you, will deny you any thing which he sees to be really necessary to your happiness whether he would hesitate to give you a world or many worlds, if your happiness would be increased by the gift?

How can you doubt that he would as soon cut off his right hand, as take away from you a partner, a child, a relative, or give you the smallest pain, unless he saw it to be necessary? O, then, what reason have we for sorrow, shame, and self-reproach, if we have even been tempted by affliction, to doubt his love: and still more, if we have been led by it to murmur or repine! Let us, then, never more be guilty of this conduct. Let us not stab to the heart our already deeply wounded Savior, by distrusting that love of which he has

given us such infallible proofs; or murmuring at those afflictions which he sends in love, and for our good. Let us rather say with the apostle, the love of Christ constraineth us, to live not to ourselves, but to him who died for us.

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