

How to Love Like Christ Did

by Ernest O'Neill

The sermon teaches that the Holy Spirit empowers us to live like Jesus, showing us a better way to love and forgive, and transforming our thoughts and actions to reflect God's love and character.

Duration: 37:45

Scripture: Luke 23:34, Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Love"

Description

Ernest O'Neill emphasizes the profound love of Christ, demonstrated during His suffering, and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in enabling believers to love others as Jesus did. He illustrates how Jesus remained calm and forgiving even in the face of extreme persecution, contrasting this with the natural human tendency to respond with anger and resentment. O'Neill explains that the key to embodying Christ-like love lies in being willing to obey God and allowing the Holy Spirit to work within us, creating a new nature that reflects God's love. He encourages listeners to identify with Jesus and to trust in the Holy Spirit to cultivate genuine love and kindness in their lives. Ultimately, O'Neill reassures that through obedience and willingness, anyone can experience the miraculous change that the Holy Spirit brings.

Transcript

Do you remember the scene about, really it's about nineteen hundred and fifty years ago now, in that park outside the city of Jerusalem? Do you remember it? Darkness had fallen and in one corner of the park there were a few peasants lying on the ground sleeping. And then a little way off from them there was another youngish man on his knees praying. And then suddenly you heard the tramp of soldiers' feet and the darkness was shattered by all those flickering torches.

And a group of soldiers and religious leaders began to move towards the group of fishermen who were lying on the ground sleeping. And the fishermen suddenly sprang up and ran to their leader and encircled him. And then you remember as the group of soldiers and priests moved to circle around the leader and the fishermen, one of the fishermen decided, well I'm not going down without a battle and he just drew a sword and slashed out and flailed off one of the ears of one of the servants of one of the priests.

Do you remember how the leader remained absolutely calm? And he touched the man's ear and healed it and spoke to Peter and said, put up your sword. And then he turned round to the attackers and he said, are you coming against me as against a thief and a robber? And then you remember how he accompanied them to a whole night of brainwashing and third degree examination of beating and pressuring and

questioning. And do you remember how that terminated in a stumbling, crawling, bloody journey down the Via Dolorosa to a hill outside the city of Jerusalem.

And yet throughout all that charade of the soldiers buffeting him and striking him and through all the insults and the whipping and the spitting and through even the tearing of the hands by the nails as they put him onto the cross, there rose from that miraculous man no anger and no resentment and nothing but tender love for those people who were torturing him. So that even at the very end, rather than feeling resentment against them, he actually spoke to his father who is the creator of the universe and he said, father, forgive them for they know not what they do. Now most of us here have no difficulty imagining how Peter felt.

And most of us here would have great ease in pulling our sword out and flailing away at anybody who would attack us or would attack our friend. And indeed, probably many of us are surprised at some of that rising within us even over the Iran crisis. And indeed, probably there isn't one of us here who would not say that we have felt that retaliatory anger and resentment rising up within us when people have shown us a far milder form of hatred than they showed to this man Jesus then.

Probably most of us would say when others have whispered about us in the office, said something untrue about us, something that wasn't right, we've found that there rises up within us an anger and a hatred that startles even us. Or the boss criticizes us utterly unjustly, comes to believe that we're lazy or inefficient and we aren't. And there rises up within us a spirit akin to hatred at times when we think of how unjustly we're being treated.

And yet we have incredible problems with imagining how we could possibly be spat upon and have our faces slashed with whips and be shown the contempt that was shown to that Jesus and be insulted the way he was. And yet still have a tender love and a kindly well-wishing for the people who were torturing us. Probably that's true, isn't it? We have no difficulty identifying ourselves with Peter, but even in our day-to-day lives we have incredible difficulty identifying ourselves with Jesus' attitude.

And loved ones, the people in the first century were no different from us. They were the same. They were Jews who knew that they should behave like a lamb or a sheep before his shearers is dumb and opens not his mouth.

They knew they should be like that. They knew they should be patient. They knew they should return good for evil.

They knew they should love even when they were cursed. They knew that. They knew what the law said, but they found that the good that they wanted to do and they should do they couldn't do.

And the evil that they hated, the resentment and the anger that they found rising inside their hearts when anybody criticized them and opposed them, that was the very thing they did. And they were exactly like that. And yet, those men and women of the first century ended up living and behaving exactly like Jesus.

Thousands of them. Thousands of them began to speak out fearlessly as he did. Despite the overwhelming ability of the Roman power to utterly crush them, they spoke out courageously what they believed to be true about them, even though the Roman emperors used them as torches, lit them, covered them with tar, and lit them and used them with torches in their garden parties.

These ordinary men and women continued to speak what they believed was true and to say what this Jesus had said with the same calmness as he had. And they bore the opposition and the persecution and

the crucifixions that he bore and they kept doing it. Year after year, they and their children made an impression on the pagans and the Jews of that time as a gentle, loving people who treated their creator and trusted him as their own dear father and who were absolutely fearless in the face of what men could do to them.

Now, why? Why were they able to do that and to behave exactly like this man Jesus when they were as puny and weak and fearful as most of us here? And Peter explained it. He was speaking in public one day and he said, we are witnesses to these things and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him. And that was the explanation of the miraculous change in their lives.

And that's the secret loved ones, to living the way we were made to live. All of us here, doesn't matter if you're here for the first time, all of us here were made by our dear creator to live the same way as Jesus and we're fulfilled and complete when we do that. But the key to living that way, the way we were meant to, is this Holy Spirit.

It's the Holy Spirit that enabled Jesus to continue to show tender love and kindness to the Roman soldier who thrust a sword or a spear through his side. It was the Holy Spirit moving inside Jesus who enabled him to ask his father to forgive the very people who were jeering at him and jibing and saying he saved others, why can't he save himself? It was the Holy Spirit who enabled Jesus to have peace and calmness in his heart as the arresting party moved in upon him. It is the Holy Spirit that brought these things into Jesus.

Loved ones, he said it himself. He said in the temple one day, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me and he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to free the captives. It was the Holy Spirit that did that.

It was God's Spirit. Now, Jesus had to be willing, you see, for him to do it. Jesus had to be willing and he had to be willing to obey God and he had to be willing to accept what God was willing to let him face, what pain God was willing to let him face.

Jesus had to be willing for that. He had to be willing to face whatever opposition God allowed him to face. He had to be willing to die in the garden or on the cross.

He had to be willing to obey God. He had to put his life into the hands of the one who had made that life and he had to say, Lord, I'll do it your way, whatever you want. So, Jesus had to be willing for whatever God wanted him to face.

But once he was willing, it was the Holy Spirit who created in him those attitudes of love and patience and courage and endurance. They were the result of the Holy Spirit within him. Now, that may seem wild to you, you know, that Jesus is actually as helpless as you and me, except for this Holy Spirit.

But it is the Holy Spirit that enabled Jesus to be like that. And here's the secret. He explained to his disciples, when I go away, I'm going to send the Holy Spirit to you.

And you wait in Jerusalem. Don't leave Jerusalem. Wait there for the promise of the Father, which you have heard from me.

I told you he was going to give you another gift. And you know that John the Baptist baptized you with water for the remission of sins. But you're going to be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

And when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And that's what the disciples did. They got together and they waited for the Holy Spirit to come upon them.

And every time anyone asked Peter or the other apostles, but how do you receive the Holy Spirit? Peter would say the same thing as we quoted before. He would say, listen, the Holy Spirit, God gives to those who obey him. To those who are willing to live as God wants them to.

God gives his own spirit and his own spirit miraculously creates in them the love that Jesus had. See, loved ones, you can't produce that stuff. You can't.

It doesn't matter what you or I do. It doesn't matter how many books we read. It doesn't matter how we try all those little tricks.

Let's try to think of the good things in our dad or the good things in our colleague. Or let's try to think about the good things in that dear woman that was always gossiping about us. We try all those little tricks and we try to think, oh yeah, I'll think of the good thing.

Yeah, her hair, her hair looks okay. Yeah, she has nice hair. It doesn't matter.

All you can produce is what Plato and Socrates produced, a willingness to accept them. But you can't produce the love of a father who wants the very best for them and who is willing to die for them. You can't produce that love.

That love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul said. He said the Holy Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God.

And that love is different, you see, from that old mere acceptance. Or the old classical philosophers, they had no idea of forgiveness. Their idea of forgiveness was, I blot out from my mind the face of my enemy so that I do not hate him.

But this love is different. This love is patient and kind. It is not jealous or boastful.

It is not arrogant or rude. It is not irritable or resentful. This love does not insist on its own way.

It believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, and it never ends. And that's the love that the Holy Spirit gave to Jesus through all that ridiculous, murderous, brutal charade leading up to his death. And Jesus said, this Holy Spirit will do exactly the same in all of you.

He'll create that same love in you. So that just as we're able to say today, Jesus was not jealous or boastful. He was not arrogant or rude.

He was not irritable or resentful. He did not rejoice when others were wrong, but he rejoiced when others were right. He believed all things and hoped all things and endured all things.

So, loved ones, it is possible for you and me to be described like that. Now, could you say that? Could you put I in the subject position in that sentence? And could you say at the moment, I am not jealous or boastful. I am not arrogant or rude.

I am not irritable or resentful. I do not insist on my own way. I am not glad when others are wrong.

I am glad when others are right. I believe all things. I hope all things.

I endure all things. Now, loved ones, we were made to be like that. That's what God made us to be.

Forget the cynicism. Forget the mess and monstrosities we've made of ourselves. Forget the ridiculous norm that we've lowered society to.

That's what we were made to be like. The tragedy is, most of us only get a glimpse of it when we fall in love. And even that is only momentary.

Even that is only a momentary self-forgetfulness, as we fall head over heels in love with somebody. Isn't it terrible? Isn't it a tragedy that we who were made to live that way throughout our lives experience only a moment of it? So that even the phrase is known, oh, he's in love because he's different from all the rest of us. But soon he'll get back down to miserable life like the rest of us.

But isn't that a shame? Isn't there something tragic that we human beings look at a wedding and we look at the fun and we think of the evening they'll have together and we think back to maybe the evening we had and we so often think, oh, that is not real life. And loved one's real life is full of tenderness and love and kindness and understanding. It's a monstrosity of life that is filled with bickering and irritability and anger and criticism and conflict.

And you see, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would create that love in you and me. If you sit there and say, well, I'm not like that at all. That's right.

Nor am I like that on my own. But the Holy Spirit creates that love in us. All you and I have to do is to be willing.

But we do have to be willing. That's true. I mean, if you say, well, to be willing to depend on God alone, well, I'm not.

I like to depend on myself. I like to get some of my kicks from the good things that happen to me. In fact, I am pretty dependent on the things that happen to me for my happiness.

And I am pretty dependent on the things I own for my feeling of safety and security. And I do like to call a halt to any pain that may be coming my way. And I do like to control my life.

Well, loved ones, it is true that unless you identify yourself with Jesus and are willing to trust God the way He did for those things, the Holy Spirit cannot come into you. But here's the miracle. If you are willing to be identified with Jesus, if you're willing to forget all this business of what your possessions do for you, what your stocks and shares do for you, what the approval of your friends do for you, what the acknowledgement of your peers does for you, what the approval of your relatives do for you, if you're prepared to turn your eyes for a minute away from those things and simply deal with Jesus and decide, are you willing to be identified with Him? Are you willing to say to Him, Lord, you do seem to be the Son of God.

And you apparently have made all things. And without you, nothing was made that was made. And it's just logical that you made me.

And your position on the cross does not seem very safe or happy to me. But I can see that if you're the origin of the universe, I'm better with you than with anybody else. So, Lord, what does it mean for me to be

identified with you? What will it mean for me to be crucified with you? And if you are willing, loved ones, to begin to discuss that with Jesus, then you will find a miracle taking place inside you.

And you will find that that old nature of yours, that does want to depend on people and things, that that nature passes away. And a new nature comes into you. And old things are passed away.

And the way you think of other people and the way you depend on other people, that passes away. And you'll find a new spirit coming inside you. And that spirit is the Holy Spirit.

Because he makes you holy. He makes you like God in an appropriate way in your situation and your job. And that's what happens.

You do have to be willing, you see. God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey. That is, to those who yield to God, to those who are willing to live the way Jesus lived.

So, that's what you have to deal with. But you don't have to produce the love. You see that? All the attempts at producing love that we do with the help of the help-yourself books are foolishness.

They're not real love. They're not the real character of God. The Holy Spirit produces those.

You don't even have to go into all kinds of ascetic practices to try to enter into Christ's death. You don't have to do that stuff. You don't have to try autosuggestion to reproduce the death of Jesus in you.

You don't. You simply have to deal with Jesus and settle, are you willing to be identified with him? To die with him to the things that he wants to die to in you? That's it. That's it.

You don't even have to take a thousand sins upon you or two million sins. You're probably, all of us here, are unlike God in a million, million ways. Well, probably Jesus will only deal with you on about two of those issues today, and maybe another issue tomorrow, and another the next day.

What he requires from us is a willingness to say yes. And then the Holy Spirit, who made him what he was, will begin to move in you. And that's it.

It is really simple. So even as I've talked here, there are some things have come up in your conscience. You know that.

Some things have occurred in your conscience. You've thought to yourself, well, I sure I felt resentment not only against too many. I felt resentment against the people in my office.

Sure, I feel some resentment even at this moment against somebody who has criticized me. Now, ask Jesus how he wants you to enter into him in regard to that. What attitude does he want to take in that situation? Ask him that, you see.

And Jesus will show you the attitude that he wants to take towards that person. And, of course, immediately they'll crop up in your mind, well, I mean, if I don't have this resentment, this kind of holds them off, you know, it kind of controls them. Now, if I don't have this resentment anymore towards them, they'll mow in on me and tear me apart.

Well, that's it. That's what being on the cross with Jesus is, you see. That's saying, all right, Lord, it seems dumb.

You could have called thousands of angels down, and yet you trusted your Father to call them off whenever he chose. Well, Lord, I see that's what you're saying to me. Am I willing to open myself to them possibly destroying me? And, loved ones, that's what obedience means.

Now, you know, don't go away off with that silliness. Oh, have we to be doormats? Just look at Jesus walking through the temple and throwing over the tables of the moneylenders. Of course, you don't have to be doormats, but you do have to react only as the Holy Spirit moves you to react, only as he would react.

And it's not that you have to be passive in his hands, you have to cooperate with him. But the truth is, he can only come into you if you're willing to live the kind of life that Jesus lived. And that means, loved ones, depending on God and not society any longer.

That's it, really. So, there are many of us here, you know, who are just silly little pups. You know we are.

They stroke us the right way and we beg like mad. And they stroke us again and we beg again. Lots of us are just silly little puppy dogs.

We're just at the mercy of what people think of us. Somebody criticizes us and we're utterly cast down. Somebody praises us.

There's no power over us at all and we're delighted. Well, dying with Jesus means dying to what the Roman soldiers think of you, dying to what your supporters think of you, dying to what everything but God alone, what he thinks of you. It means depending on his approval in your life.

I mean, you know, many of you will say to me today, you'll say, well, I do. I do get annoyed when people criticize me. I do.

I mean, I do care what people think of me. Well, that obedience means being willing not to care, you see. Obedience means dying to what opinion they have of you.

And that means thinking through what can they do. So they can destroy your job. They can destroy your reputation.

Well, would you be willing for that? If Jesus wants that in your life, would you be willing for it? That's what it means, you see. It means leaving the judgment of how far your life will suffer up to him. And if you are willing for that, loved ones, there is a sweet Holy Spirit that will come into you, a dear person, a dear person like ourselves, who will come into you and begin to beget in you a love that is beyond anything that you have ever experienced, and a kindness, and a wisdom, and a discernment about things, and a directing in your life that you cannot produce yourself.

But do you remember how the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus? Well, we all do remember. And you can't imagine anything more gentle than a little dove. You can't.

And you can imagine that a little dove just flutters down on a lamb. Only on a lamb. Something as gentle as a lamb.

Something as much in the Father's hands as a lamb. The dove can come down upon that kind of person. And that's it, loved ones.

And you know, you manly men and you courageous women who think, oh, we've got to be doormats, don't be silly. Jesus was no doormat. But being a lamb means not being a lamb in men's hands, but being a lamb in God's hands.

Being willing for whatever God wants for your life. And if you are willing for that, if you're willing to obey God, God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him. So every one of us here has some area that God has already spoken to us about in our conscience.

Loved ones, your place is to obey. Not to try to obey, to obey. There's no such thing as trying to obey.

You remember I told you about Britain, the English restaurants, when we first came out with the non-smoking thing. We were over in London one summer and here in this restaurant was the notice, try not to smoke. That was the British polite way of asking for obedience.

That isn't obedience. That's the funny thing about it. Trying not to smoke isn't obedience.

Try not to smoke. Oh, I'm trying, I'm trying. You can't try to obey.

You obey or you don't obey. That's it. You're willing to obey or you're not willing to obey.

That's it. And we all know that. And that's why there's such a clear cut between the defeated Christians and the victorious Christians.

One group pretend that you can try to obey. The other group know that's a contradiction in itself. You either obey and you're willing to obey or you're not obeying and you're not willing to obey.

Loved ones, that's it. And the beauty of it is that those of us who are willing to live like Jesus receive this miraculous person of the Holy Spirit who changes us from the inside. Oh, the Holy Spirit is likened in the Old Testament to the oil that they use to anoint the kings and the prophets, you know.

And the oil that was used in the Old Testament has several ingredients. It's just interesting to follow it through. But one of the ingredients is myrrh.

You remember it was mentioned, I think, as a gift that was given to Jesus. And myrrh is used to take the soreness out of a bruise. When the Holy Spirit comes into your life, he takes the soreness out of the bruises that people give to you.

He takes the soreness out of the criticism that people offer. See, you don't have to do it yourself. The Holy Spirit actually takes the pain out of those things so that you don't feel the pain the way you used to.

Another ingredient is calamus. And calamus is used to take the acid or counteract the acid in the stomach. When the Holy Spirit comes into you, he takes that acidy feeling out of you, that irritability and resentment that you feel against people who oppose you.

He takes that out of you so that you've never met a Sarpus. You see everybody as beautiful in Jesus. You actually see them that way.

The Holy Spirit enables you to see them that way. So don't say, oh, I couldn't, I can't overcome these things. You don't have to.

The Holy Spirit who did this in Jesus will do it in you. He will change you from the inside. Another ingredient was cinnamon, you know, and it's a spicy, fiery thing that gives energy and stimulation.

And when the Holy Spirit comes into you, what was lumpish and heavy and slow and ponderous becomes light and agile and filled with energy. The Holy Spirit gives you a new energy, a new facility in your thinking, a new agility in your mind, a new flexibility in your feelings. The Holy Spirit does these things in you.

Now, just another ingredient is olive oil, you know, and it's used to take the wrinkles out of skin and to take all the things out that distract people from the beauty of the person. And when the Holy Spirit comes into you, he takes all those idiosyncrasies away. Another way, we're all elbows.

Oh, I want to do God's will, but I want to do it so that they see it's me doing it in my version. And they remember me. The Holy Spirit takes away that desire for that individuality and that show of your own personality.

And yet he fills your personality with more variety and more diversity than ever before. Loved ones, this is why Christianity is different from all other religions. You see that? It's not just that Islam is the Ayatollah and we have somebody else.

That's not that. It's not even simply Jesus' death. But it's that Jesus' death enabled God to send the Holy Spirit to us.

And the Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to be what God made us to be. And he is yours. Changed my life when I came to know him.

Changed my life from that of an intellectual, trying to make these things real by the power of my own mind and my self-discipline, into a person who received a gift from God, who began to make me like God. And that Holy Spirit is for you. And Jesus has sent him here this morning.

And you can begin to receive him if you will obey. Really. Let us pray.

Dear Father, I would pray for my dear friends this morning. Especially, Lord, loved ones who may be as I was. Respecting the truthfulness of all these things, seeing the logic of them, but unable to live them.

Crying out the good that I would, I cannot do. The evil that I hate is the very thing I do. Lord, I would pray for my dear brothers and sisters that you would show them that this is true, what you've given us to share this morning.

That the Holy Spirit, you dear Holy Spirit, are real and alive here. And it is because of you that Jesus was able to be what he was. And that doesn't make him any the less wonderful.

But that he has poured you forth upon us. And that you, Holy Spirit, are a real person, a counselor, able to come into our lives and to think and to explain to us and to show us things that we have not been able to see. And above all, that you're able to take of the things of Jesus, his love and his humility and his forgiveness and compassion.

And you're able to make them real in our own hearts. So that at last, God's law is written in our inward parts. And we are good because we feel good.

And we are loving because we feel loving. And we at last are pure within as well as without. Holy Spirit, I would trust you to continue to counsel each of us here in this room and to begin to run our lives and be our dear friend and our dear Lord.

And now the grace of our Lord Jesus and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and evermore. Amen.

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