

Love

by George Duncan

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love as the fruit of the Spirit, and how it can be demonstrated in our lives through extravagance, action, sympathy, and memory.

Duration: 34:56

Scripture: John 3:16, John 12:1-8, Ephesians 5:18

Topics: "Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the church's witness through their actions and lives. He shares a story of a little girl drawing God and highlights the need for people to see the love of God in Christians. The speaker also addresses the issue of giving time and resources to the Lord, comparing it to the love and sacrifice of a mother. He concludes with a prayer and reminds listeners that the fruit of the Spirit is love.

Transcript

Will you turn with me to the Word of God, to the 12th chapter of St. John's Gospel, and I want to read with you the first 11 verses. St. John's Gospel chapter 12, verses 1 to 11. Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead.

And there they made him a supper, and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the odor, with the fragrance of the ointment.

Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, let her alone. Against the day of my burying has she kept this.

For the poor always ye have with you, but me ye have not always. Much people of the Jews therefore knew that he was there. They came not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead.

But the chief priest consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death, because that by reason of him, many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus. May we bow in prayer. Our gracious God and our

loving Father, we believe that the ministry of thy word is not ended, but continuing.

Thou hast spoken again and again during these days, and we bless thee for it, and we ask that we may hear thy voice speaking to us yet again. Grant us now a fulfillment in our personal experience of the promise of our Lord concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit, that when he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth. May he then take our minds and think through them, my lips and speak through them, our hearts and incline them in obedience to thy will.

We ask it for thy glory and our own good and the good of others to be reached through us, and above all, for Christ our Savior's sake. Amen. In the final Bible study this morning, our thoughts were drawn to the command that is laid down in Scripture, to be filled with the Spirit.

And I'm sure that in all our hearts there was a great yearning and a great longing, that our lives might experience this and demonstrate it. I wonder how far you and I are prepared to accept what that fullness will mean. It seems to me that the fullness of the Holy Spirit is bound to produce the fruit of the Spirit.

And the fruit of the Spirit is summed up in just one word. I think those scholars are right who interpret the very familiar verses in Galatians, that really the fruit of the Spirit is love, and that what follows are simply facets of love. I remember receiving a little card some time ago, it was titled, the fruit of the Spirit is love.

And then it went on like this, joy is love exulting and peace is love at rest. Patience, love enduring in every trial and test. Gentleness, love yielding to all that is not sin.

Goodness, love in actions that flow from Christ within. Faith is love's eyes open, the living Christ to see. Meekness, love not fighting but bowed at Calvary.

Temperance, love in harness and under Christ's control. For Christ is love in person and love Christ in the soul. Worries me a little bit sometimes that many Christians are concerned about the fullness of the Spirit, and I don't find quite so many concerned about the fruit.

The fruit of the Spirit is love. It was General Booth who counseled two despairing Salvation Army officers who found their situation almost intolerable, and they wrote asking if they could be recalled. And he sent out a cable to them with just two words on it, try love.

And I owe such a debt to Evan Hopkins for his telling little sentence that comes in his book, *The Law of Liberty in the Spiritual Life*, when he says that while faith makes all things possible, love makes all things easy. I love that, don't you? While faith makes all things possible, love makes all things easy. But I believe there's another aspect of this that is of vital importance.

When John, in the beginning of his gospel, summed up the significance of the coming of our Lord, he said the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. Now the thing that comes to me with a sense of challenge is that John writes, the word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld.

Writing to his epistle, summing up the ministry of our Lord, he speaks of that which we have heard, and that which we have seen with our eyes. Now you and I as Christians are desperately concerned that people should hear. That they should hear the gospel.

That they don't want to listen, they want to look. You don't hear love so much as see it. And it's what people see that is very often decisive.

Do you remember that word of commission of our Lord to his own? He said, as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. Why did the Father send the Son? To redeem, of course, but more than to redeem. The Father sent the Son to reveal.

And Jesus said, he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father. Our Lord's life was not simply one that was going to mean redeeming, it was to mean revealing. Now you take that and apply it to yourself, and you and I suddenly find ourselves faced with this tremendous challenge.

The Father sent the Son in order that the Father might be revealed. The Son sends you in order that he might be revealed. So it's not just a matter of telling people, it's a matter of revealing Christ.

We as evangelicals glory in John 3 16, there are some evangelical communities that think the minister is heretical if he doesn't preach on John 3 16 every Sunday night. Can't find any law of the Medes and Persians in my Bible that tells me I've got to do that every Sunday night. And I find today with declining evening congregations, the gospel needs to be preached sometimes in the morning more than at night.

You get the sinners in the morning, can you get the salt of the earth at night? They don't want to hear the gospel. I should maybe say the salt of the earth if they haven't lost their savor. But what is the heart of the gospel? God so loved.

That's it. But do people sense and see in your Christian life and mine, this caring love of God in Christ? Do they see it? I believe that the tragedy of the failure of the witness of the church is not entirely in what people hear from the pulpit, it's in what they see or fail to see in your life and mine. You know the story of the little girl who was busy drawing away on a Sunday and her mother called over and said, what are you drawing? She said, I'm drawing God.

Oh said her mother, but you can't draw God. She said, you don't know what he's like. Nobody knows what he's like.

Oh she said, but they will know when I finish drawing him. My dear Christian friends, people ought to know what Jesus Christ is like, if they know you, if they work alongside you in the office, if their patience in the ward where you're a nurse, the fruit of the Spirit is love and love is action. So I want to turn with you to this passage we read together.

It's to me indescribably choice. And I want to bring your love and mine that we profess into the light of the unquestioned love of Mary for her Lord. And I want us to note three things.

Maybe just before we move into that, I ought to remind you if I need to, that this love is something already given to us. The fruit of the Spirit is love. This isn't a love I have to work up.

It's maybe just a love I have to let out. You remember how Paul writing to the Romans said, the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us. It's not our love for God, it is the very love of God.

Paul says, the love of Christ constraineth. He doesn't say my love for Christ, he says the love of Christ. When you receive the new life you receive the new love.

And you've had evidence of this in your life. You started caring for the Bible, you didn't care before. You started caring for the house of God, you didn't care before.

You started caring for God's people, you didn't care before. You started caring for others, you didn't care before. That is the evidence that the love of God has been shed have wrought.

It's there, God's gift, but we don't let it out. We don't allow it to motivate. Let's look then at Mary's love, and oh may, may something of this be seen when you and I get back home, to our church, to our family, to our work.

And I want us to note first of all what I've called the quality that marks the ministry of Mary's love. And there are two qualities, and the first is the sheer extravagance of it. We read this, then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly.

The sheer extravagance of it. Now love is always extravagant, always. It's extravagant in the price it's prepared to pay.

There's any fellow or girl here in love, you know what I'm talking about. Parents who love a child. When you're thinking of buying something for the person you love, be it child, be it sweetheart, be it husband or wife, I want to ask you this question.

Do you not always think in terms of the maximum that you can afford? Or do you think in terms of the minimum you can get away with? You don't need to answer that question. We think in terms of the maximum we can afford, and sometimes we go way beyond that maximum, don't we? You set a limit when you go to the shop, and then you see something that's dear, and you say, oh we'll just get it. What about our price that we're willing to pay for the Lord's work? You know I'm ashamed of my country.

In this area we just haven't learned the beginning of the meaning of what it is to give. I preached in a church in the United States one Sunday morning not so long ago, and in their order of service they also gave the amount of the offering the previous Sunday. It was a church that hadn't been long opened, happened to be a Baptist church.

Do you know what the collection was the previous Sunday which included their special giving to the building fund that wasn't quite cleared off? Do you know what the offering was the previous Sunday? Ten thousand pounds. I know that's America. It's a biggish congregation, fairly well to do.

Let me take you to another church not in America. A membership of 100. Do you know what their offering is every Sunday? 100 pounds.

And we're content. Now we've forgotten that we used to put half a crown in. We've dropped down to 10 pence, the two shilling piece, and that has dropped in value.

So those of us who used to put two and six into the offering are now putting in one and six. We think it doesn't matter. Do you know why we don't give? I'll tell you.

We don't love. That's all. If we loved we would give, not minimum but maximum, all the time.

And in these days of the affluent society so-called, I'm not taking terms of widows, bless their hearts, they're amongst the best givers of all. Called on one of the widows of my own congregation with a Christmas gift for her, and the first thing she said after we chatted, Mr. Duncan, I haven't been to church

for a while, I must give you my collection. So away she went and she dug out her bag and took out a little old purse and took out three pound notes and handed them to me.

We spend more on tins of kennel meat and kitty cats in a week than we put in the offering for God. It's a scandal, isn't it? The price it's willing to pay in the time it's willing to give. You know love, love loses track of the time.

You see two young folk, all they've got to say, two words on each side. Those two words are good night. Now how long does it tell them to say those two words? Anything up to half an hour or an hour.

Do they grudge that time? They don't. How much time do we give to the Lord? On the Lord's day. It is the Lord's day after all.

He said the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath day in a peculiar sense. But I find there are lots of converted Christians now who give the Lord on the Lord's day one hour and 15 minutes, and that's all. They're not there at night.

Do you know where they are at night? In front of their TV set. Do you think it's a witness to the Lord to see a trickle of folk going in and out of a church on the Lord's day? That's no witness. But to see a crowd pouring in and a crowd pouring out, folk begin to wonder what's happening here.

The paying of the price. Love's extravagant, the giving of its time, the spending of its strength. I suppose the highest form of love almost that we ever experience is that of a mother's love.

It's the hardest worked profession and occupation in the world. Husbands discover that when mum is sick and they take over, and they end up at the end of the day absolutely exhausted and whacked. They never knew so much was involved, so much work.

But why does a mother spend her strength like that? Because she loves, that's all. My older sister was nursed by my mother who was herself a nurse. But I think two and a half years while she lay in bed, both day nurse and night nurse, until my sister died in her late 20s.

Did my mother complain? Never. How often are you really exhausted, whacked, because of what you've done for Jesus Christ? Sheer extravagance of it. It's a baptism of love we need.

And the sweet fragrance of it. I love that sentence. I don't like the word odor in the authorized version, but I like the word in the RSV and some of the other translations.

The house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. A whole house sweet. How fragrant some lives are.

How fragrant in our hearts and in our memories are the names of some places. You started naming some of the places in the Valley of the Spey. They would just bring immediately a warmth and a glow to my heart, because I spent holidays there.

Methy Bridge, Downan Bridge, Carr Bridge, Cromdale, Grantown and Spey, Boat of Garton, King Usy, Newton Moor. You mention these names and my heart immediately begins to warm. Why, why is the very memory of these places fragrant to me? Why? Because when I was there, I was in the, in the atmosphere of the love of my home and my family and my, my father and mother.

Certain people, certain names. Immediately you hear them. There's a warmth comes to you.

Why? Because they loved and cared. The quality that marks the ministry of love, the sheer extravagance of it and the sweet fragrance. Is this a quality marking your professed love for the Lord? The second thing I see here is not only the quality that marks the ministry of Mary's love, but the sympathy that guides the ministry of Mary's love.

They say that love is blind. You know, two get together and other people say, can't see what she sees in him. Or the other way, can't see what he sees in her.

Depends whether you're a man or a girl, which side you take on that. And we say love is blind. That's, that's only a half truth.

I believe that love can be blind to thoughts, but love is not blind to thoughts. Love can see. When Paul prayed for the Philippian church, he prayed that their love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and in, and I love this, and in wise insight.

That's it. Love has an insight, a sympathy, a sensitivity to the mind and the needs and the thoughts of those it loves. This is seen here.

You see, this was a festive occasion. It was a social thanksgiving. They were all rejoicing that Lazarus had been raised from the dead.

Everybody had got together to have a jolly evening and thank the, thank the Lord for, for what had done. Everybody was in a festive mood. No, they weren't.

Two were not. Jesus wasn't. And because Jesus wasn't, Mary wasn't.

She knew. You see, there is a wisdom that Mary's ministry of love reveals. Love has insight.

And Mary knew that there was a dark, dark, cold, cold shadow beginning to fall across the mind of her beloved Lord. The cross was just around the corner, and Jesus' heart and mind were already reaching out to that. Mary knew it.

She didn't need to be told. She knew. I never liked going to the dentist when I was small, and so if I got toothache, never breathed a word.

Better now. They're kinder if they're not in too big a hurry. But I remember on one occasion I got terrific toothache, and I wasn't going to let on at all.

I knew what would happen. My mother would go straight to the telephone, pick it up, and phone and make an appointment, and I before it. So I never said, well, I was sitting, I remember it as if it was yesterday, sitting in front of the drawing room fire at home.

My mother was sitting in the chair there, busy doing some downing, and I was sitting looking in the fire. And then my spoke. She said, George, have you got toothache? I never said a word.

But she knew. She didn't need to be told. Oh, for Christians who have the insight of love so that they don't need to be told.

Though welcome this ministry of love receives. Do you always have to be asked to do something? In your fellowship? And when you have been asked, do you always have to be thanked by the minister? Or are you content just to have the opportunity to do it and rejoice in that? And do you have the insight that sees what needs to be done without having it pointed out to you? Are you the kind of person who is sensitive to the mood and needs of the person working alongside you, so that you know when there's been trouble? This is the kind of sympathy and sensitivity that guides the ministry of love. The voice of the critic was heard.

Judas Iscariot. The critics are always with us, aren't they? And they were with the master, and his cold voice was heard breaking in. Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence? That gives us an indication as to the value of the gift.

A working man's wage for nearly a whole year. That was the value of it. And Jesus turned round, I think sharply, and he said, let her alone.

For pity's sake, leave her. Don't deprive me of this kind of ministry at this particular moment. Leave her alone.

The sympathy that guides. Love is always sensitive. Some of us are not.

We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of, full of what? Truth? No. Full of grace and truth. And some of us dear evangelical Christians are packed full of what we call the truth and almost empty of grace.

We're the most ungracious, insensitive people knocking around. And that applies sometimes to us in the pulpit just as much to anybody else. We preach the gospel of the love of God in a voice of thunder, and we don't have a Bible in our hands.

We have a hammer or a great big stick, and we flog our congregations. Why they come back to be flogged again, I can never understand. The quality that marks the ministry of love, the sympathy that guides the ministry of love, and then finally the memory that crowns the ministry of Mary's love.

Our Lord said, for this she will be remembered. She will be remembered. It was to be an enduring memory, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of in memory of her.

Are you going to be remembered? Are you? And what are you going to be remembered for? Are you going to be missed out of your fellowship? Tragically and terribly missed when you go? An enduring memory and an enriching one. Oh, the blessing that has come to other lives as they've read of Mary's love. What kind of a blessing has come to others as they've come to know you? As folk have come to know you, has there come a hunger and a desire in their hearts, oh I'd give anything to be that kind of Christian.

The fruit of the Spirit, love. Now this shall all men know, if ye have love. What is love? Most supremely, I suppose, it's caring.

Do you care? I think I may have mentioned before that I followed a quite remarkable man in my church. The name of Tom Allen was a household word in Glasgow. After he'd ministered in St. George's Tran for six or seven years before he died at the age of 48.

Just worn out with caring and he was ill for a few months after I went. I went in March and he died in September. A little while after he died, a few weeks after, the phone went as it always goes at our manse at any hour of the day or night.

And it was a woman's voice at the other end. The voice said, can I speak to Tom Allen? I said, I'm terribly sorry but didn't you know that he died just a few weeks ago? There was silence at the other end and then I heard a sound of weeping. And I heard this unseen person saying to herself, who can I go to now? Do you know who that was at the other end of the phone? A prostitute.

Tom Allen told me that he'd known what it was to be in the vestry of St. George's Tran at one o'clock in the morning, washing the vomit off the dress of a drunken prostitute. He cared. Do you care? Why do people not come? I'll tell you why.

Because we don't care. We don't. We don't care for them as people.

A girl, a problem girl said to me, Mr. Duncan, they're only interested in you in St. George's Tran if you need to be converted. What an indictment. Not interested in her as a person, just in the soul that we say needed to be converted.

Jesus loved the world and we don't care. We don't care. Here's a tremendous prayer that I came across and with this I end.

Do you know these words? They're very, very old. O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

The fruit of the Spirit is love.

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