

Loved to Death

Beholding the Power to Die to Self

January 30th, 2022

Today we're talking about the love that leads to death... *to self*. But to get there, answer this: **How much more could you love Jesus?** Got room for improvement? How much? Let's get to work!



First, I want to clarify that I don't mean *love* in some detached, esoteric, "Christian-ese" way, but in the normal earthly way – where you can't stop thinking about the object of your affection and all your choices revolve around them. That constant, consuming, and even confusing way, where your desire starts directing and defining you. Like me and Back to the Future. And it's *this* regular old human love, that is crucial to the deep theological truth that Bruce exposed last Sunday: **in order to be a living sacrifice we need to be ALIVE.** *Who knew?!* But **it's *this* love that'll help answer last week's essential and insightful question at Christianity's core: Are we alive?** And despite the sound, it's *NOT* silly, it's just *surprising* to see life and death from God's perspective. You see:

You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world ... [that's the *living dead*]- Ephesians 2:1-2 NIV

[but] We know that we have passed from death [*living death*] to life [*true life*], because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in [*living*] death... [Now,] This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. – 1 John 3:14-16 NIV

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of *God's* mercy to offer *your* bodies as a [*truly*] living sacrifice [*by loving, which is*] holy and pleasing to God-[cuz let's face it] this is your true and proper worship. –Romans 12:1 NIV

[So, as Paul explains,] I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live [*in death*], but Christ [*truly*] lives in me. The [*true*] life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. – Galatians 2:19-21 NIV

And a couple weeks ago we saw in Hebrews that *faith* is two things:

Faith is confidence in what we hope for [*as confirmed by our actions*] and assurance [*from His Word*] about what we do not see [*which gives us the confidence to put life-giving love into action*]. – Hebrews 11:1 NIV

And last Sunday we talked about "dying to self" so we won't "remain in death" – even **though the biggest ongoing disciplinary hardship of the Christian life is dying to self.** Yet, we *must die* to self, in order to *love* on others, in order to truly *live*, as a living sacrifice. Remember? Die. Love. Live.

However – there is a necessary *prep* step to get that whole thing going (that Bruce didn't get to unpack), and it involves **the love that leads to death... to self**. And this is the "**assurance**" portion of living by faith, that empowers our "**confidence**", to put that ol' love into action.



It's called **Beholding**. It's the pre-step where we take stock, gather information, and try to gain an understanding that will motivate our action. It's where we work to truly, personally comprehend something in order to discern its right fit into *our* thoughts, beliefs, and life. And **we do it when we actively observe, explore, or engage some thing, person, or idea. Like we would if we were to "be holding" something of interest in our hands**. Imagine being handed a baseball hat for the first time on a sunny day and being told it would help you see more clearly. You'd turn it over a few times, take a close look, unsnap and snap the back, and try it on; making adjustments until it comfortably shaded your eyes best. And *boom, Hats are part of your life now!*

And it's this hands-on experience with something that encourages and inspires us to make deliberate choices by giving us reasons to be confident in the action we take. Because beholding something assures us that our beliefs are not baseless but rational because what we're seeing or discovering confirms our plan of action as a good idea! And that's the confidence and assurance that grows faith! And in the same way we can be holding a hat to find out its role in our life, John implores us to build faith in something that has a much more profound effect on us:

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! – 1 John 3:1 NKJ

Behold God's love! **We need to take some time to observe, explore and engage it** or we won't build the confidence and assurance of that faith which enables us to overcome ourselves and lay down our lives. **So, what is it that's so important about His love?** Well first, it's the "**manner**" of love John mentions. In fact, that word literally means "what country", as if to say "Behold this foreign or alien type of love". **It's never-been-seen**. And this helps us with John's most famous *and* misunderstood verse, John 3:16: For God so loved the world...

And stop right there! The word translated "so", actually means, "in such a manner" and some bibles like ESV even offer an alternate translation of "This is *how* God loved the world". And although the depths of His love *are* infinite, the point being made here is *not* how *much* God loved the world, but what *kind* of love He had. And it's the kind where:

He gave His one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16 NIV

God loves us sacrificially; for our benefit, at His expense, through His Son. But, there's a twist to His love that makes the familiar, feel foreign; where it looks illogical, impossible, and insane:

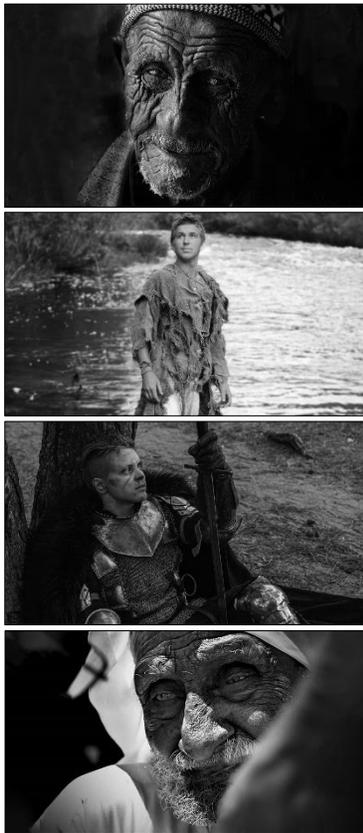
You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone

might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:6-8; 10 NIV

His love is sacrificial and across enemy lines; an absurd mix of grace and mercy. **Grace in getting the sacrifice we don't deserve and mercy in not getting the punishment we do deserve.** This is the never-been-seen love that needs to be beheld! And having personally beheld *this* love, John surely felt the gravity of Jesus's instruction when He said:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. [How is this new, you ask?] As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [And this is where we can show Him that we know Him by doing what we beheld of Him. It's our progress report!] By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." – John 13:34-35 NIV

Now, there's a moment when something you "know" becomes something you "are". It moves from your head to your heart and it changes from something you consider – that *influences* your life, to something you account for – that *guides* your life. **This is where the assurance and confidence of your faith becomes so overwhelming that it moves you to action.** Something you've beheld has suddenly compelled you to get going and that "prep step" becomes the *pep* in your step as you start following Jesus's fearless example of loving others without regard for yourself.



Take John. Two 2nd and 3rd century books tell an incredible story of him in his twilight years: After returning from his exile on Patmos, old man John returns to Ephesus to help the churches and finds this strong, good-looking young guy whom he takes a liking to and after winning him to Christ, begins discipling. So, when business at another church pulls him away, he calls in the bishop and asks him to look after him until he can get back and continue. But, while gone, the kid starts backsliding and ends up becoming the leader of a gang of robbers, hiding out on the nearby mountain. So, when John returns, he immediately asks the bishop how his boy's doing, and the bishop says, "Oh, He's dead." And John is like, "How'd he die?!" And the bishop says, "Well, he's dead – *to God...*" Which gets John fired up (**We're not the only ones who can appreciate the difficulties of spiritual language like 'living dead in sin'**) So this 80ish year old guy demands a horse to and leaves right from the church to a place everyone knows is certain death. And when he gets captured by these guys, he's like, "Good! Now take me to your leader!" And boom, there's the kid, looking all tough and armed to the teeth. But when he sees John, oh, he feels the shame and turns to leave. But John bolts after him and he crying out, "Son! Don't run, it's me, your dad! There's always hope for you, I'll gladly suffer death for you just as Jesus did for US! Just listen and trust me!"

And on hearing these words, the kid just stops, drops his weapons and starts crying and shaking. So John runs over, hugs him, and walks him right past the gang, explaining how they're going to fix things. And over time, they do. And eventually, he's proudly presented to the church as an example of repentance, regeneration, resurrection, and the unbelievable life-giving love of Jesus.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? ... [Paul's beheld it, and *he's convinced*] that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – Romans 8:35-39 NIV

Now I know John must have been quite a spectacle at that camp, but **you know what I think made him so easy to recognize? His love. His illogical, impossible, and insane love.** Who on earth does that? And in that moment, all the scripture and knowledge of Jesus's love that John had shared, went straight from this kid's head to his heart. And what he beheld gave him the confidence and assurance to put his old self to death, right then and there in the middle of the enemy camp.



And those moments of inspiration are ready and waiting for all of us. In fact, I'm sharing this story because I *am* the proverbial prodigal son who fiercely fought my parents' grace and mercy from my teen years on. Here's an empty gesture I offered to get my way at 14. But I just celebrated my 40th birthday this month and was blind-sided by something that made me feel like Jesus was in the room. My dad gave me a card that returned my IOU that said, "Son, all debts are cancelled and forgiven." And I know how silly it seems down here – but I know how much I don't deserve it and that I do owe dad everything, down here *and* up there. And I know that I need to *do* something about it. We all do. Remember it's our job to:

Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. – Matthew 5:16 NIV

It's by design that we behold the love of Jesus to be changed into something for the world to behold and be changed by. That's the chain reaction that saves the world!

But there's a problem, because the church aint giving the world something to behold. **Politics, policies, media, and masks continue to keep us in our own camps and make us unrecognizable as His disciples.**

That's the life He's asking us to lay down; the one that's concerned with the earthly things we love down here. And it's gonna take some real faith and an intimate knowledge of Jesus's love to break those bonds. **But we'll love like Jesus to the degree we embrace and internalize how He loved us.** So in case it hasn't hit your heart, behold this: **Jesus loves you to death.**



You are the joy that was set before Him, for which reason He *endured* the cross. **But, to make His love complete and fulfill all things, He must be the joy set before you,** for which reason *you* will endure this world's *hardship* as the loving *discipline* of a Father who is coming for His kids to take them home!