

How Great Is Our Calling!

“23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. 25 ¶ "All this I have spoken while still with you.” (Joh 14:23-25 NIV)

As we celebrate this season of the year, as we remind ourselves of the importance of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection, we often turn to the biblical account of Jesus’s last days on the earth.

Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples all the years that He spent with them during his ministry. This last Passover before his death would be different. Instead of looking back at the Exodus, the time of deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, Jesus did something very different with them that year. Jesus knew what was coming. His disciples did not. What Jesus did, what He told them that night was shocking to them.

That night, Jesus looked to the future and also to a time that was before creation! It was only after his resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit that they would understand what was going on.

That night, Jesus taught them many things. He talked to them about love and He exemplified love - one thing being what love looks like in action towards one another!

Israel was really a very dusty place. Except for the rainy seasons which were in October and November and March and April, the rest of the time, the region was like a dust bowl. To top it all off, there was no garbage collection like we have today. In our day, we consider it normative to put our garbage outside one evening to have it gone the next day, often time when we are still sleeping! But it was not so back then. Most people did not have closed shoes like we have today. They wore sandals. As you can well imagine, outside, there was dust everywhere. When people came indoors, they were expected to wash their own feet. No one was expected to wash other people’s feet. Sometimes, slaves were forced to do so but people would not do this to one another willingly!

One time, at a place of work, a supervisor from head office came to visit. The secretary was asked to bring coffee. When she came in to the office, she told her immediate supervisor, “Don’t you ever asked me again for coffee!” She gave the strong message that she did not want to serve anyone in that way! The secretary was insulted by this request. Back then, to expect that one would wash your feet, would be a greater insult!

In that context, the night before He gave his life, Jesus did something very stunning. **“2 The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal,**

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took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.” (Joh 13:2-5 NIV)

Jesus gave them a powerful example that they were to serve one another in humility.

After having done this, Jesus then predicted his own death. **“31 ¶ When he was gone, Jesus said, “31 ¶ When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. 33 "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. 34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”” (Joh 13:31-35 NIV)**

These words, **"Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. 32 If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once”**, do not appear to make any sense. What did God's glory have to do with Jesus' death? How could God be glorified in his Son's death?

What do we think when we think about God's glory? Naturally, our minds are brought to God's greatness, his magnificence, his majesty, his brilliance, his grandeur, his creative abilities and rightly so. **“1 ¶ [A psalm of David.] Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness.” (Ps 29:1-2 NIV)**. We give glory to God not because He needs anything from us but because He already has glory!

Glory has another significance in the Bible. In both the Old and New Testament, God's glory is reflected in his presence with people! After they left Egypt, the Lord was with Israel. **“20 After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. 21 By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. 22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.” (Ex 13:20-22 NIV)**

After the Israelites left Egypt, it was not long before the Israel began to do what we find so easy to do? And what is that? They began to grumble, moan and gripe! They were not satisfied. Can you imagine if at the complaint department of a store, there would be the insignia: “Complaint Department” and underneath it, “No whining”. That would be a pretty tough command to follow! To complaint and gripe comes easy to us human beings.

Anyway, they complaint and God began to give them manna. Interesting to read what Aaron tells the Israelites:

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“6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?"” (Ex 16:6-7 NIV) “While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked towards the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.” (Ex 16:10 NIV)

The glory of the Lord was God’s presence with men! When God gave the 10 commandment at Mount Sinai, we read that the God’s glory was on the mountain. Moses entered into God’s glory and to the Israelites looking up the mountain, it looked to them as a consuming fire. **“15 When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, 16 and the glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud. 17 To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain.” (Ex 24:15-17 NIV)**

If you want, you are encouraged to look at other passages in the Old Testament that links the glory of the Lord to his presence with his people.

We find the same thing in the New Testament. The glory of the Lord was related to God’s presence amongst and with men. **“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.” (Lu 2:9 NIV) “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (Joh 1:14 NIV)**

Getting back to John 13, how can glory and death be linked to one another?

God is so great that even the universe cannot contain Him. In fact, He spoke the universe into existence! He is not a part of the universe, He sustains it and maintains it!

When we understand this in faith, God coming to be one of us to die on the cross is indeed a stupendous, amazing and stunning act of God. It is an act that blows our minds! The Lord of the universe dying on the cross!! The Father would glorify himself by allowing his Son to die on the cross in our place and for all of us! God present with us.

Then He gives them a new commandment. **“34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”” (Joh 13:34-35 NIV)**

How is this a new commandment? How is it different from the commandment God gave to the Israelites? Or is it different? **““Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD.” (Le 19:18 NIV)**

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Our relationship with one another is to mirror God's love for us, Jesus' love for us. This is sign that will and does identify Christians. It is a reflection of how Christ treated his disciples when on the earth. How can this be? This love is love in connected and in relationship to Jesus Christ.

“15 ¶ "If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 ¶ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. 21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.” (Joh 14:15-21 NIV)

What do we notice in this passage? There are many things to notice but one thing that we notice is that love and obedience are connected. They go hand in hand!

We have difficulty with love and obedience in our society. There are things that we do not like about the word command. In fact, there are certain passages in the bible about marriage that some would prefer to skip over because of the word obedience. Could it be because we misread those passages?

In our society, we think that love does not imply obedience and between equals, love ought to be without commands. However, we must realize that Jesus is not our equal. He was made human just like we are but He remains the Creator. He remains God. He remains a distinct person in the one Trinitarian God. Jesus is our Lord and Master and he has every right to tell us what to do! We have to realize that when we balk and recoil at this truth that our pride is getting in the way big times!

When Jesus commands us and we obey, we love Him by willingly keeping his commandments! When we refuse, we are said to be in a state of rebelliousness! When we realize His love for us, we obey Him willingly and joyfully.

When we love Jesus in this way, it will reflect in the way we treat others. The apostle John is very clear on this. **“If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.”** (1Jo 4:20 NIV)

Our love for others reflects our love for Jesus and Jesus' love for us!

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This kind of love is very different than the love we usually think of. When we think of love, we usually think of love that binds 2 people together to the exclusion of others. This is not so with the love of God! Being in relationship with Jesus helps us to love others in a different way!

“17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 ¶ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. 19 Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. 20 On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” (Joh 14:17-20 NIV)

In between the verses that we have just read linking love to obedience, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit. This kind of love is nurture by the Holy Spirit. It is not a love that we can have on our own! In his book, *Life in the Trinity*, Donald Fairbairn, says on page 24,

“Here we should also notice that Jesus links the Holy Spirit's dwelling within Christians to the fact that the Father and the Son are in each other. Because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we will recognize that the Son is in the Father and the Son is in us. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the link between the Son's relationship to the Father and the Christian's relationship to the Son. As Jesus continues speaking, he will make this link much clearer. In the meantime, we notice again how interconnected the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, Christians, love and obedience are. The very fabric of who we are is an intricate tapestry of relationships and actions. As we try to understand that tapestry more fully, let us look at what Jesus says later in the discourse.

What is the nature of this love that the Holy Spirit imparts to his disciples?

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.” (Joh 15:1 NIV) “4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” (Joh 15:4-5 NIV) “This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (Joh 15:8 NIV)

This parable was a great illustration for those people. Grapes grew well in that area of the world. It was actually safer to drink wine than to drink water. They could easily relate to illustration of the gardener, the vine, the branches and the fruit.

This parable illustrates the importance of abiding in Christ in every aspect of our life. As we read this parable, we realize that we do love on our own. When Jesus said that we are to love one another as He has loved us, He realized that we could not do that on our own and that we would do it imperfectly in our corrupted flesh. As we read this parable, we realize that the Holy Spirit is the One enabling us to love as Jesus loves us.

This is spoken clearly in the following verses:

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(Joh 15:9-15 NIV) “9 ¶ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”

Jesus’ love is connected with the love of the Father. You will notice that we are not to love one another because the Father loved Him and He loved God the Father. He is saying that we are to remain in His love. As Donald Fairbairn says on page 26 of his book LIFE IN THE TRINITY,

“We are called to remain in and to carry forward to the world the very love with which the Father has loved his Son from all eternity. The loving relationship between Father and Son, the glorious presence of the Father with the Son, is not simply a model that we are to follow. That relationship is the substance of what Jesus says Christians are to possess. Christ is simply not giving an example; he is offering himself to us as a person, that we might share in most personal relationship, the relationship he has with God the Father.”

In vs. 10, Jesus tells us that He obeyed the Father and remains in His love. By obeying Jesus, we remain in Jesus’ love and in the love of the Father!!! Jesus was giving his disciples and us an inside look at the relationship that exists between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These words have been given to us to enable us to understand this wonderful news through His word, Jesus the Word and his word, the Bible! Jesus is of the same substance as the Father, God of very God just as the Father is God of very God. He submitted to the Father out of love as an equal but having a distinct personality within the one God a wonderful mystery!

Because he lets us in on this wonderful truth and news of His revelation to us of the Father, Jesus calls his disciples, friends!

I know our appetite is just getting wet if you will! We just get a glimpse of this wonderful truth!

(Joh 17:1-5 NIV) “1 ¶ After Jesus said this, he looked towards heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. 2 For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. 3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. 5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.”

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When we stop and think about what Jesus is saying here, he really blows many myths. If we were to ask most Christians what is eternal life, I may be wrong, but I imagine very few would come up with Jesus' description. When we think of eternal life, we think of heaven – a place of bliss where we can get the best out life, where we can eat what we want and not have to worry about obesity, clogging our arteries, etc.... Eternal life means life of the age. It has to do with the new life, the fullness of life, all who place their trust in Jesus will enjoy in the fullness. Very clearly, Jesus defines eternal life - **3 Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.**

In these verses, Jesus not only prays for himself but he prays for us. God wants to share his glory with us in Jesus. We will never be gods as God is God but in Christ, our High Priest, we will participate in the same relationship that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit have had for all eternity!

Brothers and sisters, this is our calling as we place our trust in Jesus to do this! To be participant in the same love that the Eternal God has within Himself! A perfect love and perfect relationship that God has enjoyed for all eternity!

With Paul we can say together – **“33 ¶ Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever! Amen.”** (Ro 11:33-36 NIV)

Reference: LIFE IN THE TRINITY BY DONALD FAIRBAIRN AN INTRODUCTION TO THEOLOGY WITH THE HELP OF THE CHURCH FATHERS.