

LOVE-DRIVEN LIVING

2 Cor. 5:14-21

There is no greater driving force in this world than the love of Jesus Christ. Now, there are countless men and women in the world that you could rightly say are driven people. I have shared with some of you before about Leo Tolstoy. Leo was one of those driven people. Some would say that Tolstoy wrote the greatest novel in history, War and Peace, which depending on the edition, can have well over 1,000 pages. And I might say that if you have ever read War and Peace you would have to be pretty driven yourself. But after Tolstoy finished this massive work he continued to write so relentlessly that at times he came the point of exhaustion but could not sleep. And he almost came to the point of a mental breakdown. And one day someone asked him why he continued to write when he was a wealthy Russian count who had no need to ever pick up a pen again to maintain his luxurious lifestyle. And Tolstoy replied that there was just something inside of him that drove him to write, that he had to write. And that if he didn't write he felt as if he might really have a breakdown

Peyton Manning is a driven man. Peyton will go down as one of the greatest quarterbacks in NFL history. According to his former coach at Indianapolis his mental preparation for a game is legendary. Nobody has ever prepared more thoroughly. As you football fans know, Peyton is hurt and not playing this year. He has a neck injury, probably from the countless times it has been jerked and popped and twisted for fourteen years by all of those 300 pound defensive linemen he's played against. And if Peyton were smart he probably should take all of his MVP trophies and his Super Bowl ring and his records and walk away from the game while he can still move his neck at all. But he vows that he will be playing again before the season is over, because he is a driven man.

There are countless other driven people like Leo Tolstoy and Peyton Manning. But there has never been a man more driven than the apostle Paul. Paul wrote to the Philippians, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:14). The picture is of a runner who sees the finish line of a race, who would not be detracted by anything lest he lose and forfeit the prize. Paul told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 that the Holy Spirit had told him that in every city to which he went he would be persecuted. But he said, "I don't care. I don't even care if they take my life. I just want to finish my race and my ministry with joy (20:24).

But what was it that caused Paul to be driven to the point of giving up his own life? It was the love of Jesus Christ. Paul said in 2 Cor. 5:14, “For the love of Christ compels us”. The literal word is “constrain”, or to press together. But the idea is that the love of Christ controls, it dominates, it motivates us. The question has long been asked, “Is Paul talking about Jesus’ love for us or is he talking about our love for Jesus?” And the answer is “Yes!” Paul is talking primarily about the unfathomable love that Jesus has for the entire world that caused Him to shed His blood for all mankind. Look back at v. 14b “because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all...”

But you could also argue that Paul is also talking about his love for Christ that compelled him. For the Bible tells us in 1 John 4:19, “We love Him, because He first loved us”. And beloved, when the Holy Spirit sheds the love of Christ abroad in your heart – when you begin to grasp the infinite love that Jesus had for you that drove Him to the cross to **die** for you, it will drive you with a holy passion to **live** for Him! The great old hymn writer Isaac Watts knew that passion. Just like Abel, he who is dead still speaks, when we sing these words:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small...
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!

I want us to camp out here for just a few minutes and I want you to come up close to the fire of God’s great love for you and warm your heart. World demographic experts told us this past week the population of our planet passed the 7 billion mark. That’s a lot of faces, a lot of names, and a lot of souls. Tell me, how many people would you venture to guess that you have met personally and remember their names? You would probably recognize the names of several hundred, and for some of us old-timers it might be a thousand or more. But if you sat down with pencil and paper you could not write nearly as many names as you recognize, because many of them are not a part of your life anymore and you never think about them.

But friends, the Lord Jesus Christ knows all seven billion of us in the human family by name. He knows us so intimately that He knows the number of hairs on our head. And that also means that Jesus knows every thought deep in the recesses of our hearts. He knows our every heartache. The psalmist says that He has captured every one of our tears in a bottle (Ps. 56:8).

But let's go a little further with this. How many people do you know that if they died, you would feel a personal loss? You would actually grieve, you would actually miss them. I can tell you, it's not too many. Why, we can go to an aunt or an uncle's funeral, and the thing that's foremost on our minds an hour later at the dinner for the family is if we'll get a second helping of the potato salad. And if they are rich, we may even be daydreaming in service about what they may have left us in their will. Our capacity to love is pretty limited.

But every now and then we do see an example of true love as far as we humans have the ability to give it. I read recently about a man whose teenage son was paralyzed in a car accident. Several times a day therapists will massage the boy's limbs to maintain proper circulation. But there's no one to do it at night – no one except him. And every two hours, every night, that dad hears his alarm go off, and he gets up and lovingly massages his son's limbs. And the next day he's back to work all day, and that night he does it all over again. And it is all because of love, unconditional, *agape* love. As much as is humanly possible, God's love.

Another story of *agape* love is the story of "Pop" Mazzeo, a first-generation Italian American who was struggling with liver and lung cancer. When the doctors told him that he had only a year to live, "Pop" said that was fine with him, he was ready to go. But then he found out that his only son Dan was going to be a father, "Pop" sat up and said, "I'm going to make that". And then he began a horrific regiment of chemotherapy treatments that ravaged his body. People would call to check on him and it took all the strength he could muster just to say, "Bad day" on the phone.

But the day came for the delivery of his grandchild, and "Pop" insisted on going to the hospital. The ninety minute ride was torturous. But "Pop" did what he set out to do. When his granddaughter was born he was too weak to hold her, so his son held her as Pop leaned over and kissed her and said, "Sheila Mary, Grandpa loves you very much". And within seconds Pop had dozed off, within an hour he was on the way back home, and within days Pop was dead. But *agape* love had won out. But the dad's love and the granddad's love I've described are only weak, puny, and blurred images of the love of Christ.

Behold the infinite love of Christ for you today! As Max Lucado wrote, our finest love is a preschool watercolor compared to God's Rembrandt; it is a blade of grass alongside a giant sequoia. Let me share with you just why. You see, Paul says in v. 14 of our text that at one point you died. You died spiritually, and 1 Cor. 15:22 tells us that this occurred in the Garden of Eden. You died spiritually in Adam when he ate the forbidden fruit, for Adam was the spiritual head of the race.

And every son of Adam except Jesus, including you, was born into this world physically alive but spiritually dead. But you were not only dead; you were dead in your trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). You lived in rebellion of God's authority in your life and you were actually His enemy. And if you've never been saved, if you've never submitted your life totally to Jesus and have experienced the forgiveness of your sins then you are still God's enemy.

Now, that idea may cause you to bristle just a little bit. You say, "Wait a minute, preacher! I may not be a super-saint, but I'm certainly not God's enemy." But friend, you are wrong. Romans 5:10 says, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved through His life". Paul says that before any of us were reconciled to God we were His enemy. If you were here last week you may remember that we saw from Romans 6 that all of us are slaves all of our lives, a slave to sin or a slave to righteousness. Before we came to Christ we were bound in the chains of sin, obeying the will of our father, the devil. And the moment we came to Christ we became His slave. But if you have never trusted Christ as your Savior and Lord, you are still in bondage to your sin, still under the devil's sway, and still God's enemy.

But friend, this is what makes the love of Christ so marvelous!! For Romans 5:8 tells us, "But God demonstrated His own love for us, in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us". Jesus suffered a beating and scourging before His crucifixion that would often kill its victim. But He survived it and was nailed naked to a cross to suffer the most horrific and painful death the cruel Roman army could contrive. All because of His love for you.

But hear something even more marvelous! Look at v. 21 again. Jesus was made to be sin for us, the One Who never sinned! Here we tread on holy ground, so holy that we tread with all reverence. Scholars offer numerous suggestions as to just what this really means. We know that it could not mean that Jesus became a sinner. There is a different Greek word for "sinner" that the Holy Spirit would have inspired Paul to use if that's what he was trying to tell us. So what could God mean when He said that Jesus was made to be sin? No one can claim to fully understand the depths of the glorious mystery. But imagine this fictitious situation that may help us get a glimpse of it.

Jesus and the disciples are invited to the wedding of a prince, just like they were invited to the wedding in Cana. It was an affair that was an absolute honor to be invited to, and everyone in the province had been invited. But the groom's dad, the king, was a very harsh, intolerant man, and warned that anyone who didn't

show up for the wedding would be beaten and killed. And further, anyone who showed up improperly dressed or dirty would be beaten and killed. So Jesus and His disciples make plans to go like everyone else, and the day of the wedding arrives. The disciples plan to go fishing in the morning and get back around noon to get ready for the 6:00 p.m. wedding. And Jesus tells them that He'll just meet them at the king's palace at 5:45.

So the disciples go fishing that morning, but to their horror, a storm blew up on the Sea of Galilee and they were extremely late getting back in. They rushed around trying to get ready for the wedding, but it was just too late. There was no way that they could clean up and get there on time. But not to go meant certain death, and to go in their smelly, filthy condition meant certain death also. What would they do? The only thing they could do was to go and beg for mercy from the king, and so they set out. They get there at 5:55, rush by Jesus, who's all dressed and ready, and knock on the palace door, praying with every breath. But their hopes were not to be. When they got to the door of the king's palace, the king himself was there to greet all the guests. And when he saw them in their nasty condition he was livid. Without giving them a chance to offer one word of explanation he called for the guards to come and take them away and beat them and run them through with a sword. But as they were being led to their deaths, all of a sudden, in a split second, their clothes were miraculously made clean! There was not a spot on any of them, and they all smelled like they had just gotten out of a bubble bath. The king couldn't believe his eyes, but he said to the guards, "Let them go!", and they walked right into the wedding.

But then John looked at Peter and said, "Peter, where's Jesus?" And Peter said, "I don't know. I forgot all about Him. And then they looked around and saw Him. He was being led away by the guards, dirty, smelling like fish, to His death. For you see, Jesus was not a filthy fisherman, but He became filthy like one and He became smelly like one. He became like a fisherman the moment He made the disciples clean. And as a result He bore all of the guilt of a filthy, smelly fisherman that day and died like one.

Beloved we have no idea how God accomplished this great exchange that v. 21 speaks of. , how He who knew no sin became sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God. But somehow, somehow when Jesus died on the cross, all of the vileness and filth of my sin and yours was placed upon His perfect, royal shoulders, it was imputed to Him. That literally means it was charged to His account. Can you imagine how this tormented the spotless Lamb of God, He Who had never, ever sinned? And at the same time, God miraculously imputed all of Jesus' righteousness to all who trust in Him. Jesus suffered all of the pangs of Hell

for us so that we might receive His perfect righteousness by faith in His death on the cross and become fit for Heaven. No wonder the song writer wrote years ago, “How marvelous, how wonderful, and my song shall ever be, how marvelous, how wonderful, is my Savior’s love for me”. And it was this love demonstrated at the cross that drove Paul, as he put it, to “die daily”, to lay his life on the line every day in his passionate pursuit of glorifying God (1 Cor. 15:31).

Friends, I want to ask each of you something. Does the love of Christ compel you this morning? Does it drive you to love Jesus in return and serve Him with all of your heart? I tell you, Jesus’ love will never be marvelous to you unless you make it personal. Paul said, “and the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). And that’s what some of you need to do today; you need to make Jesus’ love personal. He has died on the cross for your sins, but you have never turned from your sins and trusted Him by faith alone to forgive you for your sins and to be the ruler of your life. And right now you are still His enemy, under His judgment of death and hell.

Oh, but that can change in an instant! Paul says in v. 20 of our text, “...we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God”. Jesus is urging you this morning, “Come to Me! Trust in Me! I will take away your sin and give you My righteousness, and you will be right with God.” Some of you as believers cannot honestly say, “The love of Christ compels me”. You need to repent of your cold, worldly heart and return to your first love, just like the church at Ephesus. Some of you may need to publicly confess that Christ has saved you and be baptized. Others may need to honor Christ by uniting with His church. Whoever you are, if God is speaking to you, will you honor Him by obeying Him today?