

Communion

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[0 : 00] Now, could you turn with me to that passage that we read in Ephesians, Ephesians chapter 3, and particularly words we find in verse 18.

These words at the end of verse 18, how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Philosophers and gurus work eloquent about it.

Books and films extol its virtues. Poets and songwriters sing its praises. From all you need is love, to the power of love, to up where we belong.

Love lifts us up where we belong, where the eagles cry on a mountain high. Love lifts us up where we belong, far from the world we know, up where the clear winds blow.

The Bible, too, of course, commends love. In the Old Testament, in the Song of Solomon, in chapter 8, it says, place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm.

[1 : 13] For love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love.

Rivers cannot sweep it away. If one were to give all of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned. And, of course, in the New Testament, there's that amazing statement in 1 Corinthians 13.

And now these three remain, faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love. Love hurts. But in contrast with that, as the song says, the experience of many is that love hurts.

Love hurts. Love scars. Love wounds and mars. Some fools rave of happiness, blissfulness, togetherness. Some fools fool themselves, I guess, but they're not fooling me.

I know it isn't true. I know it isn't true. Love is just a lie to make you blue. And, of course, many people have experienced that. Many of us have been let down by others, parents, husbands, wives, lovers, friends.

[2 : 26] And so we can become cynical about love. They say it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved. But they don't have to count the cost and learn to be unloved.

Or it can make us long for a better love, a higher love, a wider love, a deeper love. But is there someone somewhere else who loves without reserve, accepts me as I am, and gives the love I don't deserve?

The message of the gospel is that there is such a love. It is Christ's love. A love that is wider, longer, higher, and deeper than any merely human love.

I'd like us this morning for a few minutes to consider the dimensions of this love. And first, the width of Christ's love. Christ's love is wide in this sense in that it is to all branches of the human race.

In verse 6, this mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

[3 : 37] Jews and Gentiles brought together in this great love of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word Gentiles simply is the nations. So there was the Jewish nation, but it is being made clear throughout the Bible, and especially in the New Testament, that God's purpose embraces all the nations, all the peoples of the world.

This was the radical message of the gospel. God so loved the world. There was not any distinction between races. We know that God had narrowed down his revelation to one nation, to Israel, but it was in order to reach the nations of the world.

Right at the beginning of that focus upon Israel, it was said, through Abraham, all nations would be blessed. Through the seed of Abraham, all nations would be blessed.

But the Jewish people at this time had forgotten that. They despised the nations. They said, love your neighbor and hate your enemy. And they viewed other nations as their enemies. And of course, this is the problem with human love.

It tends to be exclusive, excluding people. I can love a person of this particular nation or color or culture, but not of that.

[4 : 54] The whole root of racial prejudice. And all other kinds of ways in which we discriminate against others in who we will accept. Jesus showed none of that.

Even though his ministry was the last great concentrated witness to the nation of Israel, yet we read that he helped Samaritans, Romans, Greeks. Didn't matter whoever crossed his path, he reached out to them.

And he commissioned his disciples to go and to make disciples of all nations. So it doesn't matter what nationality or culture or color you are, Christ's love reaches out to you.

It is wide. He died for the whole world. And he wants you to know that. But also his love is wide in this sense. It comes to all kinds of people.

Charlie Brown in the Peanuts cartoon said, I love mankind. It's people I can't stand. And I'm sure we can all identify with that to some extent. We have great ideas about being good to other people.

[6 : 00] But when it comes down to actual personalities, it's different. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verses 9 to 11, Paul writes there, Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

Now, you may think, what's that going to do with our theme of love? It seems as if it's excluding people. But listen to this. And that is what some of you were.

All the different types of people mentioned in this list, there were people like that in the church in Corinth. But what does Paul say? You were washed.

You were sanctified. You were justified by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of God. All those different kinds of people from different kinds of backgrounds, from different kinds of sinful experiences, all experienced the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, a transforming love, a renewing love, but this great, powerful love.

[7 : 19] So it doesn't matter what you think your identity is today or even what your sexuality is. You're not excluded from Christ's love because of that. His love will cause radical changes in how you may view your identity because his love is a transforming love.

But he loves you nonetheless. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. He's died for people of all sorts of identities. But then Christ's love is wide in this sense also.

It is to all kinds of personalities. Think of what the Apostle Paul said. He said, By the grace of God, I am what I am. You know, other people were comparing him to some of the other apostles and perhaps looking down on him for this reason or that reason.

And he said, Well, whatever. By the grace of God, I am what I am. My personality, the gifts I've been given, it's by the grace of God. And God has a purpose for me.

And every Christian can say that because Christ's love is wide. It embraces all kinds of personalities. It embraced the extrovert, impulsive Peter and the more introvert, thoughtful John.

[8 : 31] It embraced the highly intellectual Paul and the more people person, Barnabas. It embraced the sensitive Mary and the practical Martha.

It embraced the highly religious and respectable Nicodemus and the disreputable Samaritan woman. All different types of personalities Christ's love reached out to.

Jesus loved all of them. And his love is wide enough to embrace you this morning, whoever you are. You may not yet know him, but this message of his love may this very morning transform you.

If you receive it. And those of us who know that love, that's what we're celebrating today. The amazing love of the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for us out of love to bring us back to God.

But secondly, here, we have the length of Christ's love. And it's long in this sense. It is from all eternity. It is from all eternity. In Ephesians chapter 1, first chapter of this very letter, verses 4 and 5, we read, For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

[9 : 44] In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with his pleasure and will. This is absolutely staggering, what the apostle reveals here and some of the other things that Jesus says in the gospels as well.

It means that if you're a Christian today, it's not simply because of some decision you took. It's not even because God loves you at this particular moment.

It's not even just because Christ died for you. It is because he loved you from all eternity that God chose you in Christ from before the foundation of the world, a powerful, effective, non-negotiable, eternal love.

And that's the only sure basis for our salvation because if it depended upon our decision, our decisions are so fallible and so changeable that we would fail. But it is based upon the decision of God.

It's based upon his eternal love. The love of Christ is long, everlasting, from eternity, and as we'll see also to eternity.

[10 : 55] There are different kinds of human love. There's what we may sometimes call a whirlwind romance where it's a sudden thing. People fall in love at first sight. But there's a different kind of love when someone has loved you from a distance for a long time.

Waiters, through all your mistakes and broken romances, waited for the right time to declare their love.

That's a different kind of love. This is this long love. And this is the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, who perhaps has been waiting a long time for you, that perhaps even this very morning you'd respond to that love.

And those of us who love the Lord Jesus Christ and are loved by him, we know that that was true. Even before we ever thought of him, he was thinking of us and causing things in our life that led us to that point where we surrendered to him.

Jesus, for you perhaps, will you not respond now to his love? But also, Christ's love is long in this sense. It is for life.

[12 : 07] There's a word used in the Old Testament that's translated as covenant love or steadfast love. It's this constant, steadfast, faithful love of God.

And that is a great aspect of the love of Christ for us. Because human love is fickle. So, Carl King sang in, Will You Love Me Tomorrow?

I'd like to know that your love is love I can be sure of. So, tell me now and I won't ask again, will you still love me tomorrow? And that speaks of all the insecurity of the human heart.

Will we still be loved? Well, we don't need to ask Jesus that. He said that he is always with us to the end of the age. And he says he'll never leave us nor forsake us.

And he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We know that he is utterly dependable. Somerset Maugham, the writer, said, We are not the same persons this year as last, nor are those we love.

[13 : 09] It is a happy chance if we, changing, continue to love a changed person. And of course, this is true. We do change all the time and it's amazing if we are still loved and can still love through all those changes.

Jesus loves us through all the changes of life. We may change in all kinds of ways and situations, but he does not change in his love to us.

He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. George Matheson, who was a 19th century minister, he wrote a song, a hymn called, Oh Love That Will Not Let Me Go.

In his earlier years, he started to go blind and he was at that time engaged to someone and the engagement was broken off.

Later on, some years later, on the occasion of his sister's wedding, he wrote this great hymn, Oh Love, that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee, I give thee back the life I owe, and in depths its flow may richer, fuller be.

[14 : 19] The love that will not let me go, that's the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. Other loves may fail you, but Christ's love never. But Christ's love is long in this sense also, it is to all eternity.

Again, to refer to something Somerset Mons said, he said, the love that lasts longest is the love that has never returned. Speaking there of unrequited love, but he's wrong there, because the love that lasts longest is Christ's eternal love, and it is a love that is not unrequited, it is a love that people respond to and know, not only for that moment or that lifetime, but for an eternal lifetime.

Christ's love extends beyond the grave. In John chapter 14 from verse 2, we read, In my Father's house are many rooms, Jesus said, If it were not so, I would have told you.

I'm going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Verse 17, he said, Father, those you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

[15 : 42] The Lord Jesus Christ wants us to be with him forever. This love is not till death us depart, it is forever. Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the 19th century in London said, When the time comes for you to die, you need not be afraid because death cannot separate you from God's love.

the length of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to be absolutely assured of that today as we remember his great self-giving love for us in the Lord's Supper.

But then also, our text refers to the height of Christ's love. It is high in this sense. It comes to us from heaven, from the heart of God.

It's great to be loved by family and friends, by people like yourself, but what if you were loved by someone famous, a prince or a princess, a pop star or a film star, a famous writer or a sports person?

Well, apart from anything else, it would do wonders for your self-esteem, but it would be amazing someone so high taking notice of you. But that says nothing compared to Christ's love for us.

[16 : 59] He's the prince of glory. He's the only begotten son of God. He's the king of kings and Lord of lords, and yet he loves me. His love comes down from the highest place, down even to the lowest.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 8, Paul refers to this. He says, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

And as the hymn says, there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. Only the highest, the most glorious, the most amazing person could bring us back to God, the height of Christ's love.

But also, his love is high in this sense, that it can reach us at our highest moments or highest situations. In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 26, Paul says, Brothers, think of what you were when you were called.

Not many of you were wise by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were of noble birth. Not many. And so often, we think of that as saying, well, yes, it's talking about the fact that so many of us are just ordinary people or even poor and needy in some way.

[18 : 23] But he does say, not many. In other words, there were some people who were high and influential or famous or whatever who became Christians. In Revelation chapter 21, it says, The nations will walk by its light as the light of the city of God.

And the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. So you see, if in any way you're high up, you're a high hedion, you're not excluded from this great love.

He loves you in spite of all that. And he has something for you to do in his service. So we must never go away with the idea that the Christian faith is somehow just for people who are weak and inadequate.

It's for everyone, every one of us. Praise God, it is for us when we're weak and inadequate. And we're all weak and inadequate in some way or other. But it comes to us all, whether we're high or low.

It comes to us at the high points in our lives. We sometimes think of Jesus and of God helping us just at our lowest points.

[19 : 26] We call on him when we're in trouble. Maybe everything is going well with you just now. Maybe you feel you don't need his love. Maybe you're like someone like Saul of Tarsus who was going about what he thought was God's work and everything was going well for him and he was actually going in absolutely the opposite direction.

He was rejecting the very Son of God who was sent for the salvation of the world. But Jesus reached him at his highest point. There he was riding into Damascus to go about this business that he thought was right and good.

And Jesus knocked him to the ground, blinded him, and showed him his total inadequacy. It can reach us at our highest points and bring us low. Jesus can reach us at our times of high emotion and even high self-importance.

And his love lifts us up. Mostly we need to be lifted up. Psalm 113 from verse 7 it says, He raises the poor and lifts the needy from the ash heap.

He seats them with princes with the princes of their people. In other words, Jesus' love is high in this sense that it lifts us up to a high place.

[20 : 43] Who did Jesus choose after all as his apostles? He chose fishermen, a despised tax collector, an ex-terrorist. He's lifted them up to a place of eternal and high honor.

Jesus, in his love for us, wants us to be with him where he is. Where is he? He's seated at the right hand of God in the place of honor and power.

Jesus wants us to be there. As it says here again in this very letter in the previous chapter, verse 6, And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.

The amazing height of Christ's love that came down from such a height and has lifted us up from such depth to the very height of glory. That's what we celebrate today as we remember the Lord's great loving death for us.

But fourthly and finally, there is this dimension of his love, the depth of Christ's love. And we think there first of the depth to which he went.

[21 : 51] Jesus spoke of himself as the bread that came down from heaven in John chapter 6. And in that passage we quoted already from 1 Corinthians chapter 8, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich.

He came down to a manger. He came down to being a refugee, to being an asylum seeker in Egypt. He came down to being a working man.

He came down to have nowhere to lay his head as he went about his public ministry. He came down by taking the very nature of a servant. He came down by taking the likeness of sinful flesh.

So as people looked at him not knowing really who he was, they thought he was just a man. And they criticized him as such. He came down by making himself vulnerable to hostility and hatred, to temptation and suffering.

He came down by taking on himself the sins of the world and enduring what those sins, your sins and mine, what they deserved. None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed, nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through, ere he found his sheep that was lost.

[23 : 19] Because Jesus went down eventually to the very pit of hell. He cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? He experienced that God forsakenness, that hellish experience that we deserve.

That's how deep the love of Christ is. It reaches us at our very lowest also because of that, because he came down. Someone said to me recently that I'd known them at their worst and at their best.

And that's quite something, isn't it? But Jesus not only knows us at our best but at our absolutely worst. He's certainly seen us at our worst. His love comes down to us in the depths of our sorrow, our despair, or our depravity.

There's a song that Bob Dylan wrote called Chimes of Freedom, and it was long before he became a Christian, but it was as if he had some kind a premonition of this amazing love of Christ.

The Chimes of Freedom, he said, were tolling for the aching ones whose wounds cannot be nursed, for the countless confused, accused, misused, strung out ones and worse, and for every hung up person in the whole wide universe, and we gazed upon the Chimes of Freedom flashing.

[24 : 41] It's the love of Christ that reaches out to us in all our confusion, in all our being misused, and our misusing of others. It comes down to us in all the depths of our sin.

Christ's love reached a Samaritan woman who had been married five times and was now living with another man. His love reached a widow who was in the depths of despair because she'd now lost her only son as well as her husband.

His love reached out and came down to a synagogue ruler whose little twelve-year-old daughter had died. His love reached to a prostitute who came and washed his feet with our tears of repentance.

Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 1 says, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst, the chief of sinners.

And in 1 Timothy chapter 1 verse 13 he says, he was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man. But he says, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

[25 : 51] Victor Hugo in his great book Les Miserables says, the greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved, loved for ourselves, or rather loved in spite of ourselves.

And that's what the gospel says. This great amazing depth of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ loves us in spite of ourselves, in spite of all we've done and all we are, loves us and transforms us.

Like David, can you say, Lord, from the depths to you I cried. You can say that now if you've not said it before, the words of Psalm 130, and call upon him even from the very depth of human experience.

Mother Teresa said, the hunger for love is much more difficult to satisfy than the hunger for bread. That's a very perceptive statement.

We have this hunger for love. But there is a love that can satisfy that hunger. It is Christ's love, the dimensions of which are infinite. Neil Young said, only love can break your heart.

[27 : 00] And for many people that sums up the failure of love. But it also sums up the effect of the greatest love. Oscar Wilde, who was dishonored, imprisoned, he wrote the ballad of Reading Jail.

How else but through a broken heart may the Lord Christ enter in. Sigmund Freud wrote in a letter to his fiancée, how bold one gets when one is sure of being loved.

Bold, I approach the eternal throne and claim the crown through Christ my own. It is through this great, amazing love, the dimensions of which we have thought about for a brief moment this morning, it's through this great love that we can approach with boldness to the throne.

It's with this, because of this great, amazing love that we can approach to sit at the Lord's table and to enjoy fellowship with his people and show forth his love and what we think of this amazing love and its amazing infinite dimensions.

Let us pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, we pray that you would bless to us your own word, take away all that would be misleading and misguided, and leave us with this great impression of the amazing love of the Lord Jesus Christ that has come down from such a high place, down to the very lowest, and as he died there on the cross, he bore the sins of the world.

[28 : 41] We pray that you would bless us as we gather together around your table, and may our thoughts be of Jesus and his amazing love to us, and as we symbolize a unity together of the church of Christ, may that unity be shown forth in how we speak and how we act towards one another, that we may show forth this love, that it would be a testimony to the world around us, and all that we do in life, that others may seek to know this wonderful, amazing love.

So we ask these things in Jesus' name, and for his sake, Amen.