

# No Greater Love

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

Written By: Pastor John T. Anderson

Delivered On: June 26, 2010

*This Sermon is available in audio format for listening or downloading on our [Audio Sermons web page](#)*

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” John 15:13. Jesus spoke these words just hours before that becoming a reality. He was just steps away from the Garden of Gethsemane where He would be betrayed, arrested, then tried, scourged, beaten and spit upon, then raised up on cruel cross to die for our sins.

On this very evening, Thursday, He had partaken of the Paschal (Passover) meal, building on its foundation to institute the Lord’s Supper, or Communion, which we today celebrate. In it there were powerful reminders of deliverance from sin; the bitter herb salad recalling days of bondage in Egypt; the unleavened bread, a reminder of the haste with which they had to leave the “iron furnace” of slavery, as well as a reminder of the removal of sin from their lives.

Jesus used the backdrop of these symbolic reminders to illustrate His sacrifice; the juice symbolized his blood, which before the sun would set on the next day would be poured out generously for our transgressions. The bread symbolized His body, which would be broken for our sins. These reminders we hold in our hands today as we honor the Lord’s request for us to “do this in remembrance of Me.”

In these symbols we are reminded of His love; God’s love for a lost and dying race. In humanity, deserving of death because of sin, God imputed value, undeserved value. He would justify sinners and make them His inheritance. He would make men and women more valuable, through His grace, than gold. He would not only forgive but restore mankind, and change us into His image through His divine power.

All of these wonders are prompted by His amazing love. God’s love is beyond words; the Apostle John thought it best not to try to describe it, but called on us to study it; to behold it. “Behold,” writes John, “what manner (what “kind of”; what “type of”) love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God.” I John 3:1. That we, lost and helpless sinners, should be called “children of God,” what an extraordinary thing is this!

But a question is raised by the Scripture with which we began, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” Is there a question that comes to your mind at these words of Jesus? It has to do with the word “friend.” The issue is this: Jesus didn’t die for those who were His friends; He died for those who were His enemies!

Before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve enjoyed unveiled communication with God and the angels. But with transgression, a curtain fell, because sin separates. Man's heart was turned against God through sin and we became enemies of God. Therefore Paul wrote, "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Romans 5:6-10.

Does Paul's passage seem to contradict Jesus' words? Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." Paul testified that Jesus' death was for us who were "enemies." How do we understand these two Scriptures?

One way would be to understand Jesus' statement as representing the highest ideal to which human love can reach. It could not be expected that human love would ever attain to the pure and unconditional agape love that beats in the heart of God. The statement of Jesus follows His words, "This is My commandment, that you love one another."

However, this analysis does not seem to measure up. After all, the complete sentence of what Jesus said was, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." The very core of the Gospel is that God will put His love into our hearts. And other Scriptures agree with the concept that Paul put forth, that the cross benefited every single person on this earth, whether they would eventually accept the generous gift of grace or not. He didn't die for good people; even those who would someday accept Him and believe in Him. "He Himself is the propitiation (sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." I John 2:1. When on the cross, for whom did Jesus pray? It was for those who drove the nails that pinned Him to the cross.

So, we're still left with the question of what Jesus meant when He said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." We've seen that He died for all, not just those who would one day look to Him as their Friend.

It must be this, then. While we counted God as our enemy when sin came into the picture, He has always counted us as friends. He has never counted us as an enemy. Is that proposition scriptural? Is it biblical? Let us test it by looking at a few passages. Let's think of Judas' story for a minute. That Thursday night at the last supper, Judas allowed the devil to take full possession of his mind. "And supper being ended, the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son to betray Him,..." John 13:2. A few short hours later, Judas arrived at the Garden with a detachment of soldiers to plant the betrayer's kiss on the cheek of Jesus.

Arguably, this could be viewed as the most despicable act in history. Yes, Pilate condemned Him to death, but he did not know Jesus. Yes, the Roman soldier drove the spikes into His hands and

feet, but he did not know Jesus. But Judas! Here was one who had walked by His side, one who had witnessed His miracles, one who had heard His gracious words, one who had sat with Him at supper and even shared the bread dipped in sauce who conspired against Him! Shocking! Was there a more evil act ever recorded?

What was the term of address Jesus used when Judas came to the Garden? Let's read how Matthew records the event. "And while He was still speaking, behold Judas, one of the twelve, with a great multitude with swords and clubs, came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now His betrayer had given them a sign, saying, 'Whomever I kiss, He is the One; seize Him.' Then immediately he went up to Jesus and said, 'Greetings, Rabbi!' and kissed Him. And Jesus said to him, 'Friend, why have you come?'" Matthew 26:47-50.

Think of it! The most criminal act in history and yet Jesus still counted Judas as a friend! One day we'll sit at Jesus' feet in heaven, and "Someone will say to Him, 'What are these wounds in Your hands?' Then He will answer, 'Those with which I was wounded in the house of My friends.'" Zechariah 13:6.

So Paul was right when he said, while we were enemies Christ died for us. Jesus was right when He said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends." According to this way of thinking, God has no enemies, only friends. That doesn't remove personal choice and the importance of making a decision to accept Jesus as your Savior from sin to win eternal life. But it shows the incredible magnitude of the love of God's heart toward those who turned against Him. While in our minds we were enemies, in His mind we were always friends. Which way of thinking is better? Which way of thinking, God's way or the way of a lost world, do you choose?