

You Are Loved: By Jesus
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
January 8, 2017

John 13:1

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The “love” theme appears 8x in chapters 1-12, but is found 31x in chapters 13-17. It becomes a DOMINANT theme of Jesus’ ministry to His disciples. Jesus initiates love. However, the love of Jesus is not a soft, sentimental type; it’s affectionate but consistent and disciplined. At the end of this text, he shows his love for his disciples by a simple act of service: he washes their feet. He tells his disciples, who had been fussing and fighting about who among them was the greatest, that the “greatest” is the one who serves. Then in Chapter 15 Jesus tells them that there’s no greater love one can show than to lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus introduced a 2nd kingdom. We all know about the first: “The Kingdom of Self.” This is our natural, innate setting. It’s our default setting. Do absolutely nothing and this is where we will reside. It is based on pride, power and self-promotion. It is easy and convenient. Jesus called it the “Wide” or “Broad” road – it is the super highway. However, it leads to destruction. Unless we get off it, that is where we’ll all end up. Non-religious people travel this road. (Romans 1) While they can do some good things, its end is still about self-promotion. Sometimes religious people inhabit this kingdom – it is “self-righteousness.” (Romans 2)

Jesus said His kingdom was not of “this world.” His is an entirely different approach to life. Jesus called it the “Narrow” road. To enter this Kingdom, we must repent of our self-centeredness and admit we have severe limitations. Part of our problem is that we will all die physically, but we are already dead spiritually. We are at enmity (hatred) with God. We ignore Him at best. At worst, our selfish kingdom resists and hates Him. We are terrified of Him and so we run in fear from Him. This selfish kingdom is nothing but a pretender to the true throne. The sad thing is that we are so deceived. We think the KOG is something to avoid until the last possible moment. The truth is that the KOG is full of those things that we most desire in life: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Gentleness, Faithful, and Self-Control. The KOS tells us that we can buy these things or get them on our own, independent of God. These are the natural fruits of living in the KOG. We would rather do anything in the world than repent, but once we do, we find that following Jesus is truly the key to life. Jesus said if we’d enter his kingdom, He’d give us “all these things” that we worry about (see Matthew 6:33). Everything we are seeking in this life can be found to the fullest in the KOG – and

the end...is even better. This is God's Righteousness – not our own unrighteousness or self-righteousness. We receive it when we repent, or turn away, from our own kingdoms, and surrender to the KOG.

Let me share 2 stories with you about 2 men I've learned about recently.

Andrew Klavan's book: The Great Good Thing: A Secular Jew Comes to Faith in Christ. By a "secular Jew" he meant he wasn't religious in the least. He was at best an agnostic, but as he says, most agnostics are functional atheists. I have a heart/affinity for Jewish people and was wondering about Andrew Klavan's story. He's a very successful novelist, and has had a couple of his books which have been made into movies.

Klavan's story is that he grew up in a family where his mom/dad didn't believe in God but his father insisted that they keep their religious traditions. God didn't have a role in the life of their family, but his dad made him take a Bar Mitzvah. He had a terrible relationship with his dad. His dad had experienced such anti-Semitism that he became paranoid about it.

Andrew had an older brother and two younger twins, so his mom felt overwhelmed and got a nanny who lived with them for a couple of years. Her name was Mina. She was a Yugoslavian immigrant who never spoke very good English, but Andrew was drawn to her. She was a devout Christian. She prayed and went to church. She never preached at Andrew but one Christmas, he spent Christmas at Mina's house. The cooking, especially the cookies, were incredible. He saw a picture of Jesus there. Put this together: a sensitive child with a hostile father, a distant mother, a kindly nanny, happy Christmas and a picture of Jesus. These were good seeds, which were planted. As a teenager, he got his hands on a New Testament. Growing up, he'd never heard that Jesus was anything special. When he started reading the NT, he did not believe it, but found it made sense. God created the world. Man sinned. God came in Jesus to redeem us.

A major event in his life was when one of his brothers had an emotional breakdown. When Andrew began to process that news, the truth hit him – something was terribly wrong in HIM. His childhood had been miserable, twisted and hostile. His view of reality and himself were unreal and delusional. He realized it was not just his brother who needed help – it was him. He was potentially suicidal. He entered therapy. His Jewish therapist was incredibly trustworthy and helpful. He helped Andrew get over his hatred for his father.

You really need to read the book for yourself, but let me fast-forward to his actual conversion. He was reading a novel set in the Napoleonic War era. There was a dark, ugly and tormented surgeon named Dr. Stephen Maturin. Andrew identified with him. Maturin was a Catholic. In this novel, as Maturin climbed into his hammock, he said a prayer. Andrew thought to himself: "**If Maturin can pray – so can I.**" His prayer was 3 words: "Thank You God." Like Maturin, he fell asleep. Those 3 words were intended to be a trial w/o any commitment. Then

everything changed. When he awoke the next morning, he felt a new power, a new love and joy. He quotes G.K. Chesterton who once said that when he stumbled into his Christian faith he was like an English yachtsman who'd gone off course: he thought he'd discovered a new island when in fact, he'd landed back in England. Andrew had spent 50 years of his life seeking and managed to do nothing more than reinvent the Christian wheel. He read the Gospel of Mark, started going to church, kept on praying, and he was baptized. His wife had been an atheist like he was – so after he became a believer he teased her that since she always ended up adopting his viewpoint anyway she might as well become a Christian right away and save time. “Oddly enough, only one of us found this joke to be funny.” But she ended up in the faith, too. Her mother had died in her arms – and she said when it happened she'd seen her mother's spirit leave the world. It left such a mark on her that she'd believed in God ever since.

Pastor Todd Craig, knowing how much I love history/biography, told me this incredible story of a man Todd officiated his memorial service a couple of weeks ago. Jack Lantz was 92 years old. He served in the Army Air Corp during WW II. On his 4th mission, an engine caught fire in their B-17 Flying Fortress and they all had to bail out over the Zuiderzee in Holland. Jack was the only one who survived. He was pulled from the icy sea by two Dutch fishermen in a small boat. He nearly died of exposure, but the men revived him and then gave him over to a patrol boat who gave him to the Germans where he became a POW. This was January of 1944. Victory-Europe wouldn't happen for 16 months. Jack endured beatings, dysentery, frostbite, lice, starvation, thirst and deprivation of every type. He was bayoneted as a POW. He received a Purple Heart as well as a medal for being a POW. While he survived, he attributed many of his life-long health problems to his years as a POW. Interestingly enough, the Dutch drained the Zuiderzee and when they did so in the 1970's, they found the B-17 Flying Fortress that Jack was in which had crashed there. The Dutch got a hold of Jack and flew him back there and he was reunited with one of the fishermen who'd rescued him and saved his life 30 years before. Sounds like a movie script.

I'll read the rest of the obituary, his son, Ron Lantz, wrote. (Ron gave his enthusiastic permission to read this to you): “My father believed in God. He led an admirable moral and ethical life but he didn't attend church or read the Bible. He thought Christianity was good for people and for the country. Many of his closest friends were dedicated Christians but he was just not interested in becoming a biblical Christian himself. He did not know enough about Christianity to become a real believer. I (Ron) accepted Christ at age 19 and gave Jesus control of my life. I had one of those real born-again experiences, and received from God a happiness I can't quite explain. I'm far from perfect, but I am forgiven. I wanted all that for my father. I shared the good news of Jesus with him on a few different occasions over

the years. He'd listen politely and then change the subject. I prayed for him for over 30 years. On my last visit a few months ago, I shared with him again; but he was simply not interested – so I dropped it. I'd about given up hope, but continued to pray. I asked several friends to pray for him also. I came down from Michigan when I heard he was in the hospital. We spent a lot of time together. Dad wanted me to meet a nurse (I'll call Bob – not his real name, as we don't have permission to use it). Bob obviously impressed dad. I finally met Bob and to my surprise, dad asked him why he believed in God. Bob shared a little about his trust in God. Later that night, I talked to Dad some more about this. He seemed open. We talked a bit about God and heaven, but I didn't go further. This needed to be his decision and his only. The next afternoon we talked again. He mentioned getting Bob to join us. I realized that he'd been trying to arrange for all 3 of us to be together, but Bob wasn't available. I asked Dad if he wanted to accept Christ. To my astonishment, he jumped at the opportunity! I shared with him that he needed to give complete control of his life over to God and accept Jesus as his personal Savior. I knew this would be hard for an independent man like my father, but he did not hesitate. He followed me in prayer, agreeing with God that he'd not lived his life to please God and asking for God to come into him and to take control of his life. Afterward, he wept tears of newfound joy...and then of remorse. He said: "Why did I wait so long? You see young guys only 15 years old who are Christians and they are so happy. They figured this out. Why did it take me so long?" He spoke of his past when he was very young and had gone to a Baptist church and Sunday School and he was so happy. He talked about how he'd strayed from God as a young man and never again felt that deep happiness. He'd tried fill that void with many things throughout his life, but as good as many of them were, they all fell short. It took my father his whole life to figure this out, but he did on Saturday, Nov. 19th. God miraculously changed his heart in the nick of time. I was amazed at the change in my Dad. He told me that as soon as he got home he wanted me to show him how to study the Bible. He had little chance to enjoy or live out his faith on earth, because that Saturday, Nov. 19th, was the very last day he was consistently mentally aware. We think he had a reaction a drug in the hospital that caused delirium and took him quickly downhill. The next day he was in and out of reality and not conversant. He usually couldn't remember what had happened 10 minutes before. Because of this, I sometimes questioned his astonishing spiritual turn-around. Was it real? But later that next day on Sunday afternoon he clearly announced to the immediate family and others in the room that he'd asked Jesus into his heart. He wanted me to pray with him the hospital and read scripture. 5 full days later on Thanksgiving Day, we brought in our Thanksgiving meal to the 4th floor of the hospital lobby. Dad sat in a wheelchair. He seldom spoke other than for immediate needs. He wanted to say something. Everyone stopped talking and listened. He again announced that he'd asked Jesus into his heart. We rejoiced and prayed with him. God made my father

to be an adventurous soul. He loved seeing new places, meeting new people and doing new projects. He often said, especially in his later days: “Come on, let’s go! What are you waiting for?” My father Jack finally found real happiness and peace. He’s now in heaven on his greatest adventure. I know his message is clear to anyone who’s not asked Jesus into their hearts. I can hear him saying: “Come on, let’s go! What are you waiting for?”

Here are the lyrics to Chris’ song:

We hide pain in the weirdest places
Broken souls with smiling faces
Fighting for surrender

For now and the after, yeah
Just look around and you'll see that people
Are scared to say how they really feel
Oh, we all need a little honesty
You are loved.

If your heart’s in a thousand pieces.
If you’re lost and you’re far from reason.
Just look up; know you are loved.
When it feels like something’s missing.
If it hurts but you can’t find healing.
Just look up. Know you are loved.
We're not made to be superheroes
Photo-shopped, all size zeroes
A light not expected

But not quite perfected yet
Look up; see the sun is shining
There's hope on a new horizon

Calling you, it's calling
You are loved. You don’t have to prove yourself.
Don’t try to be someone else.
You are loved. Just look up.
You are loved. Just look up;
you are loved Just look up; you are loved

Several have told Chris: “this song has kept me from taking my life.” Today, I want you to walk out of here knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ loves you – no matter how bad or how good you’ve been. No matter how you’ve flip-flopped in your relationship with God. No matter how guilty you feel. If you’ve lied, cheated, hated, stolen, been abusive or been abused, acted selfishly by demanding your own way, been addicted to drugs, alcohol or pornography, been an adulterer or promiscuous, been a failure at home, work or school, been a gossip, don’t feel pretty or thin enough or make good enough grades. The thief wants us to believe that we aren’t loveable. Jesus love for us isn’t based on our merits but is based on His character. He is love. That love never fails. If you’ll give yourself back to this love...even if it’s hard for us to believe it – we’ll be surprised by joy.