

No Greater Love-Part 12
How the Righteous Respond
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I was recently watching an Orange County car chase which is always interesting here in Southern California. This one started near Knotts Berry Farm in Buena Park, it made its way actually into the parking structure at Disneyland in Anaheim and it just weaved all throughout Orange County. It was typical cat and mouse game, you know, the good guys chasing the bad guys, bad guys flipping off the cops, you know, taunting them, throwing things out the window at the cops, all of that. Then it came to an end and it would have been a typical car chase and the typical end of a car chase except for this one when the cameras from the helicopter zoomed up on them when they actually made the stop, on the back of the car you could clearly see the words, "We Support Our Local Police." I thought well, they have a strange way of showing it that car that day.

You know there's an easy to understand biblical axiom that's presented to us in Scripture regarding the reciprocity of love. It's very clear in the words of First John 4:19 that, "We love because he first loved us." And you would think that makes perfect sense and it does in terms of our own lives as Christians. If we are genuinely born again, regenerate Christians there's that reciprocity that God loves us and in turn, organically, because we're born again, we have a love that God generates in our hearts back to him. There's that responsiveness.

If he loves us and through the death of Christ on the cross he has supported us in our greatest need, then we want to support his cause, we want to advance his glory, we want to love him. That is clear and very important for us to grasp. In our study in Luke 23, we recognize this greatest act of God's love of all time. He says it himself, Jesus said, "No greater love has anyone than this that a man would lay down his life for his friends." And God one-ups that in Romans 5 by saying it's not just his friends, "God demonstrates his love for us in this that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This is an amazing expression of love that God would love us. And the response that God would want to see and wants to work in our hearts is a response of love.

Which brings us to the end of this series that I have entitled "No Greater Love" as the response from this crucifixion of Christ, not fully understood by those who were there, granted. I get that. But even as the beloved rabbi, the teacher, the one who had gone about doing good, here were the responses of this group of female disciples who had traveled with Jesus from Galilee down to the pilgrimage feast at the Passover where Jesus was killed. As well as a character we're introduced to in this passage in both in Matthew and Mark and in John, as well as our passage in Luke, we're introduced to this figure. We don't know anything about him before this and we really don't know anything about him after this.

But he steps onto the scene and makes an impression and everyone in the room knows his name. His name is Joseph. Now you say Joseph in church, you can think of a lot of different Josephs. Matter of fact, if you were to add them all up there are 13 Josephs in the Bible. And so, you know, most of us think in the Old Testament, we're in our Old Testament reading right now, the beginning of the year, and we read about Joseph, the son of Jacob and Rachel, and his two sons and his brothers end up becoming the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. And we know that Joseph, a very prominent Joseph in the Bible. If we open up our New Testament the first Joseph we encounter is the carpenter who is called to be the step-dad, if you will, of Jesus, a very important descendant of David fulfilling the Davidic covenant. We also learned that there is a Joseph who is the half-brother of Jesus, a son of Joseph, that we read about in the Gospels and there are several others.

But the one that we meet today is designated, usually in our memories and our minds and certainly in the text, as being from a city, probably 12-15 miles northwest of Jerusalem. And though there's a debate about where this actually was, not a well-known town, but he's from the town of Arimathea, so we call him Joseph of Arimathea. His response to the death of Christ, it becomes a template for us, and it should because the Bible says and Paul is very specific about this, if you see people who have a kind of exemplary faith or love, you ought to take note of that and you ought to imitate that. And so in this passage Joseph certainly is giving us an example of what it is to love, to respond to God's greatest love toward us in a way that I think is exemplary. It's not complete, it's not total, but him in combination with those female disciples of Christ from Galilee, I think we can leave today motivated to love God better. He loved us, we love him and we love the things that he deems important. I'd like you to look at this passage with me noting in Luke Chapter 23 verses 50 through 56 that your response to the love of God says everything about who you are. It's the most critical thing about you, really, how you respond to God's demonstration of love. It is the indicator of your spiritual health. It determines your attitude and your perspective. So I hope today that we make some progress in mimicking and illustrating in our own lives this week a little bit of the proper response to love in response to Christ's love for us.

So take your Bibles, if you haven't already, don't look at me or my face, look at your Bibles, look at your text. You can find it on your phone, on your iPad, there's a Bible there in front of you, it's printed on your worksheet, but let's look at these last seven verses of Luke 23 as we wrap up this series, "No Greater Love," as we study this passage of the Passion of Christ. Jesus had just died. Remember he got crucified early in the morning, fairly early after the trial of the Sanhedrin, 9 o'clock he gets crucified, 12 noon we learned last time the darkness falls on the face of the earth. He goes three more hours in darkness, breathes his last, the darkness lifts, the temple veil is torn, and now we've got from three till sundown. It's in the spring, probably sundown is 6:30, and we've got this time period now where his body is going to be dealt with, and Joseph of Arimathea steps in.

I'll read it for you, you follow along as I read it. It's in Luke Chapter 23 beginning in verse 50. I'll read from the English Standard Version and here's how it reads. "Now there was a man named Joseph, from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council." Now the council is the Sanhedrin and that was the 70 leading jurists, if you will, of Israel presided over by the high priest, the reigning, living high priest, and they were the ones remember that brought this "criminal" before their court and in this kangaroo court, in the middle of the morning as it was dawning, they condemn Jesus to death. And so I'm thinking right now if he's a member of the council and that introduction so far, Joseph from Arimathea, a member of the council, I'm thinking this guy is a bad guy.

But then you see a comma and then you see these remarkable words that are very unexpected. "He was a good and righteous man." That's a big set of words, "good and righteous man." We see that about some people in the Scripture. That's a big statement. Then you got to do some explaining here because how in the world can you have a good and righteous man on the council, he just condemned him to death. Well there were some exceptions. There were some people who didn't go for this and he was one of them, thankfully. Verse 51, "He had not consented to their decision and action." And a little bit of an explanation here. I mean one of the reasons is, "he was looking for the Kingdom of God." There's a lot implied in that, but certainly his view beyond the horizon of this life and certainly as it relates to his expectation of the Messiah coming, I mean this certainly implies that he believed that Jesus was the king of this kingdom. And so, he didn't want to see Jesus crucified.

Well, this man, Joseph of Arimathea, as we often call him, went to Pilate, this Roman prefect, the governor, the one in charge who Jesus had come before and Pilate, though he equivocated, he ended up having him crucified, "He went to Pilate and he asked for the body of Jesus. He took it down and he wrapped it in a linen shroud and he laid it in a tomb cut in stone, where no one had ever been laid." Now, verse 54, "It was the day of Preparation," capital "P" that's the day before Saturday, the Sabbath. On Saturday, you got everything ready for the Sabbath because you couldn't do any work, you couldn't do any big preparation on that day, so you had to prepare for the day when you can't work. And so it was Friday, "day of Preparation, and the Sabbath was beginning."

You need to understand, if you don't already understand, Sabbath begins at sundown. So remember that if you go to Israel with us, and we're going in a little bit, we go often here at the church in educational trips, learn about the geography of the Bible Lands and you know we're usually in Jerusalem on Friday, and we're in Jerusalem on Friday when the sun starts to set, even today, even in secular Israel, most things shut down and all the marketplaces close and shops close and all of that, because the Sabbath begins on Friday at sunset and then it lifts Saturday at sunset. So you've got that 24-hour period. And so we know the Sabbath is beginning and that means the sun is about to go down. It's about 6:00-6:30. And it says, "The women who had come with him from Galilee followed and saw the tomb and how the body was laid."

So they watched Joseph take this body there and he does it with a group of people which we'll learn later and "they returned and prepared spices and ointments." Returned where? Well, they're staying as pilgrims in Jerusalem somewhere and they're going now probably through the marketplace as the sun is about to set getting their last-minute purchases and getting the things that they need to be able to embalm, at least in the ancient sense, in the Jewish custom of burying someone, got spices and ointments, that preserving agent that they would use in tombs. Now, it says, bottom verse 56, "On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." And if you just glance at Chapter 24 you know they're going to go back, the Sabbath interrupted their work, they are going to go back on Sunday morning now as it dawns with those spices to be able to, as it says, take those spices to that body as they would do in the Jewish custom. And yet they find the tomb empty.

Now, let's consider this first response from Joseph of Arimathea, verses 50 through 53. Let's marvel for just a moment that he's a member of the council and yet he's a good and righteous man. If I want to learn how to respond to the love of Christ in my life, Christ has demonstrated the ultimate act of love. While I was a sinner he died for me. He canceled the sin debt that I have. He took upon himself and absorbed the penalty for my sins. What is my right response to that? Well I'd like to respond in a very simple way, I know it's a general statement but in a simple way, in the way that Joseph of Arimathea did. He is a good and righteous man who's doing something that is good and righteous.

Here's a good and righteous thing. Here is a man who is not deserving an execution by the Romans, he shouldn't be thrown like a lot of these Roman criminals were, their body in the valley and the dogs would eat their flesh, and they were just thrown away like refuse. Well, I don't think the rabbi, this miracle worker, this teacher of the Kingdom of God, should be thrown out like a common criminal. He should be given a proper burial. He should be given a place that was respectful as is expected throughout the Bible. When someone you love dies you lay their body aside respectfully and await the resurrection. They didn't know it would just be on the third day, but this was his mindset. "I want to do something good and something good is he doesn't have a tomb. I have one. I'm a man who's got a very nice tomb," as a matter of fact, it's the tomb of a rich man, it says in

verse 53, it's cut in stone, it's hewed out of stone, no one's ever laid in it, it's not like, "Yeah, we got a family crypt here, we can throw his body in there with, you know, Grandma Ethel." None of that is going on. This is like a brand-new tomb. This is a new place, I'm sure he reserved it for himself and his family, but he's going to put Christ's body in this tomb. A very respectful thing. He's not going to get anything in return. That's a very good deed, you're doing a good deed, and that springs, in this passage, because you were a good and righteous man.

Now before I should sidebar on this for a second. When you read the words "good and righteous" you might start to say, "Well, there seems to be contradictions in the Bible, because when someone in Matthew 19 comes to Jesus and says, "Hey, good teacher," Jesus gives them a theology lesson and says, "Now wait a minute. No one is good but God alone." And as a matter of fact, when I talk about righteousness, as a kid I learned in Romans 3, "There's none righteous, no not one," speaking of human beings, no one's righteous. And yet I read here, here's a man who is good and righteous.

Now you've got to understand that descriptive is used in a relative sense, a comparative sense, among human beings and it's used in an absolute sense as it relates to God. It would be like me coming to your kids Pop Warner football game and he scores a touchdown as, you know, a little running back with the big helmet on and his pads and he's running into the end zone, and I say, "Man, your kid is a great running back." I can say that because I'm speaking in relative terms regarding all the other little kids out there who can't even find the end zone. Your kid is good, he can run into the end zone, what a great running back. But I'm not saying that he is NFL-ready and he's not ready for college football. I'm not saying that he's a great running back in an absolute sense, or even a relative sense as it relates to the world of athletics. I'm just saying in this context he's a good running back.

And so it is in the Bible, whether we're talking about Noah, who is presented to us as a good and righteous man. Well, he ends up, as we've read in our Daily Bible Reading, getting drunk and doing things that he shouldn't do after this whole Ark episode. And we think well he's not a perfect man. Or we're introduced to Job, a good and righteous man in Job Chapter 1. By Chapter 4 his entire perspective on God has fallen apart and we spend all these chapters of him lamenting even the day of his birth and wishing for his own death. And though we sympathize with a lot of it we got to say, as he puts his hand over his mouth at the end of the book, "I've done wrong. I've said wrong. I've accused God of wrong." It's not good. He's not a perfect man. Oh, he's a good and righteous man relatively speaking.

It was said the same of David. It was said the same of Daniel. It said the same of Joseph of Arimathea. We're not making absolute statements about him being a perfect man. We're saying, relatively speaking, he's a good and righteous man and good and righteous men do good and righteous things. And that's a good thing. And if you want to talk from New Testament perspectives regarding our heart, the Bible says when he changes our heart as Christians he rewires us with a passion to love doing good and righteous things. And that's where I'd like to camp. Let's start there. You want to love God in response to his love to you? Let us love and direct that love toward doing good.

As a matter of fact, you ought to be fearless just like you'd think it would take a lot of gumption to go before Pilate, who just gave the thumbs down to Jesus living, and say, "Let me have his body. I'm going to not throw him out in the Valley of Hinnom. I'm going to take him to this family tomb of mine that has not even been used yet. I'm going to put them in the tomb of a king. Hey, Pilate can I have the body?" That's a courageous thing. Number one, you need to "Fearlessly Love to do

Good." That's what we see Joseph doing. That's a good template for us to mimic, the good response of a good heart that loves God, to say I want to do good.

Time out. You start talking about good deeds from the pulpit, you're going to get a lot of pushback. Certainly I grew up in a church where you talk about good deeds and good works, you use the word good works and I'm thinking all of a sudden I'm going to have a lecture about the Jehovah Witnesses or the Mormons or some cult group. Because whenever you talk about good works that's a bad thing because good works are all about how people try to climb their way to God. Did you grow up in a church like that?

Take your Bibles and turn with me to Ephesians Chapter 2, Ephesians Chapter 2. Here's the verse I learned as a kid, which made me really gun shy about any sermon about doing good works. We've got a resurgence of this lately in the young reformed movement, where people are looking at people talking about doing good works and they immediately say, as some have coined the phrase, you're just about performance-ism. You're just trying to get yourself, you know, the favor of God. You're trying to keep the favor of God. Now all I would say to that, I would give the theological response to that, and that is baloney. That's nonsense. It's absurd. For you to say that we should not be talking about the obligation to do good works, to say that good people should be devoted to good works, that God's people, who are making the claim to godliness, shouldn't be involved in good works, is a complete nonsensical, non-biblical thing and yet it's still popular today. And one of the reasons is because we have learned verses like this but we haven't considered the context.

Look at verse 8. You know this passage, I learned as a kid, if you grew up in church, you learned as a kid, if you spent any time in church you've had this verse pounded into your mind. And here it is. And it's important and we got to know it. We've got to distinguish ourselves from the people trying to climb their way to God. And the difference is that we believe that we are saved by grace, "For by grace you've been saved through faith." We trust in Christ. I could be a criminal hanging on a cross in my last moment, I don't recommend this but you could be, and I could put my trust completely in Christ and I'd be fully 100% qualified to go to heaven because I'm saved by grace. "It's not of my own doing," it's not about my resume. No, it's a gift. "It's a gift," God wants to give this gift to us and "not a result of works." I don't get saved by doing good things, "so that no one can stand before God and say, 'I earned it. I'm boasting. I got here on my own.'" Right? You've learned this verse. I've learned this verse. These are two verses we've all learned. That's where the period goes. And we're done. I sit down. I get the star on my vest, people pat me on the head. Good deal. You learned your Bible verse this week.

But there's more to say. As a matter of fact, when the Apostle Paul clarifies, very clearly, you're not saved by your good works, he's going to immediately go, "Oh, wait, you need to know, I'm not dissing good works. I'm dissing the wrong VIEW of how good works work. You don't get saved by good works, you don't earn God's forgiveness by good works." But you need to know when it comes to good works, man it's important, "For we are," verse 10, "his workmanship." God crafted us, created us. How? "He created us in Christ Jesus," here's the purpose clause, "for good works." That's your job description. Good works.

And it goes further than that. One of my favorite phrases in Ephesians, here it comes, "Which God prepared beforehand," which God prepared beforehand, "that we should walk in them." That's a great kind of directional, progressional word, "to walk in them." In Greek "peripateo" this word that Paul loves to enlist regarding my life. I'm looking at my life and I'm imagining the rest of my life. Well, maybe that's too big, let's just... Well, maybe the rest of my life, but let's think about the

week, I got seven days here, you know, presumably ahead of me. There is my life, the next seven days. Before we meet again and I'm preaching to you from this platform, if that's God's will, we end up here a week from now, we've got a week ahead of us. I'm thinking I need to walk through this week. Peripateo. I need to get to the end of that week. Let's just think of those seven days between here and next weekend.

That process, between here and there, the Bible says God has purposed me, he has created me to do good works. He has, like waypoints on a mapping program on your phone, he's put waypoints and stops along the way. Let's just think of next week, the seven days, he's put there good works for you to perform. "I want you to be here. I want you to do that. I want you to do this. I want to perform this good work." Just like the Bible says in Psalm 119, that God is good and he does good works. He does good deeds. So it is that we, if we're Christians, we profess godliness, to quote First Timothy, and we demonstrate that, or as it says there, we adorn ourselves with good works. And all I'm saying is I want to see that as my mission. I want to love the fact that God has a path for me this week, and if I lived beyond that, next week and next month and next year, where he says, "Mike, I want you to do this good work, I've got this good work plan for you, I've got this good deed for you to do. I want you to do good."

Now people oftentimes don't like sermons about doing good works. They throw a flag on the play like I did as a kid because I'm thinking you're talking like the cults now. No, good works are essential. Good works are essential, not as a means to get saved, but as a demonstration of the lifestyle of those who are saved. That's a completely different way to look at it. It does not take away the obligation. If the thief on the cross could have had a life to live for another week after he was on the cross, he would have been called for a week of good works. God has called Christians with good and righteous hearts who are changed by God's grace to do good and righteous things. We should love fulfilling that passion.

As a matter of fact, to quote Titus Chapter 2, "He has," redeemed us, "purified for himself a people for his own possession," here's the purpose now, "to be zealous for good works." I just wonder how zealous you are for good works. That this week you know God has called you to do good works. And if, like Joseph Arimathea, there is an opportunity for you to do a good thing because God has changed your heart, you're now a child of God, you have a good and righteous heart that God has changed, it's called the miracle of regeneration, I love God and in that love for God I want to do good things this week.

I used the word at the beginning of this point, "fearlessly." And I do that advisedly and carefully because I understand this: that this is not a perfect example of a fearless disciple. As a matter of fact, jot this reference down if you would, John Chapter 19 describes Joseph of Arimathea this way. Matter of fact, this is worth turning to, would you turn with me? John 19. Here's the parallel passage from John. We learn in Matthew that he's a disciple of Jesus. We learn in Mark that he's a respected member of the council. We learn in Luke that he is a good and righteous man. Here's what we learn in John, who's saying he's doing a good and righteous thing, but it gives us a little bit of his track record. Start in verse 38, John 19:38. Did you find that? "After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus," all is going well until that comma right there. Now look what it says. "But secretly for fear of the Jews." Your high schooler comes home and says, "Well I'm a Christian but I'm one secretly." You're going to go, "Yeah..." No, you're going to go, "That's terrible. You need to be bold. God has not given us the spirit of timidity. You ought to man-up and be a stand out for Christ. Come on, get bold, be courageous, be fearless."

Well, he wasn't fearless and yet I get another comma here, he went and "asked Pilate that he might take the body of Jesus, and Pilate gave him permission." That's a bold thing to do. As imperfect as his discipleship had been, as imperfect as his heart had been in sometimes withdrawing because he's afraid, he's stepping up right now and doing something pretty bold. That's a good thing.

And then we add this: "He comes and takes the body away." Look who we meet in verse 39. Underline this Sunday school grads. What do you get here? Nicodemus. How do I know Nicodemus? Well I know from two passages in John, John Chapter 3 and John Chapter 7. In John Chapter 3, Jesus there is having a discussion about being born again with Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, a teacher of the Jews, a rabbi. It says here, "Nicodemus also, who earlier had come to Jesus," now note this phrase, "by night." That's the critical setup in John 3, that Nicodemus comes secretly and quietly to Jesus at night. It was night time. And the point is he's under the cloak of darkness because he doesn't want his peers to see that he has an interest in Jesus. "Hey, you're from God. I want to know what you're all about." He's another secret, scared, timid disciple of Christ.

Well it's interesting, he's stepping up too, and we learn that a little bit in John 7. I quoted John 7 verses 50-52. He's stepping up even there, he's starting to show he's a little more bold and kind of defending Christ to his fellow council members. Well, he comes now and he brings a mixture of myrrh and aloes. How much does he bring? 75 pounds in weight. Now, you're not going to hide that in your back pocket. All I'm telling you is he's coming with a load of spices as though we're burying King Tut. You know what I'm saying? This is a big deal. You're going to bring all of that and everyone is going to see you marching through Jerusalem to go to this hewn stone, rich man's tomb and you're going to bring all that. Wow. You're stepping up.

It's interesting that we have Joseph of Arimathea, which John says he's kind of a scared, secret disciple. But look at the bold thing he does. And Nicodemus who is hiding under the cover darkness. Look at what he does. Here are two guys and I love it. You may have been timid in the past, like Timothy. It's time for you to step up and say I'm going to fearlessly and boldly do good works. It's one of the things that characterizes, by the way in the book of Acts, the disciples of Christ who are going around doing good just like Jesus. And you know what they needed in a world that didn't like them speaking up for Jesus and doing good things in Jesus' name. They needed boldness, they needed courage and they had it. And you and I need to recognize when it comes to our life, let's just think in seven-day segments, I've got good works to do this week. I need to be bold and say I'm going to fulfill God's plan for me. I want to love those good works. I want to anticipate those good works. I want to go after them and I'm going to be bold and fearless this week to do the good that God has called me to do. What a great passage that reminds me of two guys who are starting to prove their courage to step up and do something good for Christ.

I just want to touch on one more thing before we leave this first point, Verse 51. Take a look at it. It says, "He was looking for the Kingdom of God." Now I don't want to stretch this too far and I'm not going to say this is the only motive that he had, I'm sure he had lots of motives, but certainly this is helpful: that anticipatory heart that says I know something's coming. God has a plan in the future. Here's the thing about earthbound folks when they think about doing good this week, I mean really good deeds like this Joseph of Arimathea was doing, it was costly, it was risky, people would misunderstand.

If you're just an earth-bound thinker, all your thinking is in terms of the cost-benefit analysis of everything you do as it relates to the here and now. If I do this, what do I get out of it? If I sacrifice in this way, if I go the extra mile, stay the extra hour, spend the extra dollar to do this thing that I

know is pleasing to God, a good deed this week, I just know I'm not going to get much back, that kind of mentality is what earthbound people think about. It's the reason that they can keep investing in their own stuff and keep doing things that really don't risk much at all for doing good in this world. But if you have a perspective that looks beyond the horizon of this life, if you say there's something going on beyond the horizon of this life, maybe you'll respond to Jesus who said very clearly, can you think that way when it comes to investing and sacrificing and doing good in this world?

He gave that parable about you giving feasts and parties at your house. He said you can give parties and feasts and do all that at your house and you can invite all your rich friends who will invite you back to their parties, but he said here's a challenge for you. You want to do it right? Do it this way. Why don't you "invite the poor, the lame, the crippled and the blind?" Bring people who cannot pay you back. And then he says, "Then you'll be repaid at the resurrection of the just." You know what? You'll look beyond the borders of this life and say I'm doing this for God, something eternal, something beyond this life. The cost benefit analysis of so many people looking at whether or not they're going to go the extra mile, stay the extra hour, or spend the extra dollar to do good works this week, they don't think it's worth it because they don't think about the heavenly investment as Jesus said, would you "store up some treasure in heaven?" You know how you're going to do that? You can do that by loving the good works that God has called you to do, some that are going to be costly, some that are going to be risky. That long view of reality considers the honor of God, and it goes beyond this life. If you start looking at that paradigm you'll see it everywhere.

Think about Jesus who told that story of the shrewd steward in Luke 16. In verse 9 after talking about the guy who was marking down all the bills and he's working really hard to prepare something for his future when he loses his job, he says you know the evil people, the fallen people in this world, are much more shrewd as it relates to their bottom line than you are about your eternal bottom line, to paraphrase that passage. He says, "You ought to be out there making friends by means of unrighteous wealth." You ought to use the things in this world that can't last, so that you can do something that will have an eternal impact. And here's how he puts it: if you would just use those things to build some bridges, some good works, he says, then maybe at the end of all this they will welcome you, those people who see your good works, "they'll welcome you into eternal dwellings.". Now that's a paradigm, think this through, we see everywhere in the New Testament.

When Peter was talking about the people being persecuted by the persecutors of the church, he says let your good deeds be seen. Show them. Let them see it so that maybe, here's the deal, when Christ comes and visits this planet, maybe they'll be glorifying God when he comes. They're not going to be his enemies, they're not going to be our enemies. To put it in the words of Christ, "Let your light shine before men, so they might see your good works," let them see them this week, "so they might glorify your Father and heaven.".

There are non-Christians watching your life. They're going to watch in your office, in your neighborhood. Who's going to step up in that situation and do something good? And when they see you going the extra mile, staying the extra hour, spending the extra dollar, they'll say that's interesting, just like they did with the early church. "How in the world do they do those things? Why are they so into doing good when really oftentimes it has nothing to do with what they'll get in return." You and I have a pathway this week and each of our pathways are different in terms of what God has planned for you and I, but I can assure you on Tuesday afternoon, on Thursday morning, on Saturday afternoon, there are good works God has planned for you. Look for those, get excited about those, and love it. Love to do the good works that God has called you to do, even if it

seems as mundane and simple as "Here's a need. I can meet it. I want to meet that need because there's no tomb for Christ. I'm going to provide it. I will do it." There's a guy with a long view of reality who is willing to sacrifice for the good of Christ. And I invite you to do the same. That's a good example to imitate.

Verse 54. Let's shift our focus now to the women who came with Jesus from Galilee on this pilgrimage feast to the Passover, which Jesus ends up coming into the Triumphal Entry there with the palm branches on Palm Sunday. And now he's crucified. It's Friday. He's dead. They watch this whole thing play out. And as sunset is approaching in verse 54 on that Friday afternoon, the women, verse 55, had come from Galilee, they follow, they saw the tomb where Nicodemus and I'm sure their whole entourage, Joseph Arimathea, they are all going, they laid this body with the 75 pounds of spices. Then they said, "OK, I'm glad that's taken care of, I'm glad they got what they need, I'm glad Jesus had a respectful Jewish burial and it was done the right way, I guess we can go home now." No. Verse 56, "They returned and prepared spices and ointments." Why would you do that? Why would you do that? I mean, really, it's already done.

Well, because they cared, because they had a heart of compassion because they cared a lot about Jesus, they cared about a proper burial. Well he kind of got a proper burial in kind of a king's crypt. Now, I mean, come on. He's got what he needs. "No. I want to do it. I want to do what I can do. I'm willing to go over the top," and they cared about Christ. As a matter of fact, you see the women who came close, even to the foot of the Cross in the Gospel of John, who even when you had Peter and others standing at a distance, you had some women who came close and said, "We care. We don't care what it cost us. We are willing because we love Christ and we're willing to do whatever it takes."

Let me sharpen the focus a little bit in terms of the object of our care and love. Let me add this word and I already did, it's printed for you in your worksheet. But let's sharpen the focus to be very clear because the Bible makes this clear. "We have to do good to all people," Galatians 6, "but especially to the household of faith." When we love the people of God, you ought to focus on them and say I am going to love them. I'm going to love them in part, and Jesus makes a big deal out of this because I'm motivated by sympathy, I'm motivated by compassion, empathy, by something the Bible calls "splanchnon". Number two, we need to "Sympathetically Love God's People." God has called us to do good, especially to the people of God, and it should be motivated by my heart feeling for them. And I want to say this: when it comes to what they're doing for Christ, think this through, when I mentioned that Joseph is not going to get a lot out of it. I mean, he is now on the record in front of Pilate and others and there's some negativity to that but there's also people who saw that and people who love Christ, they're going to say, "Yea! Joseph Arimathea," These gals, I think, no view of themselves, Christ who was the rock star, to put it in, you know, our terms, the rock star rabbi, when you were doing good to him while he's alive, I guess there's, you know, some possibility of some splash back in your life. If you're good to the big rabbi maybe you get front row seats at his next event. Whatever. I mean, there are things when you serve the servants of God, sometimes you get served in return. You're not going to get served in return for caring for the dead body of Jesus. At least they didn't think that. Matter of fact, they had no expectation of him rising from the dead as is clear in Chapter 24. But if you follow what I'm saying here, this was truly a selfless, altruistic act with nothing expected in return all because they thought, "We love him. We want to do something for him. We want to give him a proper burial. I know that it's beyond, it's superfluous, it's over and above, it's beyond anything that is needed, but we want to go the extra mile, and we want to do it because we're moved by compassion.

Jot this down if you would. When it comes to the scriptural picture of this in Luke Chapter 10, Jesus tells a story and the key word is *splanchnon* that Greek word, compassion in the gut, I feel it in the gut. And some of us don't feel enough in our gut for the needs that are around us. We're not moved as we ought to be. And the Bible would say in that story of this Good Samaritan, as it's called, that's what's missing and we ought to get it. And there's a lot of people Jesus told this parable to, and perhaps he's telling it to you today, that you're not willing to feel the things you ought to feel with people that have needs and hurts around you. Bible is very clear on this, when it comes to what you ought to do, you ought to be willing to weep with those who weep. And in that same passage in Romans 12, it says you should "not be haughty, and you should be willing to associate with the lowly." You ought to be willing to associate with someone who really can give you nothing in return, because you're moved by *splanchnon*, you're moved by that compassion in your heart. Now think this through.

The idea of the Good Samaritan, he's going down this road traveled by a lot of Jews, it's coming from Jerusalem to Jericho. This guy gets mugged by robbers on the road. He's passed by a Levite, he's passed by a priest. This is the story Jesus tells. The Samaritan, which of course, as you know, the Samaritans hated the Jews, the Jews hated the Samaritans, but the Bible says and I'll just read it for you. Here's what it says in Luke 10 verse 33. "The Samaritan, as he journeyed, he came to where he saw this man and he had," here's our word, "compassion," sympathy, empathy. He felt it in his gut. "So he went to him..." you want to talk about extravagant? Right? You don't need any more spices on this body. No, I'm going to give, I'm going to give over and above. Here's what the guy does: "he binds up his wounds," he takes oil out of his own flask, he takes wine out of another flask, he pours it on the injuries of this man who'd been beaten. "He sets him on his own animal," so no longer is he riding this animal. He's letting this beaten man ride while he's walking alongside. He takes him to an inn, to a motel, if you will, and he takes him there and he says, "Please care for this man." And then overnight after he's slept and he's going to go on his way, he comes to the front desk and gives two denarii.

Now do the math on this. After two full days of work what do you make? Whatever that is. Two denarii are two days wages. He puts two days wage down and he pays for this guy. Then he says this: he says to the innkeeper, "Take care of him, and whatever you spend I will come back and repay you." Here's a guy who's doing way more than anyone would expect. He's giving out of his heart of compassion for a need. He sees a need and he meets the need, but what stands right in the middle of seeing the need and meeting the need, is something called compassion.

Some of us don't slow down long enough to feel the hurts of those around us. We don't associate with the lowly, so to speak. We don't weep with those who weep, and when we don't do that we don't meet the needs. There are a lot of people in this church, unfortunately, they see needs and it's all theoretically great and I'm glad the church is doing something about that, but when the finger goes into your chest and we say, "How about you get involved in that?" You go, "I don't know. I don't know." Where is the compassion in your heart for the people in this church and elsewhere that need our help? Are you willing to roll up your sleeves? Are you willing to take some risks? Are you willing to say I have a sympathy and a love for people who are hurting and in need and I'm going to meet those needs?

Time for us to put our money where our mouth is, or as the Bible says, "Stop loving with word and with tongue." Would you please "love in deed and in truth." That's First John 3:18. Love people in a way that is clearly expressing that through something, as I like to put it, that is like going the extra mile, staying the extra hour, spending the extra dollar, doing what God has asked us to do out of

compassion for their needs.

Some of you don't know the needs of people around you because you only come to church on Sunday. I'm sorry. Church on Sunday is not doing church. It's just one aspect of church and I would say it's a super important aspect of church. But if you're not getting your chairs face to face in a group where you know those people, you pray with those people, and you know what their hurts and needs and problems are, then you're not doing church. You're not. You're not in a context where this can happen. And this is the expression of our love for God.

Matter of fact, some of you heard me quote First John 4:17 at the beginning of this sermon and maybe you threw a flag on that play in your own mind because you said, "Hey Pastor Mike, I know you think you're an expositor and all that and a theologian, well, ha-ha-ha. That passage is not about loving God." Well, I would argue it is, underlying the whole of First John is my love for God. But I understand and I'll give you this, in the context of First John 4, the focus is on me loving people, loving the body of Christ. Now think this through, me loving the body of Christ. Therefore in context when it says, "We love because he first loved us," really the focus direction is, yeah, I love God but the real focus is I love people. In other words, the people of God. I see a need, I don't close my heart toward them and I give and I'm willing to get involved. I'm willing to roll up my sleeves, get my fingernails dirty, and do the work.

Hebrews Chapter 6 says that "God will not forget the work and the love that we've shown in meeting the needs or serving the people of God, the saints." I love the combination of that: work and love. Don't tell me you love someone if you're not willing to work for them. Don't tell me you have a compassion for someone if it's not expressing itself in something that is costly for you. I'm telling you the missing ingredient, what I'm trying to focus in on here, is these women had compassion for Christ. They had compassion. They had sympathy. How important this is for us. We're never going to meet the needs unless we get our hearts to feel it.

I get the prayer list, I'm sure many of you do too. You're part of the prayer team here. Maybe you go to a small group where you hear people talk about their prayer requests. You know the needs, you see them, you hear them intellectually, but you don't feel it in your gut. Let me give you a challenging verse. It's a great verse. It is not quoted enough. Hebrews Chapter 13 verse 3. Hebrews 13:3. Maybe we don't quote it because we don't understand the context of it, it doesn't make sense. The Bible says, "We ought to remember those in prison," and we're not talking about crack dealers and rapists and... That's not the context, the, you know, the thief.

The context here is the people of God who've had their property seized, they're being persecuted because they're Christians. You've got Christians in the church who are suffering because of their Christianity. And he says this: "Remember those in prison," here's the next line, "as though you yourself were in prison with them." It's easy for me to get the prayer list, as I put my feet up, kick my shoes off, recline in the recliner at night and go, "Let's get to the prayer list of the church. Here's somebody in the hospital. Yawn. Oh Lord, mumble, mumble, mumble, yawn." Yeah, that's easy to do. But to pray and to care and to pick up my phone and to get involved or maybe get in my car and run to the hospital and say I want to feel this need because I have compassion and I want to feel as though I'm there with them in the middle of all this.

Does that sound a lot like Romans 12? "Weep with those who weep. Associate with those who are down at the bottom and are low." "Remember those in prison as though you yourself were in prison with them, and those who are mistreated," you ought to feel mistreated, "since you are in the body."

Now that's an abbreviated way of saying, "Aren't we a part of the body of Christ?" I mean, let's just start with your small group. Aren't you a part of that? Is that not your most expressive and most immediate expression of what it means to be a part of this group? It's not just walking through here grabbing a doughnut and greeting people, "Hey, what's your name?" The people you know, you share prayer requests with every week. If you are not saying these are the people. If there's mistreatment, if there's pain, if there's sacrifice, if there's trouble, if there's need, I am a part of that. When one part of the body hurts, First Corinthians 12, The rest of the body should hurt with it.

And you can't really do that on a good scale when thousands of people come to the church on the weekend. It's about you getting in that group. There ought to be 6, 10, 15 people who you are carrying the burdens of those with because you have compassion for them. You want to love God? God says love my people. We love each other, certainly because we love God because he first loved us. The greatest response of the righteous to the love of Christ is to love doing good, but to be very specific, to have that kind of compassionate, sympathetic love for the people of God. Don't grow weary in this. God is not going to overlook this. He's certainly going to reward it. Galatians 6:9, "Don't grow weary of doing good, we're going to reap in due season."

The simple words of Zechariah 7:9, thinking about pained and embittered and wronged and hurting people, we ought to "show kindness and mercy to one another," and there's not enough of that, I think, in churches. We're very concerned about a lot of things and not concerned enough about going the extra mile, staying the extra hour, and spending the extra dollar when people are hurting. I know many of you are and I'm not castigating our church right now. Because matter of fact, I was met in the patio after the last service and great stories of how this is put into practice. It's great when it is but I don't think it's enough. You see a need, you meet it. What stands between those two things is often a heart of compassion that feels what other people are going through.

I think these ladies felt what Jesus was going through, at least in terms of their love and respect for Christ, expecting nothing in return. Then it says in verse 56, the bottom of the verse, "On the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." Now look at verse 1. They had to put this taking the spices to the tomb on hold for an entire 24-hour period. Why? Well, because the Sabbath day came. Well, what does that mean? Well, the Sabbath, you weren't supposed to do stuff like that. Just do the necessities, sit at home, rest. None of that kind of stuff. And they did it. They had their plans interrupted. Even their heart of serving and being good to someone, they had to put it all on hold because the commandment of God was "rest on the Sabbath." That's an obedient group of disciples. Especially because the commandment of God was very inconvenient. Even though their motive wasn't selfish, it was selfless, it still interrupted their plans that day.

Let me address this by way of sidebar here the issue of the Sabbath. I often say from the platform that when that temple veil was torn, to put it in the words of Hebrews, the old covenant ceremonial law was made obsolete. Did you have bacon this morning any of you? Praise God. Godly person. Nothing ungodly about that. Maybe not super healthy, but nothing ungodly about that. I didn't see a single goat or lamb on the campus today at all. No one brought the sacrifice this morning. I don't know if there's a single Levite among us to be able to sacrifice, and I didn't even bring a pocket knife to church, so we can't sacrifice your animal today, and yet God commanded that you do that. You don't want to circumcise your baby on the eighth day? You don't have to. No big deal.

Matter of fact, Paul put it this way. Circumcision or uncircumcision mean nothing. All that matters is keeping the commandment of God. If that spins your head, and I shouldn't say commandment because it's plural, keeping the commandments of God. If that spins your head, it should. "I thought

circumcision was commanded." Well it was commanded but it fell into a category like the Sabbath that was all this ceremonial covenant connection between God and Israel. What happened when the temple veil was torn was that whole system was made obsolete. Hebrews 10:1, all of that was a shadow, here comes the reality. We talked about it last week. All that picture was replaced with the person. All the things that the ceremonial law, the temple, back before that, the tabernacle, the priesthood, the sacrifices, circumcision, dietary laws, the Sabbath-keeping, the festivals, all of that made obsolete. None of you have to involve yourself with any of that.

But Paul says what does matter is keeping the commandments of God. Then I'm going to say, "Hey, hey. Which commandments?" Well, the commandments of God that aren't ceremonial, the things that are not these pictured covenant expressions and rituals between Israel and its people. There are a ton of those, there are even embedded in a lot of Old Testament verses. The same Paul in the same book that said to the Corinthians, you know what, circumcision means nothing, it means nothing anymore, doesn't even matter. Don't even worry about it. In that same book he said this: "You know what, if you don't pay your pastors, you've got a problem with the Scripture." And he goes back to a law in the Old Testament where you're not supposed to put a muzzle on an ox while he's treading out the grain. And he says, "You know what, do I say this that you should pay your pastors, do I say this on my own authority or don't I say it on the authority of the law of God, the commandments of God."

Does God care about oxen? Is that why that verse is there? He says, "No, the moral component of that command is that you let those who thresh, thresh in hope, that those who plow, plow with hope of sharing in the crop. And that's what that passage is really doing as we extract that principle from it and say this is an authoritative obligation that I have. And he says of course you should know what to do, that if they sow spiritual things, they ought to reap material things from you, and he says, "There you go. End of discussion. I've just given you the law of God." The commandments of God matter. The ceremonies of God are all fulfilled.

If you're going to be in my wedding, if I'm going to have a wedding, I want you to rent the tux. You know what? After that, I don't need a tux next time you come to my house. The tuxedo, the formal ceremony that went up to this thing called Christ the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection - all fulfilled. Now technically, I believe that at the tearing of the curtain that whole system was wrecked as some people put it. It was made null and void, it was made obsolete. These women did not know that yet. They kept the commandment of God. The book started that way in Luke Chapter 2, when Jesus is born, the eighth day, brought to the temple, circumcision takes place, they bring the sacrifice, they do all of the things the law commands. None of that you did, your parents did not do that. You did not meet the Levitical law and the ceremonial laws of God.

Matter of fact, when Jesus had someone with a skin disease and it was healed, he said, "Go to the priest, show yourself to the priest, make sure he signs off on it, bring the sacrifice of the cleansed leper and then go on your way." What are you worried about that for? Because he worried about the ceremonial law. Even the passages where you think Jesus broke the Sabbath, I would contend if you go back carefully, even though he uses rhetorical responses in making you think otherwise, he did not break the Sabbath. Jesus didn't break the Sabbath. Even in his argumentation, I know you can look through that, I can argue that another time. Jesus doesn't break the Sabbath, he doesn't break the commandments, he does all the ceremonies, he gives all the stuff he's supposed to give, he gives the tribute. He does what he's supposed to do under the ceremonial law.

But ceremonial laws are now gone. If you want more on that, there are three books on the back of

the worksheet, one sermon by me "Seeing your salvation as the fulfillment of the Sabbath." It's all there from Hebrews Chapter 4, you can explore that if you want. Talk to me about it if you'd like after you read those books and listen to that sermon. But the idea here is that there are many moral laws that God gives us, and the Bible says listen, if you love God you will love keeping his commandments. First John says that very clearly. Matter of fact, you'll love his commands and they won't be burdensome to you. Why? Because a heart, a righteous and good heart that God has transformed by the miracle of regeneration, wants to not only do good deeds and not only wants to serve God's people sympathetically and compassionately, it wants to keep the commandments of God.

Number 3 in your outline if you're taking notes, we need to "Obediently Love God's Commands," love his commands. That's the biblical precedent, that's the biblical standard. Let me quote for you Psalm 119 verse 127, Psalm 119:127, "I love your commandments more than gold, more than fine gold." If I bring you after the service in the lobby I say, "I got something for you. Come over here." And I go into my backpack and I pull out a giant bar of gold. I grip it with two hands and I go, "Here, I want to give you this today." I'll bet you're going to keep careful observation, you're going to care about that. You're going to put a seatbelt around that in the front seat of your car. You're going to say, "Wow, I got to bar of gold at church today." You will value it. You're going to go to your accountant, whatever, you're going to get it appraised, you're going to know what it's worth, you're going to know it's very expensive. You're gonna love that thing I gave you, worth a lot a lot of money.

Here is the analogy at least. The writer of Psalm 119, who I do think is David, that's a different sermon to contend that for you, but the idea here is when God gives a command, I'm going to love that even more. So, if I at the door say, "Hey, I'm not going to give you a bar gold, I'm going to give you a command of the Lord and here it is: 'Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as is the habit of some.'" Right? But you should do this all the more to stimulate one another to loving good deeds. You ought to be in church. There's the command of the Lord. Drop that bar on you. Bam! I doubt you'd value that as much.

Just like in our day we don't like sermons about good works. We certainly don't like points like this: God's commands. "I don't want commands, I want freedom. I thought Christianity was about freedom." It is. It's the freedom for you to be able to keep God's commandments. It's the freedom to be able to say God has now empowered me to keep his law, as it's put in verse 47 of that same Psalm, Psalm 119 verse 47, "I find delight in your commandments. I love your commandments. I lift up your hands," there's the charismatic version, "I lift up my hands to your commandments," (I thought that was funny...) "which I love, and I will meditate on your statutes." I love your commandments. I love them. A regenerate heart is going to love the commandments of God. Same Psalm, verse 164, "Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules." There is another word you don't want to hear at church, your righteous rules.

As it says in First John Chapter 5 verse 3, those commandments are not a burden to real Christians. Sometimes they're inconvenient. You think it's inconvenient to keep the Sabbath on that day? Well sure, under the old covenant, I don't care if it's inconvenient, keep the Sabbath. That's been fulfilled. Right? We not going to keep the Sabbath anymore. We don't have to keep dietary laws or bring an animal to church to sacrifice it. But you better keep the commands of God. You ought to feel the obligation, and you ought to feel the privilege and the pleasure of saying, "God, I want to do things that please you. Even when they demand something of me and they're hard."



Love the word of God. Maybe you don't love it like you ought to. Let me you four quick things that might help. Got to get to know it better. Letter "A". Get to know it better. If I introduced you to the perfect person. I say, here's the perfect woman right here, single guy. There is no such woman, by the way, I just want to let you know. But if there were, if she were absolutely perfect in every way, I know this, you'd love her more the more you got to know her, I guarantee you that. The Bible is very clear. Psalm 12 verse 6, "The words of the Lord are flawless, they're pure words." God's Word is perfect. Psalm 19, Psalm 119, so many Psalms, celebrate the perfection of God's Word. The more you get to know the Word the more you're going to love that Word. And some of you are just dabbling in the Daily Bible Reading each day and skimming through it, listening to it real quick. You've got to love this book by getting involved in it, getting to know it more.

You got to obey what you know. Letter "B". Obey what you know, you got to adapt your life to it. The Bible says that it is a thing that is supposed to point out to you what is wrong in your life and correct what's wrong so that you do what is right. It's a mirror, James Chapter 1 says, verse 22. And when that mirror is put before you and you become a doer of the Word, not just to hearer who deceives himself, then you're using the Bible as the way it ought to be used to change and transform and conform your behavior to Christ. That use of the Bible is a thing that will grow your appreciation and love for the Bible when the Bible is used for what it is intended for. And that is not only to bring you to faith in Christ but to bring you into conformity to Christ's likeness. That is a great thing. You will love your mirror more when you use it the right way. Use it the wrong way, you're probably not going to love it as much as if you start using it the way God intended.

Letter "C". I said not only to save you, but it it does do that, and I would say this remember that it did that. Remember what the Bible did. The Bible revealed the way of truth to you. It revealed the way of salvation to you. You got that maybe through a preacher or an evangelist but it came from the Bible. The Bible revealed to you how to be saved. Here's a little example from Second Timothy. If you read in Second Timothy 2 and Second Timothy 4, you'll see Paul really pushing Timothy to be passionate about the Bible. Get in it he says in Chapter 2 study to show yourself "approved to God, a workman doesn't need to be shamed" You need to be into the Word, handing it rightly.

Chapter 4, he says when it comes to the Word of God, you ought to read it, you ought to be all about the Scripture, you ought to be absorbed in it. All this call to love and be passionate about the Word. Between that is Chapter 3 when he says this: "Hey, remember..." I'll just quote it for you. First Timothy Chapter 3, "Remember how from childhood you were acquainted with the sacred Scriptures which were able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ." Remember that book that I'm asking you to be all about, to love it, to get into it, to dig into it, to be zealous for it, to be absorbed in it, you know what I'm telling you, remember it's saved you.

If you think I'm stretching it just because I'm looking over three chapters, maybe this will help. First Peter Chapter 1 does the same thing. End of Chapter 1, beginning of Chapter 2, he says this, that Word of God, I love how he said, "You were born again, not through something perishable," this is something imperishable, "through the living and abiding Word of God." It was preached to you, "this good news that was preached to you is the Word." Then he says this, "like babies you ought to crave it. If you've tasted that the Lord is good," if it saved your soul you ought to now get into it because it's going to be fuel for your growth. If you want to love the Word of God, you need to remember what it did. This book that you neglect in your day because you're too busy is the book that gives you the assurance that you're right with a living God. I'm just saying you want to love it more, get to know it better. Use it for what it's intended for, to adapt your life to it and remember what it did for you.

And lastly, I'd just say dig deep, dig deep, get into the hard stuff of the Bible. Hebrews Chapter 5 verses 11 through 14 reminds us that if you're just drinking 1% milk all the time you're missing out on a lot of good stuff. The context is: I'd like to talk to about Melchizedek, and that's where a lot of people, he could see in his mind's eye, were groaning. "Groan... I don't even know who that is. This is hard." And the writer of Hebrews gets mad, he says, "You guys are 'nothros'". It's a great Greek word, nothros, you're lazy. "By this time you ought to be teachers but instead you need someone just to teach you the basics again." Why? Because all you're accustomed to is your 1% milk and some of you here you will quote the same five favorite verses you've always quoted your entire life. When I use the word Zechariah, you don't even know if it's a book or a person in the Bible. You say I don't know it that well. All I'm saying is dig in deeper, challenge yourself this year. Say, I want to dig deeper, I want to know more, I want to get in it in a way I've never got into it before, and the analogy is this: you need meat.

I can bring your little baby tonight with me to Ruth's Chris Steak House and sit there and really feel bad that he's sucking on a bottle of formula while I'm cutting through a thick piece of sizzling steak, saying you're missing out kid. That's not a good analogy because that's cute to you, but it's pathetic to me (smile). You're drinking milk. You need to eat this meat. It's so good. You got to grow up. You'll like it way better than you like that. Nothing wrong with you having your favorite Bible verses and your favorite passages but you got to dig deeper.

Here are four things that may help you grow and your love for the Word of God. You want to love God, as you should, because he first loved us. Let's make sure we understand that's going to be a passion and a love for doing good. It's going to be a passion that's sympathetic and caring about the people around us, meeting their needs, feeling their hurts, going the extra mile. Then it's all about you making sure you love the Word of God and you're going to do his commandments whatever they are, even if they're inconvenient.

A lot of commentaries, a lot of books, a lot of preachers preach on this passage and they like to make the comparison between Isaiah 53, which is quite an enigma when you read it initially, in the suffering servant who is going to die, he's with the wicked when he dies, but he's made his grave somehow with the rich, and, you know it's hard to figure out what's going on in that passage. But the New Testament seems pretty clear as he dies there the death of a criminal and then you would expect his body to be thrown into the Valley of Hinnom and eaten by dogs and instead he gets this hewn rock, beautiful, rich, opulent grave and he gets put in that, no one's ever been laid there before, he's with the rich in his death.

And I love that because as I think about this historically, Joseph Arimathea, do you think he thought, "I'm fulfilling biblical prophecy today." No, I doubt it. He's just a good and righteous man who was doing a good and righteous thing. And yet he was fulfilling God's prescriptive and prophetic plan for his life. I love that. While I'll never make it in the pages of the Bible, obviously, and neither will you, God's got a set of prescribed, sovereign, good works for you and I to accomplish this week. They're on a docket. They're in heaven. And he wants you to walk in them. They're going involve love for people. They're going to involve a love for the Word. Let's get out there this week and live purposefully, looking for those opportunities to express our love for God by loving good works, loving his people and loving his Word. I commit that challenge to you today from this great passage to follow this good example. As we wrap up this passage about "No Greater Love." Let's respond as the righteous do.



Let's pray. God, help us as a church do good, care for God's people, and obey your Word. Give us a zeal and a resolve like we've never had before to love you back in tangible ways, not just with our mouth, not just theoretically, to roll up our sleeves, to get our fingers dirty and do the hard work of love, to work. God help us to enjoy it, for the commands of God never to be burdensome.

Giving and sharing even when there's no one seeing it, when there's nothing in return, when I'm putting myself at risk, when I'm afraid of what might happen, give me joy and give us all joy in that process as we learn to love you in that very specific way. God, be honored by the way this church steps up and I am proud of them, God, even though it seems sometimes like I'm chiding them. I just pray they'd know that even though we excel in these things, as Paul wrote the Thessalonians, I think we can excel still more, we can grow more in our love for you and for people and your Word. So help us, please, to grow and excel in this. Let this church be filled with good works this week as the people of God prioritize the household of faith, and they give themselves to shining their light in this dark world doing good deeds for your glory and loving your people as you'd want us to. God, commit us to that task now, guard us and guide us as we providentially step-by-step, place-by-place, go and do what you've asked us to do.

In Jesus name, Amen.