

JOH 10:17-18 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life -only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

This passage is in the context of Jesus gathering His sheep; both the Jews and the Gentiles, the latter of whom are referred to as the “other” sheep in verse sixteen, so that there would be one flock with one shepherd.

Our Lord has been pointing out how the Pharisees have disobeyed God in that they would not shepherd the people of Israel and properly feed and care for them according to God’s word and will.

In contrast, Jesus shows how He is the Great Shepherd who has come to do the will of His Father. And this is essential to understand in the context as we come to verse seventeen.

JOH 10:17 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life -only to take it up again.

What’s interesting here is that Jesus introduces something into the discussion that hasn’t been brought up in this context regarding the doing of the will of God, and that is the issue of love as it relates to obedience.

These Pharisees did not love the sheep, and the reason is that they didn’t love God. We cannot say that we love God if in fact we don’t love others, and especially others in the body of Christ.

GAL 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

There are two great commandments we read of in the Scriptures. In fact, Jesus makes this clear when answering a question posed to Him.

MAT 22:35-39 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:
36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'

What Jesus was saying is that if one truly loves God then he will necessarily love his neighbor. This also teaches us that we cannot truly love our neighbor as ourselves unless we first and foremost love God. This was the point Jesus was making to these Pharisees.

If they truly loved their neighbor, (and by this in our context it means the sheep of Israel), they would have loved God in obedience to His word and will. They did neither. Jesus on the other hand proved His love for His neighbor by loving the Father through His obedience, and thus proved His relationship with the Father who loved Him.

To suggest that we can love God and yet not please Him through our obedience is to say that we can, for example, love our spouse and yet not care for them. Our love for each other is measured by our doing for each other. Our love for God is doing His will, not merely talking about it.

This is why Jesus could say, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (JOH 14:15)

Jesus was the supreme example of that as He proved His love for the Father, and then in turn proved His love for us as He went to the cross to die for our sin.

And so, as Jesus says that the Father loves Him because He lays down His life, He is showing the Pharisees that a relationship with God involves a love which acts, which does the will of the Father.

And it's the same with you and me.

I once had a woman years ago tell me that she loved Jesus Christ and yet her present life didn't even come close to obeying God. And I told her as gently as I could that, "no, you do not love Jesus Christ."

This was a woman who had professed Christ as Lord and Savior, and yet nothing about her life at that particular time showed any appreciation or thankfulness to the God who sent His Son to die for her sin.

And yet she insisted that she loved Jesus, and I insisted that she didn't and then went on to explain what a true love for Christ entails. She had mistakenly associated a love for Christ with a feeling in her heart that she had when she thought of Christ.

Now, first let me say that I did not then, nor do I today, question whether or not she had come to faith in Christ. And I don't deny

that a love for Christ would involve true feelings in our hearts toward the Lord, or that our love for Christ may not wax or wane at times.

But what she didn't understand, and what many Christians don't understand, is that love is not measured by feelings alone. Love is measured by action. And if you don't think so, then just ask your wives, gentlemen, the next time she asks you to take out the garbage and you don't.

As it begins to pile up a couple of things happen. Number one, it begins to stink up the house. And number two it begins to stink up your wife's assessment of your love toward her. Why? Because she knows that love is a verb. It acts, even in the most mundane of situations.

For Jesus to have measured His love for the Father according to only His feelings might have resulted in Him not going to the cross. You'll remember that on the night He was betrayed He prayed to His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane concerning what He was about to experience, which was crucifixion for our sins as He received the wrath of the Father on our behalf.

MAT 26:39 Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

As a man, Jesus was extremely distressed what He was about to undergo. In fact, He was so distressed that He actually sweat drops of blood, which is a medical phenomenon known as hematidrosis. It can occur under the most profound stress, and often times leads to shock and in some cases death.

Imagine the feelings Christ had as He anticipated the cross. But He laid His feelings aside for His love for the Father and you and me, which is why He adds, "Yet not as I will, but as you will."

Doing the will of the Father proved Christ's love. And in so doing, it proved the relationship that the Father had with His Son, which is why Jesus says that the Father loves Him in the context of Jesus laying down His life for you and Me out of obedience to the Father's will.

PHI 2:8-11 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every

knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

But, as laying down His life proved Christ's love for the Father, the taking up of His life proved He was no mere man.

JOH 10:17-18 The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life -only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

I find it amusing, as well as sad, that each year when Easter rolls around, or as I prefer to call it, resurrection day, we see the Dan Rather's and the Tom Brokaw's of the news industry, reporting on the goings on in Jerusalem.

And they show pictures of people gathered around the supposed place where Jesus was buried after His crucifixion. A Roman Catholic church is built over this supposed tomb of our Lord.

And each year they make the comment that Christians all over the world celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ on this day. And each year I think to myself, how can anyone report in such a cavalier way that a man rose bodily from the grave as if it happens all the time?

No one has ever risen bodily from the grave with the exception of one man who claimed to be God and Savior. If these men and women who claim to be reporters of the truth were truthful with themselves they would be asking the real question in light of Christ's resurrection, what must I do to be saved?

But the fact is that even before Jesus went to the cross He knew what the outcome of His death would be because He planned it with the Father and the Holy Spirit from all eternity.

Again, this is something that never took Jesus by surprise. Before He was ever conceived by the Holy Spirit; before He was born of the virgin Mary, He had planned to come into this world to redeem us of our sin and then rise from the dead. This is what the apostle Peter tells us.

1PE 1:18-20 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the

precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.

This is why Jesus could say that He would take up His life again. It was part of the plan of God worked out in the counsels of heaven before He ever made this earth and all things on it, together with the universe in which we live.

And this is why He emphasizes how His death would take place.

JOH 10:18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

There is only one reason why Jesus was crucified on the cross. And that reason is that He chose to be crucified. It was not a mistake. It was not a slip up in His plan. It was not because sinful men were more powerful than Him and thwarted His plans to live a long and healthy life.

As William Barclay puts it in his commentary on John, "He was not the victim of circumstance. He was not like some animal, dragged unwillingly and without understanding to the sacrifice. Jesus laid down His life because He chose to do so."

In fact, when we look at the situation surrounding His arrest and crucifixion everything tells us that it was part of His plan to willingly lay down His life. And it was part of His plan to use such men as Judas to assure that He would be arrested.

MAT 26:48-54 Now the betrayer [Judas] had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man; arrest him." 49 Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. 50 Jesus replied, "Friend, do what you came for." Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him. 51 With that, one of Jesus' companions reached for his sword, drew it out and struck the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. 52 "Put your sword back in its place," Jesus said to him, "for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. 53 Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

From Genesis to Malachi, the word of God foretold what the Lord had foreordained before the creation of the world. The Scriptures had to be fulfilled.

Jesus had all authority, even when it came to being delivered up to Pilate.

JOH 19:10-11 "Do you refuse to speak to me?" Pilate said. "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" 11 Jesus answered, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

All of this points to the fact that Jesus did not lose His life, He gave it freely. As Barclay points out, "the cross was not thrust upon Him: He willingly accepted it, for us."

"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

I love the way A.W. Pink puts this whole thing into perspective. "The Savior did not succumb to death through weakness, but ... gave up His life in the full vigor of His strength. It was not the nails, but the strength of His love to the Father and to His elect, which held Him to the cross."

But the same authority and power that placed Jesus on that cross for your sins and mine, is the same authority and power that allowed Him to take it up again.

I mean, what kind of a strategy would it be if Christ only planned one part of our salvation, through death on a cross? Can you imagine watching your favorite NFL team showing up for a game with only their defense on the field?

It would be just as crazy had not Christ planned and then executed the plan to rise from the dead, which is precisely why He said, "I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

This by the way, is one reason Jesus could go to the cross with such confidence. Whenever we know the outcome of something which is favorable for us, it makes the road to that outcome most tolerable.

If there's a movie or a book where the outcome is in question my wife instinctively goes to the end to find out what happens. If it works out in a good way she can go back to the beginning and read it or watch it with enjoyment.

I remember missing a game where the Dolphins were playing one of their rivals. I had taped the game with the intention of watching it later. But before we left for wherever it was we were going, I

began to watch part of the game knowing I would see it in its entirety when I got back.

What I saw was a Miami team getting whipped and beaten badly. When it was time to go I turned off the T.V. and let the VCR take over. Later that night, after the game was over, I assumed Miami lost the game and so instead of going home to watch the rest of it I asked someone who saw the game how it turned out.

They said it was one of the best games they had seen in a long time. Dan Marino had made one of the best come backs in NFL history beating the opposing team. I don't remember if it was the Jets or Buffalo.

The next day I watched the entire game. And sure enough, for the first three quarters Miami played terrible. But it didn't upset me as it would have had I not known the outcome. I watched in anticipation when Miami would make its comeback. And sure enough, just as I was told they came back and it was a delight to watch.

There was never a moment of doubt as to the outcome. And when it came to Jesus Christ rising from the dead after His crucifixion, there was never a moment of doubt as to what the outcome would be. And this is precisely why the cross of Christ turned out to be a joy to the Lord Jesus.

HEB 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus Christ endured the cross because He knew the joy on the other side. He knew the grave would not hold Him because He wouldn't let it hold Him. But just as joyous as the resurrection was to Christ it was the joy of knowing what that would accomplish; our salvation.

The joy set before Him was you and me. The joy set before Him was doing the Father's will and accomplishing what He set out to do as He redeemed all that the Father had given Him, knowing that He would lose none.

Now, there's something else I want to say about Christ's resurrection. In our text it is clear that Jesus says He has authority to take up His life again. In fact, earlier in this gospel of John Jesus

told the Jews, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." (JOH 2:19)

A couple verses later the apostle John says, "the temple he had spoken of was his body."

And so, there is no doubt that it was Jesus Himself who would cause Himself to come out of the grave, or did He?

ROM 6:4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

It's clear that according to this passage in Romans the Father raised the Son from the dead.

Well, if that's not confusing enough Paul goes on in that same letter to the Romans and says this.

ROM 8:11 And if the Spirit of him [Christ] who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Now, wait a minute. Here Paul plainly says that it is the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. So which is it? Who raised Jesus from the dead? The Father, the Son raising Himself, or the Spirit?

The answer is yes. The Father raised Jesus from the dead. The Son had the authority and exercised that authority and willed Himself to come out of that tomb. And the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead.

Well, how can this be? Well, the simple answer is that God raised Jesus from the dead, and since there is only one God it would stand to reason that all three persons in the Godhead would be involved.

1CO 6:14 By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

Jesus Christ is God. The Father is God. The Holy Spirit is God. And yet there is only one God who has revealed Himself in three persons.

But the bigger picture is this. Jesus Christ is no longer in the tomb because the tomb and death could not hold Him. That's the good news. Jesus knew this when He went to the cross. He knew the outcome. It didn't make the pain any less, it didn't lessen the wrath

of His Father that was poured out on Him on the cross, but it made it all worth it.

Jesus endured it all so that you and I could be with Him forever. But we can live with Him forever because He lives. And as Paul said in the verses we just read that just as Christ was raised from the dead He will raise us also.

In other words, you and I will one day receive our glorified bodies as we are resurrected from the tomb. When we die our spirits immediately go to be with Christ. That's what Paul meant when he said, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." And of course that is in the context of a believer dying in Christ.

But it was not being absent from the body and then being present with the Lord that Paul hoped for. As wonderful as that is Paul's hope was found in the same resurrection that Christ accomplished for us as the first fruits of our own resurrection.

A resurrection, by definition, is not being absent from the body. And Paul understood this.

Acts 23:6 ⁶ But perceiving that one group were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul *began* crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!"

Paul was not on trial for being associated with a Jewish sect who embraced a Jewish King. Paul was on trial for teaching in public about the resurrection of Jesus Christ and through Him alone can anyone have eternal life.

Since it is the resurrection that was Paul's hope, then it stands to reason that even today, as Paul is present with the Lord, even though absent from his body for some 2,000 years, he still longs for his resurrection and that hope that is found in that state where not only his body, but the entire universe will be restored to an eternal state without sin or curse.

Romans 8:20-23 ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. ²³ And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves

groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

It will be at the last day when our Lord and Savior returns to raise us up together along with creating new heavens and a new earth.

2 Peter 3:11-13 ¹¹ Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! ¹³ But ***according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.***

And of course, the apostle John was given a revelation about this new earth and new heavens.

Revelation 21:1-5 ^{NAU} Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

This is what Christ came to accomplish through His death and resurrection; what we know to be the inheritance that we will share with our Lord Jesus.

For those outside of Christ, when they die they are given a judgment whereby they are eternally separated from their God and Savior to suffer the same fate as Satan who will be delivered into the Lake of Fire at the very end. The writer of Hebrews points out this judgment.

HEB 9:27-28 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

There is no reincarnation, there is no second chance after death. The decision must be made in this world on this side of heaven. But just as sure as we physically only die once, Christ died once and He will come back for us a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

And this is what I want to leave you with. When we know the outcome of something we ought to live in anticipation of that outcome despite how the first three quarters of the game might go. Life can be a drag at times. Trials and temptations can take on all of the characteristics of a three hundred pound lineman pounding on us through most of the game.

But the truth is that when all is said and done the end of the game is never in question. We know for example that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (ROM 8:28)

We know that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. In fact, Paul goes so far as to say, “for I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (ROM 8:38-39)

We know that God is faithful in all things. He was faithful in His promise, delivered by His prophets, to send His Son into this world as they prophesied of His first coming to take our sin, and He fulfilled it all in Christ, to the letter.

And so, to doubt that He will come again and take us home to Himself would be short-sided on our parts. And so, the question is this. Are we living each day in the anticipation and the joy of our salvation, which is just as sure as Christ who rose from the dead, or are we living as though we've been defeated?

How we view the reality of our salvation will determine how we will live out this life we have in Christ, as it will affect our obedience to our Lord Jesus whose very example to His people was to do everything to please the Father and do His will.

If the only thing in life that we deem important is our own will and way then we will miss the beauty of what it means to be a servant of our Most High God and to do it in a church that has been given the privilege to serve our community with the gospel of the risen Christ.

Remember what Paul told the Romans, and by extension all of us in Christ.

ROM 8:37 "... in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

Let me end with a few encouraging words from God Himself to you and me.

2TH 2:16-17 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

REV 1:5-6 from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father - to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.