

The Benefits of Loving our Lord Jesus Christ

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer

December 18, 1955

Now, I want to talk tonight about loving Jesus and the benefits from John 14. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me. And he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself unto him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words. And my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings, and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me.

This is the second in three talks on loving Jesus Christ our Lord. I'll give the next one next Sunday night in the morning, I shall bring a Christmas sermon in the evening to conclude on how we can know that we love Christ. Tonight, the benefits of loving Christ.

Now let me get off by saying that God is the magnetic center of the moral creation. This is illustrated to us by the sun and the solar system, that each planet that revolves around the sun, is held in its place by the sun's attraction. We do not know too much about the other planets, but we do know about our familiar earth, and we know how the earth is benefited by its position, going as it does around the sun year after year, century after century.

We know that while it stays in its proper relation to the sun, held there in its proper equipoise by the centrifugal force and by the magnetic attraction, centrifugal force of its motion and the attraction of the sun, we know there is perfect safety there. We read in the book of Jude about certain stars, I presume he would mean planets which have left their proper habitation, and they have no sun, and they are in utter darkness forever. But there is safety in remaining in this place of attraction.

And in addition, there is motion and direction, and then there is heat and light and life and health and the seasons, all these come to us from the sun and illustrate our relation to God as the magnetic center of all the moral creation. To this I speak about in illustration, of course, is only the physical thing. It is the physical earth that is held by the sun, it is the physical heat that bathes the earth and its physical light. And it is life that comes to us from the sun, or at least life is nurtured by the sun, and health comes to that life by the sun, and the seasons come and go because of the relation of the earth to the sun. Now, that's illustration merely.

We come to God and Christ, who are thus the center of all the moral creation. And their relation, that is the moral creatures, their relation to Him is a spiritual thing, it is spiritual love. For spiritual love to God is the magnetic attraction that holds all moral creatures in his or her place.

When those angels that kept not their first estate but left their proper habitation fell, it was a falling away from this attraction of love. They lost from their heart the love that

held them in sweet, safe, wholesome bondage to God and went out and down and are now, says the Bible, in hell, awaiting the judgment of the great day.

But Jesus Christ gives, God gives to moral creatures that same attraction, and that same direction, and that same holy heat, and that same light of life, and that same health that the sun gives to the earth.

And all the woes that mankind has, all the pain he's ever suffered, and all the sorrow he's ever known, has resulted from his loss of this love. That is why the greatest commandment is what? Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. It is for this reason that that commandment is given, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. It is like saying to the planet that's shaky in its orbit, thou shalt remain in relation to the sun, or perish, or fly away by your own speed and force, lost forever to light in the sun.

So, when God says thou shalt love the Lord thy God, it is saying to me, a moral planet, that I am to come into the orbit and that I am to feel again and know again the attraction which is God, and Christ came to restore this. We sing of His coming at Christmas time, but we don't always know why or stop to consider why it was that His love, that we should be restored again to that love, and that His love should again burn in our hearts.

Now this love, I'm not speaking of the love of God for us. Remember tonight, and Jesus Christ is not speaking about it here. He does not say if God loves any man, or he that hath My sayings, that God will love him. He doesn't say that. He says if any man love Me, and if a man love Me, and he that loveth Me, he's talking about our love to Him.

Now, God being what He is, and man being what he is, this love of our hearts for God is the most satisfying thing in the world, just as the planet finds its perfect peace and its perfect poise and perfect balance and safety and light and heat when it's in its right relation to the sun, drawn and pulled toward the sun by its magnetic attraction. So, the human heart is the most satisfied when it has this love for God.

Now, we're talking about love for God, and particularly here, love for Christ. Now this love is the most enjoyable thing in all the wide world. In loving Christ, we find unutterable beatitude, without pain and without end. I want to say this to you, that heaven will not be heaven because there are golden streets.

I suppose that the golden street idea which John gives us is only another way of telling us what cannot be put in words, for I don't know that God finds any more pleasure in gold than he would find in anything else. But I do know that a city of golden streets where there was hatred and fear, who would want to go out on a walk on a golden sidewalk if there was danger lurking around the corner?

Or if his neighbor passed whose house he walked, hated him, or he knew nothing of love, who would care that the walls were made of jasper? If behind those walls were hidden men ready to fall upon me in murderous wrath, who would care that the gates were made of one pearl each? If outside those gates or inside those gates there were enemies ready to destroy me, and I walked past those gates of pearl alongside those walls of jasper with my feet upon the golden streets, and I had not the love of God in my

heart, it would be a hell, just as the bride that is forced into marriage with some loathsome man whose very presence is a horror to her, though he may take her into an estate where there are glass balls and birdbaths and rolling lawns outside, and where there is everything that money can buy and that artistic tastes can dictate inside that home, and where she sleeps under a canopied bed or on a canopied bed, and all that beauty that money can buy, when she knows that as soon as that loathsome man arrives, hate rises in her heart.

That's not a bridal cottage. That's not a place of beauty, that's a hell. And heaven will be heaven not because there is everything that the skill and wisdom of God can devise, but heaven will be heaven because there is love for God, because the attraction that God is the attraction, and because the heart will be glad in its love, because the heart will rejoice in its love for God. That is why heaven will be heaven.

I tell you that the love of man for God has given us so much of beauty and so much of wonder even in our Christianity. Go back to that 45th Psalm and hear the man, David. My heart is indicting a good matter. I speak of the things which I have made, touching the king. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

Then he launches into a description of Jesus. Thou art fairer than the children of men. Grace is poured into thy lips. Therefore, God hath blessed thee forever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O Most Mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty, and in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness. Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter. Thou lovest righteousness and hatest wickedness. Therefore, thy God hath anointed thee with oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces whereby they have made thee glad.

That is David's foreseeing through the long telescope of prophetic knowledge, the coming to the world of this Jesus. And he saw Him and loved Him. And burst out my heart is indicting a good matter. I speak of the things which I have made, touching the king. My tongue is the pen of a ready writer. He felt that his song flowed out as the words flowed from the pen of a skilled poet.

Now, that was David. When we come into our own Christian hymnody, I picked up here, this happens to be a Presbyterian hymnal, I have different ones, but here's old John Schoeffler, who lived in the 1600s, and he wrote this, Thee will I love my strength, my tower. Thee will I love my joy, my crown. Thee will I love with all my power in all thy works and thee alone. Thee will I love till the pure fire fill my whole soul with chaste desire.

That was not the love of God for man, that's the love of man for God. And he says, Thee will I love till the pure fire fill my whole soul with chaste desire. Then he laments the fact that he didn't love him sooner. Ah, why did I so late thee know, thee lovelier than the sons of men? Ah, why did I no sooner go to thee, the only ease in pain? Ashamed I silently mourn that I so late to thee did turn. Give to mine eyes refreshing tears. Give to my heart chaste, hallowed fires. Give to my soul with filial fears the love that all heaven's host inspires, that all my powers, with all their might, in thy soul glory may unite.

And then here is Paul Gerhardt, who lived in the 1600s, another German. Jesus, thy boundless love to me, no thought can reach, no tongue declare. Oh, knit my thankful heart to thee and reign without arrival there. Thine holy, thine alone I am. Be thou alone my constant flame. Oh, love, oh, how cheering is thy ray.

Some of us Christians that are crawling around like flies in October. Did you ever see the October fly, that busy, buzzing fly that you can't catch nor get to during the summer? Along about the latter part of October he loses his power, and his wings get heavy and he crawls around, his body swells.

And some of us Christians are like that. We crawl around because we have no cheering ray. Oh, love, how cheering is thy ray. All pain before thy presence flies. Care, anguish, sorrow melt away where'er thy healing beams arise. Oh, Jesus, nothing may I see, nothing desire or seek but thee. Now, these are Christian men telling the Lord Jesus how they love Him.

And then there's that great old medieval hymn that starts out: Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts, thou fount of life, thou light of men. From the best bliss that earth imparts we turn unfilled to thee again. We taste thee, O thou living bread, and long to feast upon thee still. We drink of thee the fountainhead and thirst our souls from thee to fill. O Jesus, ever with us stay, make all our moments calm and bright. Chase the dark night of sin away, shed o'er the world thy holy light.

And then is there ever a month goes by that we don't sing, Jesus, the very thought of thee? With sweetness fills my breast, but sweeter far thy face to see, and in thy presence rest. This man loved the Lord Jesus.

Well, you could go on. This book is full of such hymns. You could go on and on. You could hear Wesley say, O love divine, how sweet thou art. When shall I find my willing heart all taken up by thee? I thirst, I faint, I die to prove the greatness of redeeming love, the love of Christ to me.

Oh, that I could forever sit like Mary at the Master's feet. Be this my happy choice, my only care, delight and bliss, my joy, my heaven on earth. Be this to hear the bridegroom's voice. Just read those hymns, because they happen to be some that have been written to tell this story better than I can tell it, in the condensed beauty of hymnody, that the love of Christ is the most enjoyable thing that the earth can know.

Long ago I heard the testimony of a great saint of God, who in his old age wrote and said something like this, I have known the love of country, I have known the love of beautiful music, I have known the love of art, I have known the love of woman, I have known the love of sweet children, and now I have known the love also of grandchildren, but I want to testify here in my closing days that above all the loves that I have ever known, the love of God in Christ is the most exalted, most beautiful, and most enjoyable emotion that my soul has ever known. And this I'm sure would be the testimony of every child of God.

Brethren, our trouble is that we don't love God enough to make us happy. We love him only enough to satisfy the lower reaches and ranges of our nature. But if we love the Lord Jesus more, well, I think we'd never have a day that wasn't a day of delight. I think we'd scarcely have an hour that wasn't a delightful hour.

So I say that in loving Christ we have reached unutterable beatitude, without pain and without end, world without end.

So, God offers Jesus to us and says, here is all that the human heart can believe in, all that it can know. If you look at a great work of art, you read a great poem, you listen to the performance of some brilliant and lofty piece of music, you know all that can be known of human romance and the tender, soft love of parents for their children, and all the love of country that makes men die, and all the love of nature that drives poets into the meadows to compose their sonnets, and all the high beauty that can be known by the mortal mind I give you in him, in Jesus Christ my son, all that in infinite, infinite degree.

And Jesus Christ our Lord says, if any man loved Me. My God, why should He have to say that? If any man loved Me. Why should we not love Him? Why should the stars above say, if any man admire me? Why should the Messiah have to say, if anybody enjoys hearing me? Why should the sunshine say, if any bird enjoys me? Why should the sea have to cry, if any fish enjoys me? So why should Jesus Christ say, if any man loved me, for He is the object of affection.

I want to say, brethren, that if we only use Jesus as a way over hell, as a bridge over Tartarus and the world below, we have maybe gotten over the fire safely, but we haven't known what Christian religion is. If we only love Christ because He keeps our homes together and preserves democracy and saves us from communism, we're making a utility out of Jesus. We don't know what it is to love Him as we should.

God has given us the most satisfying thing in all the world, not only the most satisfying, but the most ecstatic, that which brings ecstasy to the human spirits. The mystics who were known to go into times of ecstasy, times of such sheer delight, that the passing of time meant nothing to them. And they would come out of an almost trance and find that hours had passed as they gazed upon the face of Jesus Christ and loved Him and loved Him and loved Him.

And the world has said they're fools, but the world says kind things about them now. In the last 25 years there has been a change, and the world is beginning to believe now that the mystics weren't quite the crazy men they were thought to be. And there has been something of a return, and the great publishing houses like Harper's and others are publishing the works of those enamored saints, those enraptured souls, those whose only rapture was God and Christ, those whose chief delight, the palates of whose souls knew no sweeter taste than the love of God and the love of Christ.

Well, what are the benefits? He says, If any man love me, he shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him. Why does He say that? If any man love Me, he shall be loved of My Father. If any man love Me, I will love him.

Does he make His love for us dependent upon our love for Him? That would contradict John the Apostle, who spake as he was moved by the Holy Ghost and said: We love Him not because we loved Him, but because He loved us. And the love of God always precedes our love and antedates it, always is there first.

But brethren, the love of God is two kinds. There is the latent love of God and the active love of God. The latent love of God is there first, but inoperative, at least in us. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, but the world tonight doesn't know it. And so, the love of God is there, but it's latent, because the world does not respond to it, just as the seeds lie in the ground.

I heard one time a man say in a sermon, and he quoted sources that were authentic. He said that there are parts of Alaska, in the far north country, that have been visited by birds. And those birds have wintered in the south and have picked up seeds of the tropics there, and have carried them in their flight way into the north lands. And they've dropped those seeds there in the north land, and they've fallen down into the earth, and they're lying there.

But they do not sprout nor come to fruition, because the climate there in the north will not wake them. It's too cold, it will not wake them, so they lie dormant. And he said if you could suddenly take to the far north the climate that is in South America or in lower Florida, and transport it and leave it for a few months, he said such an array of beautiful flowers and fruits as you never dreamed would be there. The seeds lie there, carried by the migrating birds from the south land.

Oh, my friend, that only illustrates this, that Jesus Christ, the latent love of God, lies like seed in the earth, waiting for the sunshine of our response, waiting for a new moral climate that can give it life and birth. But it's there, latent, lying there, and God loves every man. God loves that gangster that carries his submachine gun in his trunk of his car or behind the seat of his car.

And God loves that woman procuring down on the street, and God loves that painted hussy out somewhere tonight, and God loves that wicked low man whose mouth foams with iniquity, and God loves the proud, and God loves all men for God so loved the world, but it's a latent love.

It lies like the seeds of the tropics in the far frigid north, and there is no moral climate that can bring it to birth, no response there, but the day that ye love Me, if any man love Me, he shall be loved of My Father. Why, he's been loved of the Father since the foundation of the world.

What does He mean? He means that which is latent shall become active. He means that the seeds of latent love that lie everywhere shall blossom and bloom, and the desert shall blossom like the rose, and that which lay in quiet shall blossom, and we'll know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

My brother, if you will respond to the love of God, and you will love Christ, then God will love you, not that he didn't before, but He couldn't love you actively, only latently, because you did not respond, but now you respond. And as the water suddenly bursts

out of the open fountain, as the smell of perfume suddenly fills the room from the broken alabaster box, so this pent-up love of God will flow out over the human heart, and we will come unto Him and make our abode with Him.

The Christ-loving personality is the habitation of Deity. Oh, I don't know why, I don't know why we don't stand and cheer, I don't know why we don't stand and weep, I don't know how we can endure it, but the Christ-loving soul becomes the habitation of the Deity.

Just as the bush, the acacia bush, there on the plain under the frowning brow of old Sinai, in the backside of the desert, in the cool of the evening when the sun was going down and the nightbirds were beginning to sing their song, just then, halfway in between the day and the night, in the evening time, Moses saw a bush, and lo, it burned with fire, and lo, the bush was not consumed.

And God spake out of the bush, and there was Deity indwelling a bush, an acacia bush, the common bush, as common as the mesquite bush of the South, as common as the little oak of Pennsylvania, my home state, as common as the hedge, and no one would turn twice to look. And yet here was a bush that drew the eyes of the learned, inquisitive Moses, this man that had seen everything, now sees something he'd never seen before, a fire, a deep glowing fire, dwelling in a bush, and it didn't burn.

It was the personality of God indwelling a bush. God burned and burned, and Moses knelt and prayed and took off his shoes and trembled with ecstatic delight in the presence of God, the God of his fathers. So, the human soul that loves Jesus is the acacia bush.

An acacia bush was worth nothing. Nobody would take it and plant it in his yard, nobody would bring it in and carefully trim it and say to his friends, come out in my yard, I want to show you my acacia bush. It was one of the poor worthless things that cluttered the landscape and that nobody cared for, the goats wouldn't eat it. But God chose it and made it a famous bush. And all the bushes of the world are nothing compared with this famous bush of the third of Exodus, because it was the one bush in all the world that had God dwelling in it.

So God takes plain people like you and me. We've got nothing to recommend us, we're nobody, nobody thinks we are. And we know our faults and we know our unworth and we know what poor material we're made of. And we stand in the presence of greatness and say we're just lowly bushes, we don't amount to anything. And yet God, Jesus Christ, says to that lowly bush, if you will love Me, I and My Father will love you with an active love, and that which is latent will become active and burn and glow, and you will be interpenetrated with the personality of Deity, and you will be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and you will have Deity dwelling in your bosom.

Ah, who can be lonely with Deity dwelling in our breasts. And I will manifest myself to Him, not to our physical senses, but to our inner spiritual senses. For always remember that your external man, your outer man, is only a projection outward of that which is inward.

Emerson said that all nature was simply a projection downward of the light of God, a shadow cast by Deity. And that another man, great man, Brumman, said that all the laws of the physical world were simply a projection downward of the laws of the spiritual world.

And if we could perfectly know nature, we'd know by projecting it up infinitely into the presence of God, we'd know how to behave in the presence of God if we know God's world. For God being God always does things the same way, just as the artist, being an artist and being a personality, must always stamp his work always with his own personality, so that the keen eye of his friends will always discover his personality there.

So God, God must always stamp his works with His personality. Why then should we not preach the love of Christ? We've talked about his love for us and we've jiggled it up into poor songs that never should have been written. And it's the love, how He loves us, how He loves us, and we've had, it's been unilateral as you say, coming one direction, always flowing one direction. When is it going to start to flow back?

When is the evangelical church going to begin to see that the down-flowing love of God will not be fully active until it's met with an up-flowing love of man? But if anybody says, I can't love, I can't love, how can I love? The answer is that the love of God will come into you and wake your love and rouse it and help your love so that your poor pitiful cold love will break into song and fire, fired and warmed by the love, by the love of God. The love of God which is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, that's how we can love Him.

I can't of myself love Him, but I'm capable of having that love set aflame within me. I can no more love God by myself than a stove can create fire by itself. But on many a winter night in the state of Pennsylvania with the thermometer hugging zero and that much snow piled everywhere and sometimes covered with ice, after you had ridden or walked the long distances and you'd come into a room where there was that cheerful red pot-bellied stove, you could be warmed by that love.

And if you didn't know better, you'd think the stove was hot. No, it wasn't the stove, it's the fire that's hot, and the stove is the medium through which it flows and flows so hot that it makes it all red. And the red cheeks of a pot-bellied stove in a February day is a sweet, sweet thing for a farm boy to get up close to, better than all your air conditioning.

Nobody can get romantic or write poetry about an air conditioning system. But I'm sure that even I could write a pretty passable poem about the pot-bellied stove, that red cherry colored stove that warms the farmer. Throw the big parka off and lean back there and put your all but frozen feet up as close as you dare and keep backing off, rubbing your hands and gathering heat. But the stove itself is a hunk of cold iron and no more. The fire that's built in it is what matters. And it gives itself up and yields and responds to the indwelling fire.

And so, when He says, if a man love Me, He don't mean if a man is able to love Me, He means if a man wills to love Me, I'll build the fire. He only needs to be just the vehicle, just the vessel. I'll build the fire.

My brother, you might be that one He's looking for, I don't know. You might be that little stove that God's looking for. It's cold now and rusty and maybe you don't attract anybody. But maybe you might be the one that God wants to build a fire in. He'll take the responsibility for the fire if you just yield to Him. And He'll build a fire in your heart that the world will hear about.

He built a fire in the bosom of an Italian and the whole world has talked about him ever since. They called him Francis from the city of Assisi. And we have a Francis in hardly a church service or hardly a place anywhere there's not somebody called Francis. Why? Because this man was called Francis. There was another man named Bernard. And he loved God with a glowing passion. It was he that wrote, Jesus, thou joy of loving heart. Oh Jesus, Jesus, precious Lord. And God built a fire in him and all the world has heard about Bernard.

And an Englishman named Faber, all the world has heard about him. Because God built a fire in the iron receptacle and shone out till the whole world knew. And I will manifest myself unto him and we will come and dwell in him.

In the society to which you and I belong, the Christian and Missionary Alliance. It's not another religion, just a protestant church group, it's all a missionary group. But it came into being not by a theologian, not by an expositor, not by a man with steps and charts and maps, but by a Presbyterian man who loved Jesus Christ so much that it was a fire in his breast and he couldn't keep it down. He didn't write very good poetry, he wasn't a great poet, but everything he did write had to do with his love for Jesus Christ.

So there was born this missionary society. And by the end of 1956 we hope to have nearly 800 missionaries on the field, or perhaps fully 800 missionaries on the field, all around the world. All burst out of one man's heart.

Isn't there somebody here tonight that would like to love God, like to love Christ more than anybody? Well, do you love him? Do you love him? You must love him a little or you wouldn't want to love him at all. If, as I preach, there's a desire to love him, then you do love him.

For the heart that doesn't love Him isn't interested in loving Him. If you want to love Him, you do love Him, a little bit. But the difference between loving Him a little bit and loving Him as much as you could is the difference between ashes with a little ember burning and the outpoured fury and glory of Vesuvius. It's the difference between a candle somewhere and the blazing sun. Oh, that we might love him more than we do.

Next Sunday night, Christmas Day, in the evening, I don't know who will be here nor how many. I don't know whether everybody will figure Sunday is Christmas, not a day to go to church. I don't know that. But I know there will be some here. And I know that I'll preach next Sunday night, if I'm still on this earth and in health, I'll preach about how I can know whether I do or do not love Jesus Christ. And after that, God willing, the new year, will go into John, and close it soon.

But next Sunday night, "How I can Know Whether I love Him or Not." Well, God bless you. I poured out my heart, giving you what I think God gave me, and nobody can do any better than that, I think, except to be an angel.

Now, Father, wilt Thou bless these words? We want to love Thee. We want to love Thy Son. We want to love the Holy Ghost. We want to love the Trinity until it becomes a delight, until our Christianity ceases to be an escape and becomes a mighty, poured-out passion of enjoyable love.

Save us, we pray Thee, our God. Save us from loving Thee for what we can get out of Thee. Help us to love Thee rather for what Thou art. O Jesus, Jesus, dearest Lord, we can't say forgive me if I say for very love Thy precious name, because that indicates that we're saying we love Thee so much we can't control it. Lord, we control it pretty well. Forgive us, Lord, because we can control it. Forgive us, we pray, because we don't dance with joy.

Forgive us, because we're not like little children Christmas morning. Forgive us that we're so cold-faced and staid and so poised in control of ourselves. Help us to let go and let go until our love for Thee becomes a torrent, flowing like a torrent, rising like a fiery fountain.

Then Thou wilt love us in a measure Thou canst not now do. Thou wilt manifest Thyself to us. We'll walk all day and all night and be all night with Thy love burning in our hearts. We'll be the tabernacle of the Most High God, the Shekinah, where the Deity dwells. My God, no angel, no angel could rise to that. No seraphim could top it. No cherub before the throne could rise higher.

Help us now, down on this earth, clothed in this clay tabernacle, to have such a burning fire within our bosoms that people will find it out and know we love God. We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.