**Sermon June 15, 2015**

**Text: Luke 9:51-62 Theme: Jesus Radical Love Makes us Radically Devoted!**

1. Radically Devoted to Loving Even Our Enemies!
2. Radically Devoted to Jesus Above All Other Priorities!

**Introduction:** I wonder how many of you know Chris Chapman. I suspect not many. But Chris Chapman and his fiancée, Rachel Friedman, made national news in November 2010 because Rachel was the victim of a freak accident. The two were scheduled to be married in a just a couple of weeks. Rachel was at her own bachelorette party at someone’s home where there was a pool. In a gesture of fun, one of her dearest friends pushed her into the shallow end. Rachel hit her head on the bottom of the pool and shattered her 6th cervical vertebrae which left her paralyzed from the shoulders down. All wedding plans came to a screeching halt. Recovery in the ICU, tests and months of physical and occupational therapy followed. However, a year later than was planned, the wedding still happened. When asked, Chris Chapman said he never once seriously considered leaving Rachel. Isn’t that amazing love?

Chris Chapman is a model for the rest of us of what Jesus Christ is like. Jesus Christ is our groom, who looked down from heaven and saw that we are all spiritually disabled. All of us are spiritual quadriplegics before him. Jesus knew that in our relationship with him, we would always be the weaker partner that he would always have to be the caregiver for the entire duration of our relationship with him – that is, until we passed to glory. Even much more than Chris, Jesus saw what he was getting into and never once considered leaving us. You can see Jesus’ incredible devotion in many of the Gospel stories about this life. Just look at Luke 9:51 before us. Luke’s description of Jesus comes from late in his three year ministry, ***“51As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.” –*** In the verse right before this one, Jesus told his disciples, for the second time, exactly what was going to happen to him. He said he would be delivered into the hands of men. And by what I just read we know that Jesus knew it meant torture and death. Jesus knew that he was soon to die for every single sin you and I would ever commit. He knew that we would be the spiritual weak link in our relationship with him even after we had come to faith. He knew that he would need to forgive us over and over and over again. He knew that he would have to show unlimited patience and kindness to us for the length of our marriage to him and yet, (pause) he resolutely set his face for Jerusalem. Like Chris Chapman, Jesus said, “Let’s do this!” and he married us for eternal life! That is amazing love, isn’t it?

I don’t want to ever sound like I am minimizing the loss and struggle that Rachel Friedman - Chapman has experienced through her accident. But I just want to ask one question, “What do you think she gained through this experience?” Don’t you think that more than most brides who stand at the altar and hear their husband say, “For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.” - that more than most brides - she felt secure when her man said that? Think of it. She knew that he had already experienced a huge loss with her and yet he didn’t leave her! And how devoted do you think she became to Chris, who was and is so devoted to her? I’d guess that she loves making him happy in any way that she can. He is her selfless, giving, caring knight in shining armor! Now, what I have spelled out for you is what Jesus’ devotion ***for*** us - does ***to*** us. His Apostle John said it the best, “We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19) We love Jesus because he first loved us and we love everyone Jesus loves because he first loved us. Or (pause) do we?

This is where the breakdown in our lives occurs. You would think that if we loved Jesus we would also love everyone he loves but that’s where we show our sinful weakness in contrast to his love. We are all in the process of “getting it” that his love makes us love others just as much as he does. And it shows up in the story here in Luke. There is no question that James and John loved Jesus who loved them. But they did not easily get it that Christ’s love made them devoted to loving their enemies just as he did. Look at what happened. (Read Luke 9:52-56).

***52And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” 55But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56Then he and his disciples went to another village.***

Jesus was traveling straight down through Samaria on his way to Jerusalem. The Jews and Samaritans were bitter enemies most of the time. They not only didn’t like one another, each believed that the other party was rejected by God for their stubborn beliefs. They both felt that they had God on their side. They believed that God was just waiting to judge their rival. So, think of it. James and John had seen the incredible good heart of Jesus in feeding the five thousand and by doing many other miracles. They knew that he was God who had come to save the world. Just how he would do that, they were not sure. But they trusted that he was “the man!” So, when the Samaritans whom they already had written off, resisted Jesus coming to their town, they naturally felt it was time. These are two of the men who had been given power to cast out demons and heal the sick. They had been sent out with that power and had been movers and shakers in the community. They were feeling their power from Christ and their devotion to Christ and they had recently beheld his fiery glory on the mount of transfiguration, so they said, ***“Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven and story them***.” ***But Jesus rebuked them.*** – (Pause) But Jesus rebuked them. I wonder what he said. Some early handmade copies of Scripture record that Jesus said***, “You do not know what kind of spirit you are of, for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.”*** Not all hand written copies have these words so the NIV translators have moved them to a footnote. Many pastors and scholars believe they belong in the text. Regardless, this is what Jesus was trying to teach the disciples for his entire ministry. He came to save and not destroy sinners. And when we are devoted to Jesus we are devoted to saving and loving sinners too. I think James and John got the message but do we?

There is a little of James and John in all of us. We all have wanted to see other people get their due at one time or another. And when we are vindictive and want to get even or rejoice when someone gets justice, we are just like they were. We want to help God “get em!” Thankfully, God is patient with us the same way Jesus was with James and John, (pause) but he still wants us to change. He wants us to love our enemies the way he does. He wants us to be like Christ to them and forgive them while we hold out the gospel to them. Who is it right now that you hope gets justice from God? (Pause) Listen to Jesus. He is lovingly rebuking you. He came to save them and not destroy them.

It is easy to stand here and preach to you how ***we should*** love our enemies, it is altogether ***different to be able*** to forgive those who hurt or reject us. So, how do we grow in our ability to love and forgive? We cannot do it in our own strength. It takes a supernatural Savior to lead our hearts to forgive. So, we have to be with Jesus more and draw from his strength. That means spending more time in his Gospels learning from him. That means spending more time in prayer begging him to give us his heart through his Holy Spirit. That means meditating on his word deeply in our devotional lives. We want to have a big Jesus and little enemy and not a big enemy and a little Jesus when someone hurts or rejects us. (Pause) And why do we welcome the struggle to forgive? Because we are devoted to our husband, Jesus, who is so devoted to us, not because our enemies will change, or promise to never hurt us again or because they have found a way to ask for forgiveness. As John said in his first letter, “We love because he first loved us.” (1 John 4:19) Isn’t it neat to see that John, the man inspired to write those words, is the man Jesus rebuked? If John can grow in Christ to love others, so can we!

**II.**

In the next verses from Luke’s hand, he reveals another way we show devotion to Christ. He does it through recording three verbal exchanges between Jesus and would be followers. We will take them all as a whole. Each one teaches us that Jesus’ devotion to us leads us to be devoted to him above all other priorities. Get ready for a shocking look at Christ.

***57As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”*** ***58Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” 59He said to another man, “Follow me.” But he replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father. ”60Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” 61Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.” 62Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”***

When you hear the first man say that he will follow Jesus wherever he will go, you think, “Now that is the kind of follower Jesus wants.” So, it is shocking to hear Jesus say, “Well, that means you will be homeless like I am.” Jesus knows the heart. Too many people want to follow Jesus because they feel it will mean a better earthly life. They are not really wanting to be near Jesus as their Savior. The truth is that when you are with Jesus you are always at home, no matter where you are. Think about all the times in your life that you were out of sorts because you felt like you didn’t belong. It makes you long for that place where you know you belong. Like the old song, “Sometimes you just want to go where everybody knows your name and they are always glad you came.” But if you follow Christ and devote yourself to doing everything he would want you to do, you will constantly be moved along as a pilgrim in the world. You won’t find security in the world by following Jesus. But you will find security. Right before he died Jesus said it this way, ***“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*** (John 16:33) See! Jesus will never let you rest accept to rest in him. He wants us to find our place in life inside our hearts with him. We are married to him by faith and we follow him in devotion wherever he goes, “in sickness and in health, for better for worse for richer or for poorer as long as we shall live.” Whether we feel at home somewhere on this earth is not his biggest concern. Jesus confronts us with this reality. Jesus’ radical devotion to us makes us radically devoted to him. (Pause)

Now, the second and third men seem sincere enough too. One is just asking to go bury his dad. The other just wants to say “Good bye.” Why in the world would Jesus say such sharp words to them? ***“Let the dead bury their own dead. But you go and proclaim the kingdom of God”?***  and ***, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.”***

It’s not like Jesus doesn’t care about family. He created family. From the cross he would take care of his mother. Jesus wants us to serve our families. (Pause) But he wants us to serve him first. Let me put it another way. Jesus is our God, who created us, who saved us and who will guide our lives and will be there to greet us in heaven. Our earthly families are gifts from him. But they do not define us. They are temporary and they will pass. In heaven all of us will be God’s family bearing God’s family name (Ephesians 3:14). So, all of our earthly family priorities, line up under our service to God in his family. God tells us to love and serve our earthly families but how to do that is all up to him. (Pause) Let me say that again. God tells us to love and serve our earthly families but how to do that is all up to him. Sometimes, he calls us to deny family pleasures and comforts to follow him. You might experience this when you have to say “NO.” to some temptation a spouse or child is posing to you. You might have to leave your family for a time to serve Christ in another way. You might have to miss some important family event to serve Jesus. But what that looks like in your life only you and Jesus can decide. But make no mistake, when we are devoted to Jesus Christ we will put him first even before our family. Jesus’ radical devotion to us makes us radically devoted to him!

(Pause) If we take a giant step back from what happened between Jesus and these three men, we can see that the whole point really isn’t about how to manage and balance family and God. It is about having Jesus Christ as the only “Number One,” in your life. Everything else in your life is number two. Everything else is temporary. The details of how we manage everything under Christ is for a different sermon. This narrative is recorded so you and I will learn that Jesus comes first, always, always, always. Why? Because he is our Savior. No one else is our Savior. We live for an audience of One. Everything we do for family or with family or for church or with church is to first be for Christ.

You cannot thoughtfully read this exchange without deep soul searching. You and I must ask, “What would Jesus say about my priorities today if I were to tell him to wait for me until I could go and do this or that first?” Remember as you search your heart, that he knows your heart better than you do. What is it that you know must change today in your priorities in order for you to put Christ and his word and ministry first in your own personal life? I cannot answer it for you but Jesus is telling you to revisit your priorities and answer it for yourself. What would you do if you were one of these men and Jesus said to you what he said to them? Whatever you need to change, make that change and follow Jesus. (Pause)

**Conclusion:** At the beginning I told you about Chris and Rachel Chapman in 2010. But now it is 2016. You might wonder where they are today. Well, they are still together, happily married and God has blessed them with a baby girl. Rachel has very limited use of her arms and no use of her legs. But they are still together and totally devoted to one another. I would guess that after six years, like all couples, they have realized big challenges in getting along, getting bye and getting through with one another. But they are still there for each other. In the same way, your husband Jesus is still there for you too. He will never reject you just because spiritually speaking you are weak in the arms and legs and you easily forget to love your enemies. He signed up to love you all the way to the end. I wonder how Rachel feels whenever she is tempted to give up serving her knight in shining armor, Chris. I would guess she snaps out of it pretty quickly when she thinks of how unconditionally he still loves her - from the start of their marriage till now. He chose her with all her weaknesses and he still loves her with the same. So, how do you snap out of it when you start to grow weary of making Christ first in your life? Just remember his love for you that has accepted you with all your warts too. He is still there for you faithfully too. Then honor him by loving and forgiving your enemies and by giving him the “Number One” spot in your heart in every situation. AMEN