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Heavenly Father, thank you for this beautiful day. Thank you for another chance to come together and to worship you. Thank you for the great love you have shown us. Please open our hearts now to receive your wonderful, beautiful tree. In the name of your Son, Jesus, amen. Well I want to start today by making an addendum to last week. There was one thing I was going to say last week and I forgot. So last week I spoke on two things. Step up, meaning we got a long way ahead of us for Keith to get here and we need to get excited and start, we can't just wait for him to show up, we got to start doing things now. And the other thing was be excellent. That was as you consider your body, your mind, your finances, your job, and all the different areas of your life. Commit those and dedicate those to God and be excellent with how you treat your body and your mind and be excellent in how you work at your job and so forth. One thing I forgot to say was it's possible that you would hear something like that and you think, "Oh, if I'm going to be excellent, that means I need to work a lot harder." Well, part of being excellent with your body and mind is making sure that you get the rest you need. So if you hear that message and you are a workaholic and that just made you work even more, be excellent in your rest. Not too much, not too little because part of being excellent with your body and mind is making sure it gets the rest it needs in order to operate. That was last week. I'm going to continue now this week. I mentioned last week that the key to that excellence, the key to that committing yourself to God in all those different areas is love. Your love of God will be the strength and the driving force behind being able to be excellent and being able to commit yourself to God. Love, our love for Him, when we are overflowing in it, when we are operating in it, it flips the easy switch on the Christian life. And if you find the Christian life difficult right now, there's a good chance that you're not operating out of love. If it's hard for you to get out of bed and to read your Bible and to do your quiet time and if worship seems to go too long or whatever, it's probably a sign that you have a lack of love in your heart towards God. You need to be careful of this because when Jesus told the story of how he said, "Many will come to me on the day of judgment," and he'll say, "God, look at all these things I did for you. I cast out demons and I healed the sick and I did all this stuff," and he'll say, "I never knew you away from me. You evil do." And so be very careful about thinking your Christian life is all about behavior and without love because love is the key. I mentioned before about what they call the cargo cult mentality, and the term comes from right after World War II when America was hopping on little islands on its way over to Japan. And after we all left, a few years later some anthropologists went over and they studied the natives living on those islands, and the natives had started building bamboo aircraft control towers and they were wearing coconut headphones and they were out there doing marching drills in the yard because when the American soldiers were coming through, they brought all of these goods and supplies and the island was really blessed. And when all of that stuff went away, they wanted it back and they thought the best way to do it would be to go through all of the behaviors that they saw these guys doing and then all of that stuff would start coming back. So be careful about a Christian life that's a bunch of behavior that you think is going to earn you something with God because Jesus tells us there's going to be people in heaven who cast out demons and who are going to hear away from me, I never knew you. It's got to be grounded in love. This whole thing, this whole Christian life is about our relationship with God and developing a loving relationship with Him. And when you do, Christianity goes from being a chore to being a delight. It is the easiest thing to read your Bible and spend time with God and you'll find yourself wishing worship lasted longer and it's the most amazing, like I said, flipping the easy switch and as you delight and delight yourself more and more in God, as you fall more and more in love with Him, the ultimate place that we're headed for is complete abandonment of our lives towards God. Now as I was researching this sermon, I typed Christian abandonment into Google and all of the results were about dealing with abandonment issues. My parents abandoned me as a kid or I divorced my spouse if they've abandoned me or all these other things and we're not talking about abandonment issues. We're talking about laying down your self-interest, your goals and everything for your life and taking instead God's interests and making His interests and His goals your own for your life. I have a metaphor. I have a metaphor for that. So the heathen, the heathen person has got all these things orbiting around themselves in their life. They've got their job, their friends, their finances, they've got all these things orbiting around them and they say, "My life is good. My life is complete. I don't need anything else. I've got everything I want." But then someone says, "You know what? I'm still missing something. Maybe I'll give this Jesus a try." So they go and they find Jesus and they add Him into that orbit. And for a while they're onto something. They're like, "This is in the right direction, but then one of two things happens. Either it's not quite right and so they abandon Jesus or they realize, 'Hey, Jesus wants more than being just one of the things orbiting around me.' And so they take out all of the other things and then it's just Jesus. Jesus is the only thing orbiting around them in their life. Jesus wants something more. He wants us to orbit Him. He wants to be the center of it all. That's a good metaphor, but what does it mean? It means we destroy our self-interest and replace them with His interests. You'll know if you haven't figured it out yet, and I'm not saying I've figured it out yet, but you'll know you haven't when something in your life gets shaken and it causes you to get shaken. If something in your life gets shaken, like your finances, and that causes you to get shaken, that means you're standing on your finances. You're getting shaken along with whatever else is getting shaken. If your relationships get shaken and you get shaken, that means you are building your interests and your self-worth on your relationships. But when you build on the rock of Jesus, and when your relationships or your money or your health or any of that other stuff shakes, Jesus never shakes. You will be steady and you will be firm. Abandonment means we will stop living for our own good and start living for His glory. When we are faced with a new opportunity in life or a new situation, our first instinct won't be, "How will this affect my income?" It won't be, "How will this affect my status?" Or, "How will this advance my career?" When you are abandoned to Jesus, those new things in your life, your first thing will say, "How can I glorify God with this? How will this impact my dedication to God?" You see, God does not just want people who express a belief in Him. He wants people whose lives have been unquestionably altered by their love and devotion to Him. It's not just enough to say you believe in something. The life must overflow with that truth, with that love. In other words, He wants 100% completely committed disciples of love, those who have abandoned themselves in pursuit of the lover of their soul. This is what the Bible is talking about when Paul says, "I affirm by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus, our Lord, I die daily." When Jesus says, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of his Father with his angels and will reward each according to his works." I know I've spoken on love before and loving God, but what I want you to hear me say today is finish it. Perfect it. Complete it. Be excellent in it. I borrowed from last week. Let me deal with some discouragement right now. You're not going to perfect it in a day. You're not going to have this wrapped up by bedtime. That's why Paul said, "I die every day." He has to die every day. It's not a switch you flip and it's done. It's a constant continual turning to God. You must daily turn to it and pursue it. Every time you find your heart longing for something else in this life, you must say, "No, Jesus, I lay that down and I give my heart to you and I pursue you. You are the lover of my soul." When you think that you have messed up and that you can't turn back to him or that he's staring at you with the angry eyes, you've got to remember that you cannot out sin the love of God. No sin you ever commit will ever be bigger than God's love for you. So you must just daily remind yourself of that and turn back and turn back and constantly re-aim your focus. Oswald Chambers said, "The viewpoint of a worker for God must not be as near the highest as he can get. It must be the highest." Be careful to maintain strenuously God's point of view. It has to be done every day, bit by bit. I'm going to read you the story of the alabaster box. "Then one of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went to the Pharisee's house and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil and stood at his feet behind him weeping. She began to wash his feet with her tears and wipe them with the hair of her head, and she kissed his feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he spoke to himself saying, 'This man, if he were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is touching him for she is a sinner.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Simon, I have something to say to you.' But he said, 'Teacher, say it.' There was a certain creditor who had two debtors, one owed five hundred denarii and the other fifty. And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him more?' Simon answered and said, 'Suppose the one whom he forgave more?' And he said to him, 'You have rightly judged.' And he turned to the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I entered your house. You gave me no water for my feet, but she has washed my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair of her head. You gave me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss my feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint my head with oil, but this woman has anointed my feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. To whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.' Friends, when this woman got to heaven, she heard, 'I know you. I know you.' It's not because she had a big famous ministry. It's not because she wrote one of the books in the New Testament. She didn't start a church. She was known by Christ because she loved Christ. Love is key. Love is everything. We must perfect our love. Like I said, this is not something that I have achieved myself. It's something that I'm working on and I'm going to work on it every day for the rest of my life. I encourage you to join me in that. But what little I have started to put together about this life of abandonment, I've made some notes on what that does and doesn't look like. First of all, it doesn't mean you become a monk. You do not shut yourself up in your closet and read your Bible and pray all the time and cease to have contact with the rest of the world for some more holy life. That's not what it is. Again, Oswald Chambers, he says, "The key to missionary devotion means being attached to nothing and no one except our Lord himself. It does not mean being detached from things externally. Our Lord was amazingly in and out among ordinary things. His detachment was on the inside for its God." A life of abandonment, a life of complete love does not mean that you are perfect and that you are no longer tempted. Now I will say that I know in the times of my life when I have been focusing and I've just filled up my heart with love towards God, it's at those moments that I find it incredibly easy to say no to temptation because I remember how much it hurts the one I love. But it doesn't mean temptation goes away and it doesn't mean you'll be perfect the rest of your life. It's okay. God still loves you. He'll keep forgiving you. He wants you to continue to pursue him. The life of abandonment does not mean you will no longer have the trials, burdens, and difficulties of life. There was a false belief in Jesus' time that Jesus had to deal with that the more misfortune you had in your life, the more you must have upset your God or that your parents must have upset God. And this is not the case. If living a life pleasing to God resulted in a less happy, safe life, then Jesus would have never been crucified on the cross. Neither would the disciples. Actually what we tend to find is the more closely you live the life God wants, the more you'll face hardship in this life. The good news is that he'll be with you through all of that. And it also, this life, you won't always feel like that bubbly, giddy, just started dating high schooler. That's not the kind of love, that's not the kind of emotion that you're going to always be experiencing. Sometimes you'll experience it. But other times it'll be that deep, still quiet love that you see between couples who have been married for decades. They don't even have to speak. They can just sit there and be confident and assured of the love they have for each other. The more you abandon yourself to God, the more you will feel love, the more you will feel complete. You have found the thing that your life is supposed to have been about all this time. You'll have peace in your heart during storms, holiness, and other Christian activities. Like I said, it will be easier, it will be a delight. You'll have the energy to live a life that you've been trying, working so hard to live and failing at. You'll start to rearrange your priorities. Your life externally might not change a whole bunch. You probably aren't going to move or get a new job or anything like that, but your priorities will shift. Rather than working for the money, you'll be working to either use that money for God or you'll be at your job because you know you need to minister and witness to the other people at your job because you know that they don't have Jesus. You'll find joy in all the little bits of life. You'll find joy during times of sadness. Stop worrying so much about your future. You'll become like a little child in confidence and security. We've all seen little kids who just run around the house and get in all kinds of trouble and try and stick forks into electric sockets and they don't worry about that stuff because they know that they've got a parent following around who's going to prevent them from making a bad mistake. So they have that security and that confidence that they are completely taken care of and you will feel like that in your life as you abandon yourself to God more and more. Your past sins and mistakes will no longer haunt, control, or destroy you. This is a beautiful one if you haven't experienced it yet. Things in your past that should weigh you down, will that prevent you from opening your mouth or from stepping up and volunteering? Those things that you think are going to get you in trouble? They'll be gone and you'll realize that if God paid such a great price, if he put a life of his son on the cross to get rid of those things, he's not going to bring them up again. He doesn't want to deal with that stuff once it's been dealt with. He doesn't want to hold it over your head like some of the bad relationships we've been in. They just keep drudging up the mistakes of the past. God is not like that. He wants to deal with it and be done with it forever and stop looking backwards. Your fear won't be gone. You'll still have fears that they'll be swallowed up in your great love for God. This is how missionaries are able to do what they do. It's not that they're not terrified of going to a Muslim nation where they may be killed for believing in Jesus and for telling people about Jesus. They're terrified. But their love for God is greater. That love swallows up that fear. It doesn't matter if you're going to a Muslim nation or if you're just telling the woman next to you in the checkout line about Jesus, your love will swallow up that fear. You'll have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control bubbling out of you. You'll be able to suffer long and be kind. You won't envy. You won't parade yourself. You won't be puffed up or behave rudely. You won't seek your own. You won't be provoked. You will think no evil. You will not rejoice in iniquity, but you will rejoice in the truth. You will bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things. You want to arrive in heaven already known by God when you get there. Stop padding out your resume and start filling up your heart with love for God. Do we have our open worship now? I pray that you spend some time thinking about "is amazing, unshaking, limitless love to you. Meditate on that. Let that transform your viewpoint, your desires. If there's that thing that's in your life that you've been pursuing and you know that it's getting in the way of God, lay it down before Him. Say, "God, I'm sorry for being so obsessed with this. Help me to pursue you now. Help me to make you my focus. Help me to plant myself on you so when those other things in my life get shaken, I don't get shaken." Please spend some time now building up your heart, your love for God. Heavenly Father, we love You. Please help us to understand Your great love for us so that we can pack that into our hearts and return it to You, God. Help us to knock down anything in our heart that tries to pull our love, our dedication, and our focus away from you, even a millimeter. Help us to knock those things out of our life. Please remind us, God, that every time that we turn to You, that You receive us with love and with joy and that You are excited and eager for us to die daily, to turn to You moment by moment, bit by bit, to continue to pursue You in love until our whole life is abandoned and replaced with Your will. And Your glory is on our hearts, not our tongues. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.