



Sermon Title: The Hall Closet

Matthew 26:17-35, 69-75

Matthew 27:1-10

John 21

Speaker: Dr. Scott Dudley

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Thank you guys for being here. It's great to see you guys, those of you in the room, and those of you who are joining us online. As some of you know, my wife is perhaps the least sentimental person on the planet. She's just a very practical person. So for instance, if I write her a note, nice things about how much I love her and stuff like that, very often she will read that note standing over the recycle bin and drop it in when she's done. Now she's kept some of those notes, but I have watched many of my carefully crafted romantic words go into the recycle bin along with my heart. But she loves me, I think. I'm pretty sure she loves me. She's just super, super practical. And the upside of that is that I have zero pressure on me to be romantic.

So that's cool. But that thing I just said jokingly, she loves me, I think. Do you ever feel that way about God? Like He loves me, I think, or I've been told that He loves me. But have you experienced His love for you? Because I think a lot of people haven't or don't experience it consistently. We're in a sermon series about how the most important characteristic of a follower of Jesus is to be marked by His love. And Jesus love is no weak emotion. Jesus love is the most powerful force there is, and it makes us brave, it makes us bold, it makes us protectors, it makes us defenders. When we experience His love, it leaves a mark, it changes us. But I think one of the things that prevents us from experiencing His love is there are parts of our lives we just don't let Him into. We just don't let Him come very close to. Namely, our sin and our shame.

This summer, Pastor Rich mentioned a book called *My Heart - Christ's Home*, where Jesus comes into a man's heart, which is like a home with many rooms. That's the metaphor of the book. And the man invites Jesus into the library parts of his life to refine his intellectual

life. And then invites Jesus into the dining room parts of his life so Jesus can refine his appetites and his desires. Invites Jesus into the workshop parts of his life so Jesus can use his skills for the kingdom of God. But then they pass a hall closet and there's an odor coming from it. And Jesus says, "What's that? What's in there?" And the man doesn't want to let Jesus anywhere near that because... And the man says to Jesus, "Oh, it's just a couple of private things I've locked away that I don't want anybody to know about." But Jesus says, "Unless you let me love you in there, you will never experience the full force of my love in a way that makes you brave, bold, and more loving."

And so often we don't let Jesus come close to those things that we don't want anybody to know about. And we know Jesus knows them. Sort of theologically, we know that. And we might even, quote, "confess them real quickly," like, "Jesus, please forgive me for this. Amen." But mostly we try to ignore them. We try to minimize them. We try to normalize them. We try to pretend it's not that big of a deal. Sometimes we can't even admit those things to ourselves because we feel such shame about them. We won't even let ourselves think about those things. The greed, the lust, the ways we hurt people. This week I talked to a pastor who said he just preached a sermon on forgiveness, and afterwards a man came up to him and said, "I'm not really in conflict with anybody. There's nobody I need to forgive." And then just a few minutes later, this same man casually mentioned that he has a brother he hasn't talked to in 10 years. I think we found your problem, sir. I think it's right there.

Now, on the other hand, there are some of you who are very aware of what's in your hall closet. You're very aware of your sin and your sin. Some of you're like, "Just the whole closet. That's it? Because man, I got stuff in the attic and the garage and the back seat of my car and I'm just like a sin hoarder." And Jesus says, "Unless you let me get close to you there, you'll never experience the full power of my love or be changed by it." Because it's only when we are fully known that we can feel fully loved. Otherwise, whenever someone, including Jesus, says I love you, the first thought is always, yeah, but if you knew what was in that hall closet, I'm not sure you would.

That's the problem with one of Jesus disciples named Judas. Judas had decided to betray Jesus by leading the authorities to Him so they could arrest, torture, and crucify Him. And at the Last Supper, right before Jesus is crucified, it says, "While they were eating, Jesus said, 'Truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' Then Judas, the one who would betray Him said, 'Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?'" Judas is a little clueless. Jesus answered, "You've said so." So Judas is lying. He knows full well what he's about to do. He just doesn't want Jesus anywhere near that. He doesn't want anyone else to know about it. So he says, "Surely it's not me, Lord?" And Jesus says, "Yeah, pretty much it's you Judas." And sure enough, a few hours later, Judas betrays Jesus by leading the authorities to Him so they can arrest Him.

And then as always happens when we sin, then he has to face the consequences. And the text says, "When Judas who had betrayed Him saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse. I have sinned for I have betrayed innocent blood." And then he went away and hanged himself. And just parenthetically, sometimes people through no fault of their own and not because of anything they've done feel so hopeless they think about suicide. And if that's you, please talk to someone, a pastor, a counselor because there is hope. So please don't suffer alone. In Judas case, it's different. In Judas case, it is because of something he's done. He believes Jesus can't possibly love him or forgive him because of the terrible thing that he just did. So he doesn't even try to seek Jesus grace, doesn't even try to seek Jesus forgiveness, doesn't let Jesus anywhere near that hall closet.

Do you ever feel like you are beyond loving? Do you ever feel like you are not lovable for who knows what assortment of reasons? But one of the most famous verses in the Bible, Jesus says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Okay, Jesus didn't just say that so athletes could have something to tattoo on their arms. He said that because He meant that God so loved. Who? The world. And who does the world include? You, me, the world, even Judas. And He didn't just love, He so loved us that He came himself in the person of Jesus, died to pay the price for our sins so that we could be reconciled to God.

The Bible says, "For a good person, someone might possibly dare to die, but God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, while we were in the midst of our sinning, while we were shoulder deep in our sin, while we were committing those sins, even in that moment, Christ died for us." Not when we had our act together when we were still sinners. Jesus died for cold-hearted people, people who ignore the needs of others, people steeped in sexual sin, greedy people, people who will never love Him back.

When our kids were little, we would sometimes read them this book called Love You for Always. It's a kid's book and it's about a mom who sings this song to her baby boy every night, "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always. As long as I'm living my baby you'll be." It's a cute book, but then it takes a creepy turn. And if you know the book, you know what I'm talking about, right? Because she keeps singing this to the boy as he grows up. And finally, at the end of the book, this mom drives over to her middle-aged son's house, sneaks into his house and looks at him while he's sleeping, and sings him that song. Mom had attachment issues. Seriously, woman, get some help for yourself.

And some of you have been scarred by having that book read to you or reading it yourself to your kids. I just want you to know we have prayer ministers available for you after the service. But as a parent, I get it. When my kids were little, I would. I'd go into the room at night and I'd watch them sleep and I'd be like, "Oh, they're so cute." I was obsessed with them. I know some of you right here today, maybe God feels far from you,

maybe you don't believe in God, maybe you think God can't possibly love you because of something you did or something you didn't do. I'm just here to tell you, He is obsessed with you. Like tonight when you're sleeping, He's going to go, "Oh, look at him. I love it when he breathes like that." God is obsessed with you. Jesus loves you, even when we don't love Him back. Even when we don't love Him back.

If this were any other person, we would say it's dysfunctional. Right? Jesus, you need better boundaries. Jesus, you need to stop this obsession with people who are never going to love you back. He can't. He can't. Can't help himself. The Bible says, "God doesn't just have love, God is love." Every other religion says things like, God is holy, God is righteous, maybe even God is angry. But God is love, that's what He is. We only see that in the God who comes to us in Jesus.

Judas didn't believe that Jesus could love him because of what he had done. So he doesn't even try to bring his sin, bring his shame to Jesus. Doesn't even seek forgiveness from Jesus because he believes he's beyond loving, beyond forgiveness. Contrast that to the other disciples at the Last Supper, because Judas wasn't the only one sinning that night. Oh, no, no. The text also says, "A dispute arose among the disciples as to which of them was considered to be the greatest," at the Last Supper. Seriously? The guy you have followed for three years is about to be crucified and you get in a fight over who's going to be the greatest. To me, more amazing than the fact that Jesus loves bad people is that Jesus loves irritating people like His disciples. And then there was Peter. Jesus says to Peter, "Before this night is over, you're going to deny that you even know me three times."

And Peter said, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." But then just a few hours later when he was asked if he was one of His followers, Peter denied knowing Jesus. Not once, not twice, but three times. And then it says, "When the rooster crowed, Peter remembered what Jesus had said, and he went out and wept bitterly." Same reaction as Judas. Regret, remorse, shame. In fact, so much shame that even after Jesus has raised from the dead, Peter still wasn't sure he could bring his sin and his shame to Jesus, wasn't sure he could let Jesus into that hall closet. So he says, "I'm going out to fish." That may be the loneliest line in the whole Bible. He is so overcome with shame, so convinced he cannot be loved, so convinced he has canceled God's grace for him that he goes back to his old job.

And then the other disciples said, "We'll go with you," which is a beautiful picture of friendship and community. So they go fishing, and then Jesus shows up on the shore and Peter sees Him. And it says, "When Peter saw Him, he jumped into the water, the other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish." I love that line. Peter's like, "See you guys. I'm going swimming." And the other disciples are working up a sweat rowing the boat like, "Stupid Peter, he always gets out of the hard work." And then Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" And three times Peter says, "Yes, I do." The text says

that after the third time, Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him for the third time. Hurt because the three times Jesus asks him mirrors the three times Peter denied even knowing Him.

Peter and Judas both sinned, both stabbed Jesus in the back, one crucial difference. When Peter saw Jesus, he jumped in the water and swam to Him. Judas ran from Jesus with his shame, Peter ran to Jesus with his shame and let Jesus engage him at the deepest point of his sin and shame and embarrassment, which is what Jesus is doing when He is asking three times. He's getting in there, he's kind of cleaning the house. He's getting in Peter's soul and digging around in there. And it hurts, but by letting Jesus into that closet, he experiences the full power of Jesus love for him. Because every time Peter says "Yes, Lord, I love you," Jesus responded by saying, "Feed my sheep." In other words, He's showing Peter, He still believes in him, He still has a plan and a purpose for him. He's saying to Peter, "I know what you did, but you are still my man, Peter. You are still my man."

He doesn't say to Peter, "Oh, don't worry about it. No big deal. That's all right." Doesn't say that. What He says is, "This sin does not define you. I still believe in you. I still love you. I still have a plan and purpose for your life." And then the next time we see Peter, you turn the page, is in the Book of Acts where he's boldly proclaiming the love of Jesus. Eventually, he gets killed for following Jesus because Jesus love is no weak emotion, it is powerful, and it made Peter brave and bold, and strong. Because, unlike Judas, Peter let Jesus into that hall closet and found that even there, Jesus still loved him. Because unless we let Jesus love us at our worst, we will not feel fully loved because we'll always be thinking, yeah, but there's that hall closet stuff. But when you let Jesus in even there, and I'll say how we do that in a minute, that's when we feel bone-deep love.

The worst is known. We are still loved. And that grace was available to Judas just as it was to Peter. And had Judas responded like Peter did, even that sin could have been forgiven. There is no sin so great that it can cancel Jesus love for you. There is no sin so great that it can cancel Jesus love for you. Yeah, but pastor, you don't know what I've done. No sin so great. Yeah, but if you only knew my greed, my lust, my this, my that. No sin. Yeah, but pastor, what you got to understand is... Stop arguing with me. I'm your pastor. There is no sin. There's nothing you can do to cancel Jesus love for you. Do you believe that? Do you believe that? Because when you do, it leaves a mark.

In fact, who do you think was in the seat of honor at the Last Supper? Judas. The Book of John gives us more details of the Last Supper who sat where. Judas was in the seat of honor. It says that "Jesus even in the seating arrangements, was saying, 'Judas, I love you. I know what you're going to do, and I still love you. Just be honest with me, Judas. Just let me love you there and forgive you and change you and give you my grace and it'll be great.'" But Judas couldn't do it because he just couldn't bring that to Jesus. But here's the thing. The most love you will ever feel is when you let Jesus love you at your

worst because He knows the worst and He still loves you. And that kind of love leaves a mark.

So for this week, three action items, the first two the same as last week. First, there's a sticker out at the welcome desk. If you didn't get it last week, pick it up because it's going to remind you that you are loved by Jesus. And put it somewhere where you'll see it every day, a water bottle or your bathroom mirror as a daily reminder that Jesus loves you. Later in the sermon series, we'll do some other stuff with that sticker. But for today, put it where you'll see it every day. Second, same as last week. This fall, worship in person. Online is awesome for when you can't be here. And so when you can't, please keep joining online. But worship is one of the most primary ways we experience God's love, and worship is just more powerful in person. When we're surrounded by other believers, the Holy Spirit moves in a different way. So as you're able, worship in person this fall to experience Jesus love.

And then third action item. Let Jesus into that hall closet. And here's how you do that. You set aside some time. You picture Jesus sitting next to you because He is. If music helps, then use that. And then think about those things you don't want anyone to know about. That's sometimes even yourself. Think about those things, those things you yourself have a hard time facing. And then just say them to Jesus and then ask Jesus this question: What do you want to tell me about this thing I don't want anyone to see? And then listen for the words or sentences or memories or pictures or Bible verses or song lyrics that might pop into your head. That might be God talking to you. And if you don't think you have any sin, if you don't think you have anything in that hall closet. Well, way to be self-aware. You might want to ask your spouse about that or a friend about that, but maybe your prayer then needs to be Jesus, show me my sin.

Because sometimes I think we're so afraid of being thought of as a bad person even to ourselves that we just can't admit those things. But when you know that if you admit them, you'll be met with grace and mercy and love, then it frees us to be honest. And so do that because you'll never feel more loved than when He meets you there. When I did college ministry, there was a young man called Joe who attended our group. And Joe was so shy that he couldn't talk to anybody. But over time I got to know him and he would begin to talk to me. And eventually, after about a year, when I'd talk to him, he always would say, "If people knew who I really was, they would reject me." He just said that all the time. Well, finally, he started to open up to me and tell me why he was saying that.

And he told me stuff he'd never told anyone else before. That growing up, his dad would always tell him that he was a disappointment as a son. His mom also struggled with depression. And she would say to him, "Joe, it's because of you that I'm depressed." And then later as a teenager, Joe ran away from his home. He got involved in the rave scene, which included a lot of heavy use of drugs. He did that for about a year, and then he moved back home. And then on top of all of that, he had several sexual addictions that

made him feel completely unlovable. Well, when he got done telling me all of this, I said, "Joe, man, I admire you, because that took guts to tell me that. And I want you to know, Joe. These things don't define you." And he said, "Yeah, but my mom's depression." I said, "That's not your fault." And he said, "She says, it is my fault."

And I said, "Joe, that's not your fault." And he said, "Yeah, but it is." And I just kept saying it's not your fault, it's not your fault, it's not your fault. I full-on Good Will Huntinged him, if you've seen that movie. And finally, he started to cry and said, "Well, maybe not, but the drugs and the running away." And I said, "Well, that one is your fault and you need to own that one." And he said, "And the sexual addictions." And I said, "Jesus can set you free from that. And I'm not judging you and I'm not going anywhere." I'm not sure he believed me. But over the next several years, Jesus set him free. He started going to a Christian counselor because sometimes we experience God's love through a counselor.

He got out of his shell a little bit and started to make some friends because sometimes we experience God's love through friends. And he didn't have good grades coming out of high school because of all the drugs that he was using and everything. So he had to go to a community college for a couple of years to get his grades up so that he could transfer to do what he wanted to do, which was to transfer to a four-year university. And so he was doing this. And just when things were going so well, he did this terrible thing. He went to Cal Berkeley. But Jesus loved him even still because there is no sin so great that Jesus cannot love you. So even though he went to Cal Berkeley, he was still loved. But then there was the sexual addictions and they were still there.

And one summer he was camping with some friends and he couldn't sleep. So he got up late at night and he went out just kind of on this mountaintop, and he prayed for three hours. And he just got real honest with Jesus about those addictions. He didn't pray, Jesus, forgive me for these things. Amen. No, no. He wrestled with it. Every time he could remember committing one of those sexual sins, he'd say it out loud. He told Jesus out loud things he was ashamed to put into words, things that were painful for him to have to say out loud. And he just did this for three hours. But over the course of doing this for three hours, he could feel Jesus closer and closer and closer to him until finally, he said suddenly there was this supernatural warmth that just rushed through his body. And he knew it was Jesus, and he felt loved for the very first time in his entire life because he had a direct experience of Jesus.

From then on, whenever he was tempted to one of those sexual addictions, he would just remember how that love felt. And he was able to start to get away from it. That also gave him courage to open up to his friends and tell them what he had not ever told them before. And that also helped diminish the shame because they knew and they still loved him. And then over time, those addictions went away. He went on to become a college professor because he wanted to help college students who'd had a difficult life just like

he'd have a difficult life. He went from a shy, insecure person who felt unlovable to someone who was bold and confident, and very loving because he let Jesus into that hall closet and experienced God's love there. He had a direct experience of Jesus love even there, which shattered the chains of addiction, removed his shame, made him brave, made him a protector, made him a defender of the students that he now teaches.

He's forever marked by the power of Jesus love. Bell press. Many of us often invite Jesus into the library parts of our lives so that we can love Him with our mind, and that is a good thing. Many of us invite Jesus into the workshop parts of our lives so we can use our skills for His kingdom, and that is a good thing. But have you ever invited Jesus into that hall closet part of your life? Because it's in that place where you think that you are the most unlovable, that you will experience His love the most. And we all have that place. That place of shame and embarrassment because of something we did or something we didn't do. You've just committed the same stupid sin over and over and over that you just keep committing. That place where the shame won't stop.

That place that you don't ever say out loud. That place that makes you wince at night when you think about it as you're trying to go to sleep. Jesus says, that place, that place, that's the place I'm talking about. That's the place I want to meet you the most. Because when I do, you'll realize how much I love you even in that place. And then that place no longer has power. That place can't defeat you. That place can no longer bring you shame. That place doesn't stand an ice cube's long-term chance in hell when that place comes up against the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless, omnipotent, powerful love of God that sets you free and makes you bold, and marks you forever as belonging to Him. Amen.

Jesus, thank you for your unceasing love at great cost to yourself and thank you that you never give up. Thank you, there's nothing we can do to cancel your love. Jesus, help us this week to let you in to that hall closet and begin to unpack what's in there with you and experience your grace and your love and your mercy in a way that sets us free. And we pray you do that so much, Lord, that we are forever marked as being a follower of you. In your name Jesus. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Jesus could have exposed Judas' plan to betray him and blasted him for it in front of all the other disciples, but instead what does Jesus do? Why does he do this?
- Compare Judas' response to his sin of betraying Jesus to Peter's response to his sin of denying Jesus. What are all the differences? What do those differences teach us?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.