

Message #50

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JESUS AND THE UPPER ROOM DISCOURSE

(Part 1)

JOHN 13:1-35

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

We humans tend to remember the last words of those who are close to us and those who are famous. Consider these examples: **“I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”** Who said that? (Nathan Hale) What about these last words in Latin? **“Et tu, Brute?”** (Julius Caesar) Do you remember this phrase and who said it: **“Let’s roll.”** (Todd Beamer, 9/11 crash in Pennsylvania) Who do you suppose said this: **“I’ll finally get to see Marilyn.”** (Joe DiMaggio)

Here are some that are a bit harder. What world leader said this: **“I’m bored with it all.”** (Winston Churchill) What royal person said this: **“My God, what happened?”** (Princess Diana) What black leader said this: **“Swing low, sweet chariot.”** (Harriet Tubman) Finally, consider this last one: **“I have offended God and mankind because my work did not reach the quality it should have.”** (Leonardo da Vinci)

Last words tend to leave a mark upon those who are left behind. That is especially true of the last words of Jesus to His disciples. In our study of the Gospel According to John, we have come to the longest recorded message of Jesus in the Bible. It begins in #13 and extends through #17. This is the last message of Jesus to His disciples before His arrest and crucifixion. Clearly, His words had an impact upon the Apostle John. They continue to have great importance to the followers of Jesus.

We left off several weeks ago in our study of John with Jesus being in Jerusalem in the week before Passover. Jesus recently raised Lazarus from the dead. This excited many of the religious pilgrims who were coming to Jerusalem for the feast. Hopes were raised that Jesus might be the Messiah who would deliver the Jews from their Roman oppressors, and perhaps also from the corrupt religious leadership.

Religious leaders in Jerusalem were pressing to have Jesus killed. He was too much of a threat to their position. They continued to reject Jesus and His claims, in spite of this recent, remarkable miracle. Also Gentiles showed up, wanting to see Jesus. These things were indications to Jesus that His time on earth was short.

The Apostle John skips over many events of this final week that are covered by the other Gospel writers. John is writing several decades after the other three Gospels were written. So he focuses upon the events of the Last Supper.

In 2015 I did a sermon series on Chapters 13-17, which passage is known as “the Upper Room Discourse.” I was not planning at that time to do the entire Gospel of John. But here we are now. I am going to go through these chapters much more quickly than I did then, spending about one Sunday a week on each chapter. Today we will cover most of #13.

I.

So we will begin by looking at vv. 1-17 of #13, where we will find that Jesus teaches that GREATNESS IN GOD’S KINGDOM MEANS SERVING ONE ANOTHER. (PROJECTOR ON--- GREATNESS IN GOD’S KINGDOM...) There is a difficult chronological problem here, of which you should be aware. It appears that this observance of the Passover occurs on Thursday evening. Yet in the other three Gospels, it is clear that Passover starts at sunset on Friday. Even in John #19 v. 14, there is an indication that Passover begins on Friday. For in that text, Friday is called the preparation day for the Passover.

So why were Jesus and His disciples observing the Passover meal on Thursday evening? A variety of explanations have been given. The one that makes the most sense to me is one suggested by Alfred Edersheim, the Jewish Christian Biblical scholar from over a hundred years ago. He says that the Galilean Jews observed Passover one day earlier than the Jews from in and around Jerusalem. This made it easier for the priests in the temple, who had to kill hundreds and thousands of lambs for the Passover. Spreading the work over two days made their job more manageable. This interpretation is inviting, although there just is not much evidence from Jewish writings and tradition in the period for any of the suggested interpretations

We read then in vv. 1-5 in #13, which is found on p. 900 of the black Bibles under many of the chairs, **“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During**

supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

In Luke #22 v. 12 the author describes this place as a "large upper room." (LAST SUPPER 3) This is how we get the term "Upper Room Discourse." The custom for a meal such as this was to gather around a low table. Participants stretched out their legs and rested on cushions while they ate.

Luke #22 also tells us that there was a dispute going on among the twelve disciples about who was the greatest among them as they gathered for this meal. Probably it had to do with the seating for the Passover. The desire among them was to sit closest to Jesus.

It was also customary in this culture in a visit to a wealthier home to have a servant wash one's feet. Sandals were the typical footwear, and feet easily got dirty. There were no servants around on this occasion to do that job. The disciples were arguing among themselves about who was the greatest. So no one was inclined to do the job of a servant--- no one, that is, except Jesus. (PROJECTOR OFF)

He does the job of a servant. According to vv. 6-11, **"He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, do you wash my feet?' Jesus answered him, 'What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.' Peter said to him, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.' Simon Peter said to him, 'Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!' Jesus said to him, 'The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.' For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, 'Not all of you are clean.'"**

Peter had already been bathed. He only needed a washing. Only Judas still needed a bath. Two different Greek verbs are at work here. The verb for "bathed" is in the perfect tense, which refers to past action with continuing results. Eleven of the disciples have been bathed with the continuing result that they remain clean. The reference is not to any literal bathing or to baptism. There is no record that Jesus had ever baptized any of these disciples. Jesus is speaking about a spiritual cleansing, about a decision to trust in Jesus, which has made them a part of God's family.

The implication for us is that once we trust in Jesus, we receive the gift of eternal life and become part of God's family forever. Our only need is for regular washing, for daily confession and repentance to maintain a proper fellowship relationship with our Heavenly Father.

The story continues in vv. 12-17: **"When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you do these things, blessed are you if you do them.'"**

Greatness was on the agenda of the twelve as they came to this feast. The result was an argument. It appears to most scholars of the Bible that Judas got the best seat beside Jesus. He was hardly the greatest among the disciples. Jesus instructs His followers to follow His example. Greatness in His kingdom means service. It is service for others that produces blessing.

One of the larger refugee camps in Pakistan filled with Afghans who fled the fighting in that country years ago was in Peshawar. It was also the worst camp in terms of dust and mud. At first the refugees had only plastic sheets for tents. One of the first Christian groups to get in there brought 5000 sandals. The Christians who delivered the sandals washed the feet of those to whom the sandals were given.

Sometime later a teacher in one of the refugee schools asked, **"Who is the best Muslim?"** A little girl raised her hand and said, **"A kaffir (a non-Muslim)."** After the teacher got over her shock at that answer, she asked, **"What do you mean?"** **"The Muslims in the Mujahedin killed my father. The Christians washed my feet."** I wonder if the Syrian refugees who have fled to Europe encountered serving Christians there. I wonder if Christians in the US have a similar attitude toward refugees who come here

II.

In vv. 18-30 we find that JESUS' LOVE EXTENDS TO LOST PEOPLE. (PROJECTOR ON--- JESUS' LOVE EXTENDS TO LOST PEOPLE.) According to vv. 18-20, Jesus said, **"I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may**

believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one

who sent me.”

Jesus knows that one of these disciples is not really His follower. Back in v. 2, John already noted that Judas had come under the devil's influence. Now Jesus quotes from Psalm 41, where David spoke about one of his advisors who betrayed him. Jesus sees that incident as being a type that finds prophetic fulfillment in Judas.

This situation is especially devious and evil, because in the Middle East eating together was a sign of fellowship and mutual commitment. Judas is already plotting to have Jesus arrested and killed. The other disciples are clueless about this betrayal, although Jesus had warned them a year earlier that there was a traitor in the group (John 6:71). Jesus is seeking to prepare them now for the revelation of that betrayal. This also demonstrates His sovereignty over the situation.

The text goes on in vv. 21-26, **“After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table at Jesus’ side, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, ‘Lord, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.’ So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.”**

(LAST SUPPER 2) The main characters in this scene were probably located as this chart indicates. John and Judas were on either side of Jesus, and Peter was across the table. John refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.”

The morsel was a piece of unleavened flat bread. The custom was to add a piece of lamb and bitter herbs to it and to dip the morsel into sauce. Jesus, as host of the meal, offered a morsel to each disciple. Matthew's account of this makes that clear and adds that each disciple asked if he was the betrayer. According to Matthew, Jesus tells Judas that He knows that he is the betrayer. Yet Jesus offers this morsel to him anyway. (PROJECTOR OFF)

That morsel represents the redemption of God for the nation of Israel. This is the last opportunity that Judas has to have fellowship with the Lamb of God who has come to take away the sin of the world. This is another chance that Judas has to repent, to turn away from this course of action. Jesus already knows what Judas has been plotting. He is aware the Judas has been stealing from the group's finances. Yet Jesus still offers His love.

Verses 27-30: **"Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.' Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the moneybag, Jesus was telling him, 'Buy what we need for the feast,' or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night."**

Did Judas eat the morsel? If he did, he was not serious about accepting this offer of fellowship. His rejection of this last offer leads to possession by Satan. So Judas is dismissed. The other eleven are clueless about what has happened. They think that Judas has been sent on a particular mission by Jesus. It was necessary for Judas to leave. For this meal, this initiation of the Lord's Supper, is intended only for true believers.

John notes that Judas went out, and it was night. We have seen that the Apostle John sees much spiritual symbolism in light and darkness and Jesus' remarks that use these terms. Judas is about to be involved in promoting spiritual darkness, and he has come under the influence of those dark forces. He becomes a human instrument who helps to lay the groundwork for Jesus' arrest and crucifixion.

There are two things to notice here about the love of Jesus. The first is that Jesus was incredibly patient toward Judas. This guy was an unbeliever and a traitor. He had been stealing the group's money for some time. Yet Jesus is still offering love to him at this Last Supper. There is a lesson here for us to be patient with those around us who also reject the Savior. Our job is to show the love of Christ. We don't know who will ultimately respond. Jesus did have that knowledge. Yet He was still offering love to Judas.

The second thing to notice is that Jesus offers this love to all of us, despite our rejection of Him and despite our disobedience to His word. If Jesus can offer this kind of love to one who was betraying Him, and helping to set up His crucifixion, there is hope for us. None of us are too bad to be excluded from the offer of His love.

(PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN 1:12) Back in #1 v. 12 the Apostle John wrote, **“But to all who did receive him [Jesus], who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.”** The only requirement given to us to become part of His family is to believe in His name--- to believe that Jesus was God who became man, who died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin, and who rose again from the dead. If we trust in this Jesus, we become part of His family, receive forgiveness of sins, and experience eternal life.

III.

In vv. 31-35 of our passage we learn that EMBRACING JESUS' LOVE MEANS LOVING ONE ANOTHER. (III. EMBRACING JESUS' LOVE...) In vv. 31 & 32 we read, **“When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.’”**

Earlier in this week, when Gentiles came to see Jesus, He told His disciples, according to #12 vv.23 & 24, **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”** In these two verses in #12, it is clear that Jesus is talking about His coming death. With the discussion of being glorified here in #13, it would seem that the same thing is in view. It is that death which will produce spiritual fruit. It will lead to the establishment and growth of the church.

Superficially the death of Jesus will appear to be a calamity. The apostles and others who voiced some kind of support for Jesus hoped that Jesus would prove to be the Messiah who would rid them from the domination of the Romans and perhaps also from the corrupt Jewish leadership. But He was going to be killed. The manner of His death would be especially humiliating. He would be beaten and hung naked on a Roman cross. How could He be the Messiah? How could He be a deliverer?

Yet Jesus is telling His disciples that this death will actually be a glorification. We saw in #12 that the glorification of God involves the revelation of His divine attributes, or characteristics. This death will reveal Jesus' omniscience and God the Father's omniscience, their knowledge of all things. For Jesus has been telling His disciples that He is going to die and rise again. God the Father had revealed this to the Old Testament prophets, especially in passages like Isaiah #53. This death will reveal His omnipotence, His divine power. For Jesus will rise from the dead after three days. It will reveal the justice of God. For sin is serious. It demands a penalty. The Old Testament taught that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. So Jesus, as the divine man, will pay that penalty. The crucifixion will reveal the love of God, as the Son of God displays His sacrificial love in dying to provide us a way to have eternal

life. This death will reveal the sovereignty of God as all of these events come together at the right time to fulfill prophecy and to accomplish God's eternal plan.

We have seen that the use of this term "Son of Man" in our two verses points to the humanity of Jesus. Yet it is also a term used by the Old Testament prophet and statesman Daniel. In #7 of his book he speaks of the Son of Man as one who has the right to rule over mankind forever, which is a position that only a divine being could have. So this Son of Man in our passage is both man and God.

Jesus adds in v. 33, **"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'"** Jesus told the religious leaders a very similar thing in #7 at the Feast of Tabernacles. Now He is speaking to His eleven remaining apostles. Perhaps Jesus is making reference both to His absence from them in the tomb and His later departure to heaven. Meanwhile, His disciples will have a mission to accomplish. They will be responsible to spread the good news about this Savior of mankind.

Jesus continues in v. 34, **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."** There are two words for "new" in the Greek New Testament. One has a reference to time. The other has a reference to character. It is the latter word that is used here. This love commandment is new in regard to character.

The Old Testament did have a commandment to love one's neighbor. In the Law of Moses, as described in Leviticus #19 v. 18 (LEVITICUS 19:18), the Israelites were commanded, **"You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord."** The newness of Jesus' command perhaps relates to the standard of love. The point of comparison is not love for self but Jesus' love for His disciples. It is the sacrificial love demonstrated in washing the feet of the disciples and in dying on the cross to pay the penalty for the sin of the world. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The temptation in the family of God is to apply subtle limits and restrictions to our love. If you don't wear the right kind of clothes, I am going to withhold some of my love. If your parenting style is too lenient, or if it is too harsh, I am going to withhold my full acceptance. If you drink alcohol, or if you never touch a drop, my love for you will be limited. If you are disorganized and late, don't expect my acceptance. If you are expressive and outgoing in your worship, or if you are so strait-laced that you won't clap your hands in church, I am going to give you the frown of disapproval.

If our love is conditioned upon such standards of behavior, it is sin. We are commanded by Christ to love our fellow members in the body of Christ. To fail to love fellow Christians with the self-sacrificing love of Christ is disobedience to our Savior. If Jesus Christ has accepted them into the family of God, we are obligated to accept them. To add conditions to our acceptance is to make ourselves out to be superior to Christ, and that is not a good position to have.

Is there no room then in the church for admonition, for correction, for church discipline? Yes, there is. True love means, at times, that admonition and correction and church discipline are necessary. But it is to be done in a spirit of love. Paul told fellow Christians, "Speak the truth in love." Everything should take place in a context of love.

Jesus continues in v. 35, **"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."** When the disciples came together for this Passover feast, an argument broke out about which of them was the greatest. They wanted the best seats at the supper. Jesus is now about to depart from them. The disciples can afford no more such arguments. Jesus is telling them that their concern must be for Christ-glorification, not self-glorification. The way that Christ will be glorified is by the love that they show for one another. This love will identify them as followers of Jesus.

Is doctrine important? Yes, it is foundational to what Christians believe and practice. Is outreach important? Yes, Jesus commanded the disciples to go out into all the world and preach the gospel. Is education important? Yes, it is the only way in which doctrine can be learned and developed. Is social concern important? Yes, Jesus demonstrated concern for the people around Him. But what is the greatest apologetic? What is the key thing that causes the world to identify us with Jesus Christ? It is our obedience to the new commandment that we love one another.

In his famous work *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*, historian Edward Gibbon identified five reasons for the growth of the early church. The number one reason was the unity and mutual affection that Christians demonstrated toward each other.

In the third century, the church leader Tertullian talked about the key to the church's growth. Did Christians make such an impact upon the world because of miracles that happened among them? Did it happen because of dynamic worship services? Did it result from charismatic preachers? Did it stem from their dedicated social work? Tertullian writes, **"It is our care for the helpless, our practice of**

lovingkindness, that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Look!' they say, 'How they love one another! Look how they are prepared to die for one another!'"

Sometimes this kind of love is demonstrated in very simple ways. Journalist P. J. O'Rourke notes, **"Everybody wants to save the earth. Nobody wants to help mom do the dishes."**

In the last two days, our church moving department helped two families to move. That is the kind of thing, I trust, that is a demonstration of genuine love. Yesterday, the move involved a family from a Catholic background. Their son in prison became a follower of Jesus through our church Bible correspondence ministry. He has been granted parole, but the parole department required his parents to move to a different location. They have limited financial means, and the dad is dealing with cancer. So several of us were able to help out yesterday. Hopefully it was a demonstration of Christian love to them.

Our salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus. There is nothing that we have to earn. But the overflow of appreciation for what Jesus has done for us is to be love for one another. The example and standard that we have is the unselfish and sacrificial love that Jesus had, and has, for us. May we be sensitive for opportunities that we have to demonstrate that kind of love.