

# The Love of Jesus

*The Real Jesus: Emotional Life*

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**Bible Text:** John 13:1; John 15:9-10

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## **First Presbyterian Church**

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*Our heavenly Father, you are worthy of this praise and of all the energy of our affections to express love for you, admiration of your greatness and majesty and power and affection for your tender love for us displayed in our Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you that you have all power and all greatness, but we thank you that you are a God of infinite gentleness and tender kindness and mercy. We thank you that you hear the cries of the poor, that you see the broken hearted, that you love your children. And we pray as we come to the reading and the hearing of your Word that each of us as we come in all of our diverse need that each of us may be conscious that we are being addressed by our heavenly Father and that you are with us in the person of your Son and the power of the Holy Spirit nearer to us than hands and feet and our neighbors and loved ones around us and that you know us through and through and you have come to meet with us and to speak to us and to embrace us. And so we pray, Lord, speak. For we your servants are listening. And this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Please be seated.

Our Scripture reading this morning is from the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's gospel and instead of reading those verses in addition in chapter 15, I want to read the first five verses of John chapter 13 which you will find in the pew Bible page 900 and for our children who have their children's Bible the passage is on page 1330.

The setting of these words at the beginning of John 13 is the beginning of a whole series of chapters that goes through to John chapter 17 in which Jesus is giving his final exhortations, encouragements, his final teaching to his disciples on the evening of his betrayal and crucifixion.

So let us hear God's Word from John chapter 13.

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.<sup>1</sup>

In our little series entitled "The Real Jesus, the Emotional Life of our Savior," we have come perhaps especially appropriately on a communion Sunday to the theme of the love of Jesus.

Love, of course, is one of the most stretchable verbs in the English language. We use it in all kinds of different contexts and actually we mean somewhat different things depending on the context in which we use it. We love our families. You love your wife. You love your husband. You love your children. You love your parents. You love classical music. Or you love you two, which, for those of you who know nothing about you two, is not classical music. You love reading. You love playing sport. You really love the game cocks and you have one more reason to love the game cocks or to hate them this morning. And you love Jesus and that is not the same. That is not the same as loving the game cocks or loving classical music. That is something very special. And there is something even more special. And that is to know that Jesus loves you. And this is what John is beginning to expound here in chapter 13 in this very dramatic way as he recalls from the distance of many years how that very extraordinary night in the upper room had begun with Jesus washing the feet of his disciples.

The way he describes it is this. Jesus loved his own who were in the world and he loved them to the end. Those words are particularly interesting coming from the apostle John because it is in John's gospel, I take it, that John describes himself in this unique way as the disciple whom Jesus loved. And he does it with some regularity. But the striking thing is that regularity begins after these verses. It is not, I think, that John is saying, "Me, he loved me best of all. I think what John is actually saying as he describes himself from this point onwards is that I began to realize that I was the disciple whom Jesus loved. Indeed, you might say that the whole point of this section of John's gospel that runs right through to the end of John's gospel when he tells us that the reason he had written the gospel was so that we would come to believe in the Lord Jesus. You might almost think that what he was seeking to do here was to persuade us by the power of the Holy Spirit if it is really true that I am the disciple Jesus loved and to learn to think about ourselves in this way as Christians, as shut individually with the Lord Jesus. And just as we know people who when we are in their presence make us feel we are the only person in the world who really matters although we know there are many other people who matter a great deal to them, perhaps even matter more to them than we do, but when we are with them, the one thing we know is I feel as though I am the only person in the world who matters to him or her at this moment.

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<sup>1</sup> John 13:1-5.

And to have that sense of being loved by the Lord Jesus so that we can say, so that you could say as you shake hands with me at the door, if you do, I am also the disciple whom Jesus loved.

We very occasionally sing a hymn that dates back to the middle ages, often attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux.

Jesus, the very thought of thee,  
With sweetness fills my breast.

And it has these lines in it. But what to those who find, that is find Christ, ah this? Nor tongue nor pen can show. The love of Jesus, what it is, none but his loved ones know.

And if you have become one of those who are able to say, "I am the disciple whom Jesus loved," you know how true this is. And you may have known about the love of Jesus and sung innumerable times, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so," but had no sense of the love of Jesus for you at all. But the love of Jesus what it is none but his loved ones know. And when you know it, you know it.

You know, those of us who are our age, I mean, of a certain age and people have said, young people have said, "Well, how do I know if he is the right one for me?" And you have said if when you know, you will know. And there is a sense, isn't there, in which it is the same with the love of Jesus. How could someone who has tasted the love of Jesus fully expressed to you what it means to sense that you are loved with everlasting love and led by grace that love to know? And this is the word that John brings to us as he opens up this marvelous section of Jesus in the upper room and begins to see himself as the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Now, first of all, I think it is important to take notice of the situation, the general situation in which this love was seen, because John portrays Jesus here in a double context. This is the hinge point in John's gospel. From this point onwards Jesus has nothing whatsoever to say to the world. This is the point in John's gospel where Jesus says, "I have said it all. There is no more to say to them." And John summarizes the end of Jesus' public ministry at the end of John chapter 12 by saying the majority of people did not believe in him. And then he goes on to say but there were actually quite a number who believed in him, even people who moved in the echelons of power. But although they believed in him in some sense, he says nevertheless for fear of the Pharisees they did not confess it so that they would not be put out of the synagogue for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. They were kind of secret believers who apparently turned out not to be believers at all.

Do you remember how Paul puts it? If you believe in your heart and confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, you will be saved. Why does he put it that way? Because if actually you deny in your heart that you really belong to him, by denying in the world that you really belong to him, then you are in this very sad category that John describes at the end of chapter 12. And now Jesus is left with 12 and one of them is about to betray

him. So he is, really after three years of ministry, he is left with 11. And they are going to desert him during the course of the next 24 hours. And you wonder why they are still there.

Do you remember how Peter put it earlier in John chapter six when people started leaving Jesus and Jesus turned and said, “Are you are going to go away as well?” Peter gave this amazing response. He said, “Lord, where would we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.”

And the Christian life is sometimes like that. Why don't we leave Jesus as other people leave Jesus? We cling to him despite all the odds because there is this one thing we know, however much of a struggle it is, we know that he alone has the words of eternal life and therefore where else do we have to go? Do you feel that as a Christian quite often? You think, oh, the situations of life would drive you away from the Christian faith, but then you say, “Lord, where else could I go in the midst of all this?” So there is that general context in the gospel narrative. But you notice that John also emphasizes the context in Jesus' own life. And however he knew this, he knew what was going on in Jesus' mind. Did Jesus disclose this to him after the resurrection and those days when he kept coming and teaching the disciples about the kingdom and maybe John had the courage to say, “Lord, what was going on in your mind in the upper room?” And he tells us what it was. Jesus had a strong consciousness of his own identity, knowing, says John, verse three, that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God.

That is so striking, isn't it, because that is the way John had actually begun the gospel, the very first words. In the beginning was the Word. Jesus is the Word there in that statement.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”<sup>2</sup>

And it goes on to say the Word was so intimately with God that we could say the Son was in the bosom of the Father. There was such intimacy and this is what Jesus is conscious of. That is not something you and I are ever conscious of. Knowing that he had come from God into this world and then aware that the moment of his personal destiny as the servant of the Lord had now come. Jesus knew, verse one, that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father. And in John that is language that means to depart violently from this world in death through the cross, but then in glory through the resurrection. So Jesus knows that he has come, as it were, from the very presence of God and that he is going to the shame of the cross of Calvary. And so, says John, he was conscious of a third thing as well, conscious of his identity, conscious that this was the hour of his destiny and conscious also that he was in a room where there was deep hostility.

Do you notice what he says in verse two?

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<sup>2</sup> John 1:1.

“During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him...”<sup>3</sup>

So much was that on Jesus’ heart that you will notice in verse 21:

“After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’”<sup>4</sup>

Those were the three dimensions of our Lord’s consciousness. And John is really saying to us, “So, dear ones, when you read my gospel, please don’t think that what Jesus is about to do is an act of simple modesty,” the way it would be if we were together and somebody had forgotten to do something according to the etiquette and because you didn’t want the host or hostess to be embarrassed. You got up and you quietly did it. That would be a beautiful act of modesty, wouldn’t it? But you wouldn’t be doing that conscious that the atmosphere to which you belonged was the atmosphere of heaven’s glory and that admiration and praise of saints and angels and cherubim and seraphim and you wouldn’t be doing that conscious of the fact that this was the great hour of your destiny that would lead you to crucifixion and you wouldn’t be conscious, would you, either, that you were in a room where there was that kind of atmosphere that we do occasionally experience when we know there is someone in the room who has it in for us and we can never be completely comfortable until that person has left the room.

It is in that context that the Lord Jesus took off his outer garments and picked up the servant’s towel and the little basin of water that was laying there and began to wash the feet of his disciples.

So there is a context for Jesus’ love. And, second, there is this really memorable illustration of Jesus’ love. He washed his disciples feet. Of course, we don’t quite get what Jesus is doing unless we understand that this is actually an acted parable. This is a message. That is why he says, doesn’t he, after he has done it, he says, “Do you know what I have done?” And if the answer is, “Yes, we obviously we know what you have done. We have watched you wash our dirty feet.” Then you wouldn’t have noticed what he had done. What he had done was not simply wash dirty feet. I suspect Judas Iscariot could have said that. What he had done was to portray in this dramatic way what he had come from the Father into the world faced the crisis point of Calvary, sensed the antagonism to his ministry. What he had done here was really a little dramatic presentation of his whole purpose of coming into the world, leaving the place of honor where he was host of all things and stooping down and taking the servant form, humbling himself and then returning after the humiliation to the place of honor and dignity from which he had come.

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<sup>3</sup> John 13:2.

<sup>4</sup> John 13:21.

himself and then returning after the humiliation to the place of honor and dignity from which he had come.

It is 2 Corinthians eight verse nine in dramatic form.

“...though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”<sup>5</sup>

It is Philippians 2:5-11 in pictorial form.

...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,<sup>6</sup>

If you think that the parable of the good Samaritan is about Samaritans, you have missed the point, haven't you? If you think this feet washing is about feet, you have missed the point. The point is really this, that the Savior has come not just to wash dirty feet. Don't you understand what I have done? The Savior has come to wash away the guilt and the pollution of dirty souls. And John says here having loved his own he loved them till the end. There is an intensity in it.

Of course, the whole point of the intensity is that he has come from highest heaven. We sometimes sing at Christmas time he has come from highest heaven down into such a world as this to bear our sins. I don't think we have very much conception of what that must have meant for the Lord Jesus.

A couple of years ago I saw a documentary, a series of programs on British television where the documentary makers have brought a half dozen Amish teenagers to the United Kingdom and placed them for several days in the homes of largely fairly ordinary non-Christian British people and in one case a rather upper crusty family. And the cameramen, of course, were shrewd enough to know what to look for. And so as these youngsters intermingled, these Amish—and I am not recommending the Amish way of life—but these Amish living within the security of home and family with the desire or attempt that the pollution of the western world should be kept as far away as possible from them, being exposed to the blatant and flagrant sexualism of British society, what is on the page threes of so many of the newspapers, the titillation of the television, the demeanor of youngsters their own age.

And the camera angles on the faces of some of these youngsters and the sense of pain that they experienced, just as you and I sometimes experience pain when we are in situations

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Corinthians 8:9.

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 2:6-9.

where we know we are absolutely on our own and everyone is looking at us and we are different. And then we begin to experience it. And there is, my friends, there is no telling what this experience must have been for the holy Jesus who surely in his holiness—which is not some kind of spooky thing, but real humanity that has never been tainted mentally or emotionally or volitionally by sin. What could it have been like for him to be in this world where he could smell the sin? Where he could almost taste the sin?

Ah, you say, it wouldn't be very much. I was in an airport on, I think it was Thursday afternoon. You don't see this in every airport, but there was like a {?} room and as I passed it there were all these people gasping as they went into this tiny little room afforded by them by whoever it is that does this now in the airports where they could smoke. It was a tiny little room and they were all sitting there smoking. I thought, what if you took your seven year old daughter and said to her, "Now I want you to spend the next 10 minutes in that room"? She would have been out in 30 seconds. I just can't breathe in there. But why can the people who were in there breathe? Why could they not smell what the little girl would immediately smell? Because they were used to it. Lost their sense of smell. And if you can stretch that to some amazing degree for the Lord Jesus in his love to come into this world where he knows my sin far better and deeper than I do and for John to be able to say, "He did this because he loved his own who were in the world and he loved them to the end."

I sometimes think maybe I am at my best when I think this. Lord Jesus, how could you possibly bear it? I mean here is a mother who has invested herself all her life in her children, worked herself to the bone for her children and then as her children grow they despise her and all that she stands for. They repudiate her love. They spit in her face. And if you have ever seen it, you stand back and you say to each other, don't you, I don't know how she can bear it. But don't you see that that is small by comparison with the Lord Jesus? That is what John is saying. He is saying, "Can you just grasp that this is the magnitude of his love for us? He came down from that world to this world?"

Several times a year, Saturday afternoon, two o'clock flight from Dallas Fort Worth airport to Columbia Metropolitan airport. If I can remember about halfway through the flight I look outside the left hand window and I see another little {?} jet heading in the opposite direction about three quarters of a mile over there and several hundred feet below. And I have been sitting there thinking, this is so cozy. Look at down there. And it feels as if you are moving at 10 miles an hour. And then you see something coming in the opposite direction and it absolutely staggers you to see two planes, if I can remember my math, moving away from each other at 1000 miles an hour. And you think that plane is absolutely flying. But the people in that plane they think they are sailing along above the little creatures down there at 10 or 15 miles an hour. They scarcely notice they are moving. It is only when you see the planes going in opposite directions you realize that it is the contradiction between them that displays the magnitude of the speed.

And so with the Lord Jesus. He is moving in the direction of absolute love and trust and obedience to his heavenly Father and I, by nature, am moving in the opposite direction

and he, as it were, has turned in order to catch up with me or better to catch down to where I am to lift me up to where he is. No wonder from this point onwards John wants to say, "Love so amazing, so divine, I am the disciple that Jesus loved."

But you notice that John also gives it a very interesting description of those to whom this love was displayed, the context in which this love appeared, the illustration in which this love was expressed. And now his description of those to whom his love was displayed.

Verse one. He loved his own. I don't know if there is an equivalent in the American military, but there is a regiment in the British army or used to be because it is always shrinking and it was called the Queen's own highlanders. If you were in that regiment it meant everything to you. It meant that you knew you were the queen's, the queen was yours. It was a very special military relationship. And Jesus, as he does this, says John is loving his own who are in the world and loving them to the end, loving them to the omega point with an intensity and a commitment beyond words.

It is interesting in that connection, isn't it, that we are very familiar in this passage with the conversation that Jesus has with Peter, or actually the conversation Peter starts with Jesus that we almost don't notice and maybe John almost wanted to draw a curtain over this because it was such an unbearable expression of Jesus' love, but Jesus actually washed the dirty feet of Judas Iscariot before he left the room. That is why this can't possibly simply be about washing dirty feet. But I think if someone from Jerusalem television had interviewed Judas Iscariot when he left the room to betray Jesus and said to him, "What happened in there, Judas?" he would have said, "Well, not very much. Well, there was an embarrassing moment. Jesus washed our dirty feet."

If you had been the reporter you would have said, "Is that all that happened?"

And if you had been Judas Iscariot you would have said, "Yes. That is all that happened."

And it is interesting, isn't it, that John is the one gospel writer who has nothing to say about the Lord's supper. And it isn't interesting? The other gospel writers have nothing to say about the foot washing. Why should that be? Because, in a sense, the message of both of them is one in the same. And the response to each of them could be absolutely identical.

If channel 10 is out there this morning for whatever reason they need something to fill in on the news. They are near First Presbyterian Church. They send somebody along with a microphone and he says, "So what happened in there?"

And you say, "Well, at the end of the service there was bread. Actually it was short bread. And there was wine. Actually it was grape juice. And we took a bit of bread and we took a sip of wine and sang a hymn, got the benediction."



Did nothing else happen there? Well, what would you mean? What else would happen? I took a piece of bread. I drank a sip of wine. We do that. Just as Judas might have said, "Well, somebody has got to wash the feet. The embarrassing thing was Jesus did it."

Did nothing.... Did you not see anything more?

John is saying here, as the gospel writers and the apostle Paul saying to us and the rest of the New Testament, is all you see bread and wine? Is all you use dirty feet being washed? Don't you see that Jesus is portraying the greatness of his sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, dying for our sins, rising again to be our Lord and our Savior, summoning us to trust him, bringing us to say, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands, shall have my life, my soul, my all. Jesus, you have given everything for me and the only thing I can do is give myself to you in trust, faith, repentance to know that I am loved."

But it didn't look very much, did it? And it doesn't look very much, does it? But when you become the disciple Jesus loved, it comes to mean so much because Jesus did it to show his love for you.

So, my dear friends, are we able to say, are you able to say as you sit here? Only the Lord knows what is going on in your mind {?}. The person sitting next to you has no idea, actually, what is going on in your mind right at this moment. Even if they have been married to you 70 years they might be able to guess he is loving this. They might be able to guess he is hating this. But Jesus knows and Jesus comes and he says in this bread and in this wine I want you to be able to say I am the disciple that Jesus loved.

*Lord Jesus, thank you for the wonder of your love for us, for stooping so low to bring us up so high. With all our hearts we want to say to you: What to those who find, ah, this, nor tongue nor pen can show, the love of Jesus what it is, none but his loved ones know. Lord, thank you that we can be the disciple that you loved. We pray this in your name. Amen.*