

## ***Life in the Son: “As I Have Loved You”, John 13:21-38, BCF 2012.03.11***

*Jesus teaches us to love one another as I he has loved us, seen in his love toward both Judas and Peter. He gives us not only an example of love, but the power to love, in this way.*

**John 13:21-38 reading.** Out of the passage this morning I would like to concentrate on one verse, and within that verse a phrase: **John 13:34** *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.*

The scene is the night before the arrest and early morning trials of Jesus. They are having supper and observing the Passover meal. During this time, Jesus, to the shock and surprise of everyone, gets up and washes the disciples feet in the same manner that a servant would.

The commandment is new in that the Old Testament taught us “to love our neighbor as ourselves.” (Lev 19:8) Here Jesus, having taken the role of a servant and washing his disciples’ feet gives a new standard, himself: “as I have loved you.”

The Bible speaks of different kinds (or better, dimensions) of love. Here the focus is upon our love for “one another,” specifically in the context of fellow followers of Jesus Christ in the family of God: *having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.* (13:1)

**Jesus’ love for his disciples.** The immediate context is washing his disciples’ feet, a metaphor for practical and humble service. “He loved them to the end...” He earnestly desired to spend that last Passover meal with them and he would spend much time comforting them and preparing them for the future. But three years before that he called them in his grace and kindness. He taught them, he trained them, he tested them, he gave them responsibilities in ministry, he let them share in the miracles and proclamation of the Kingdom. When they argued, when they said stupid things, when they were thick-headed and hard-hearted, he kept teaching. He was patient. He never gave up on them. He called them “little children” (v. 33) He loved them.

*As I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*

John the disciple who wrote this gospel wrote with intentional anonymity, choosing to be called “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” This is not a title he takes meaning he was more special than the other disciples, but rather that was his self-identity, at his core he is gripped by the truth that the Lord loved him. Like Paul after him who said, “...the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

**Jesus’ love toward Judas.** What is remarkable about this passage is that Christ’s command to love as he loves is sandwiched between stories about two specific disciples: Judas and Peter. One who will betray Jesus, and the other who will deny Jesus. And in this context we find these words of Jesus: *as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*

Judas is a mysterious, somewhat two-dimensional character. But he was not apparently evil in appearance. He did not wear black or have an evil smile or cruel grimace, nor did sinister background music begin playing when he was around. Nobody suspected that he was any different than the rest of them. The disciples at this point are uncertain and confused.

We don't know much about him. He may have been politically motivated as a Jewish patriot to follow Jesus. Most Jews of that day looked for the restoration of Israel, whereby the nation could enjoy freedom from foreign dominion, have a righteous government, where people could worship God and enjoy peace, justice and prosperity in the land. Perhaps Judas thought his invitation to be one of the twelve disciples meant he would have an inside track to power and prestige. Maybe, we can't be sure.

He probably was offended at some recent events. Mary's anointing of Jesus; talk of Jesus' body and blood; and the washing of feet, which would have been very unworthy of a king or dignitary to perform. (Like an important person coming to your home and then deciding to clean your bathroom. It would be awkward, embarrassing, and perplexing.) His thoughts of betrayal seem to follow quickly from some of these latter events.

From the perspective of the gospel-writer, we do know Judas was a thief, and skimmed money from their shared treasury. (12:6) Judas is more interested in money than in the poor. More serious than that he is more interested in money than in Jesus. He then – within a very short period on one night – he entertains a Satanically-inspired thought of betrayal (13:2), and then finds himself acting upon it. It was a rather quick downward spiral from petty thief to demonic possession.

“And it was night” reminds us that we live in the midst of a spiritual war. In his prologue John wrote, *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* (John 1:5)

**Ephesians 4:26-27** *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.*

Here is a reminder that we will live life between the light and the darkness. There is a devil, there is great darkness and evil, Jesus tells us the world will hate you. We are not to be naïve. Neither are we to disengage from our world. Jesus himself lived, taught, ministered and healed among the multitudes. He ate and drank with sinners. He served and loved and taught Judas in a small group for three years knowing what he would do in the end. But he was not naïve.

*But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.* (John 2:24-25)

We are not to be holed up in some church fortress. But neither is the church to be naïve that the world at large will ever be her friend apart from the gospel. Jesus never lost sight of his Father's will and he did this faithfully and the devil waited for the right time over three years to destroy him for it. We need to go on loving and serving even when we know there are those who would betray and destroy us.

**But Jesus showed tremendous love to Judas.** Imagine the many evenings around the campfire looking around the circle and Jesus looking into the eyes of the one he knows doesn't get it and will eventually be a turncoat. To love him, teach him, feed him, allow him to participate in ministry, in healing and proclamation. And on this night, even to wash his own feet as a token of forgiveness and cleansing Jesus offers him, that he will never receive and

trust in. And passing him the bread representing the life he would not receive. They had eaten hundreds of meals together, passing and sharing food at their common table. And as he passed the bread broken and dipped in sauce, it was fulfilled what King David wrote:

*Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me.*  
(Psalm 41:9)

*As I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*

Judas's actions would lead to Jesus' arrest and early morning trials, three of them, and great injustices. Then brutality. Then scourging. Then the pain and shame of a Roman cross. All within a few short hours.

**Jesus speaks of this as being glorified** (v. 31-32). Earlier he had spoken of "being lifted up", an intentional double meaning, literally of the Cross, and figuratively of the glorious work of redemption that he would accomplish. And his death would be the ultimate demonstration of love and power toward us.

"What was shameful, even odious, to the critics of Christ, was in the eyes of his followers most glorious.... There is no greater cleavage between faith and unbelief than in their respective attitudes to the cross. Where faith sees glory, unbelief sees only disgrace. What was foolishness to Greeks, and continues to be to modern intellectuals who trust in their own wisdom, is nevertheless the wisdom of God. And what remains a stumbling-block to those who trust in their own righteousness, like the Jews of the first century, proves to be the saving power of God (1 Cor. 1:18–25)." (John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*)

There is a shared glory of the Father and Son. Jesus shall die a sacrificial death bringing reconciliation to multitudes, and he shall be raised from the dead in the glory of new life and new creation! The Son would so honor and glory the Father who sent him to do this work; and the Father would honor and glorify the Son for his beautiful obedience. (This is the glorious love that we also are invited to share in.) God's splendor and beauty and majesty will be demonstrated in Jesus' obedient, sacrificial death. And the resurrection would come quickly. And Jesus would "go on ahead" (v. 33) by ascension into the presence of the Father until the time of his return. Our entrance into glory and reuniting with Jesus would come in time.

**The command to love.** He then gives the new commandment, to love as he loves. His attitude and actions become the new standard for loving. Again, this is embedded in the context of his actions toward Judas and toward Peter. If we so love one another the on-looking world will know we are followers of Christ. What seems important here is not that those in the world sense we love *them*, but that we are actually loving *one another* in our community under the lordship of Christ.

**Jesus' love for Peter.** Peter's failure, unlike Judas's, was the failure of good intentions. He thought too highly of his own ability and would end up denying that he even knew the Lord. With curse words. A big embarrassment. Like Judas, the fall will come quickly, in a matter of hours.

**Don't ever think you won't fail big time!** "You're never too old to do something stupid." I believe in eternal security of the believer; I believe God will give grace to his people

to persevere, like he did Peter. But I do not think the Lord protects us from any and every fall. This should give us a deep sense of humility and dependence upon the Lord.

**The epic fail of humanity.** There are some key differences between Judas and Peter. Judas is not really to be considered “one of his [Jesus’] own who were in the world” (13:1) Peter believed in Jesus, and served him with many failings, but took Jesus as he was. Judas believed in a Jesus that didn’t exist, a Jesus of his own expectations, a Jesus that should prove useful. Judas believed in money, and ultimately he believed in himself. Peter loved Jesus for who he was; Judas loved him for what he could get. With one the relationship mattered, with the other, what he could get out of the relationship. But one thing in common: *they both failed Jesus.*

The very **saddest part of the story** is not Judas’ great sin and crime against the Son of God. After all many down through history have committed very great sins and have been forgiven... David, King Manasseh, and the Rabbi Saul, who persecuted Christ, killed his people, and then was forgiven and made an Apostle! The very saddest thing to me is that Judas did not believe that Jesus would or could forgive him, and so instead of waiting (as did Peter) to discover that the Messiah’s death would remove all the great sin and guilt, he tries to pay for his guilt with his own life.

**Jesus shows his love for Peter.** He prays for him (Lu 22:31-32) that his faith not fail, and that he would turn and then be a help to the other disciples. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32) And after the resurrection he invites him by name to meet him in Galilee: “But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." (Mark 16:7) And there he will ask Peter and have Peter re-affirm his love for Jesus three times corresponding to the three denials.

*As I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*

People, whether Christians or not, will let you down. This should not surprise us! Jesus’ love is seen not when things are going well and people are friendly. His love was shown in the midst of needy, squabbling, unbelieving disciples. With Judas on one hand and Peter on the other. It was painful. Jesus’ kind of love is proven when the one being loved is in fact unlovely. Other weddings it’s the bridesmaids and family who make the bride beautiful for the groom. In the drama of redemption it is the groom who makes the bride beautiful. He loves the unlovely into loveliness. His love turns the unlovely into beauty.

There seem to be three stages people go through (or get stuck in) when it comes to maturing in love for the church, or for a people group to whom missionaries are called: a) idealistic love, where we are enamored with the people or group; b) disillusionment when we are hurt or betrayed; c) realistic love, when we move beyond the ideals and hurt, to love as Jesus loves.

**How has he loved you?** Has he opened your eyes to see the truth about the gospel, about salvation, about your need for forgiveness and to be reconciled to God? Has he cleansed you, softened your heart, given you hope, fed you with his words as well as put food on your

table? Has he given you eternal life, every spiritual blessing, and so many good things in this life? Has he answered prayer? Has he been patient with you, and compassionate toward you, all the days of your life?

*As I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*

**Finally, his love is not only the example but the source of ours.** "As I have loved you..." gives us not only the pattern but the power. We are first the objects of his love before we can show it to others.

We had a shallow well pump on one of the farms we lived at. During dry season we had to be very frugal in our use of water. 5 minute showers and sponge baths. No washing cars or watering anything. What was available determined the outflow. The measure of the inflow determines the measure of the outflow. We had to be stingy and miserly in our use of water. Why? Because the well was shallow and affected by dryness. Many of us are that way with love. We don't receive much, don't give much. Yet Jesus is an infinite artesian well of love, past, present and future. John wrote about this in two of his other works...

**1 John 4:19** We love because he first loved us.

**Revelation 1:5-6** Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

*As I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*

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### Some final applications:

**Take a realistic view** of the Christian life. People may seriously betray you, and even close friends, exemplary Christians, may cause you great disappointment and hurt. D. A. Carson writes, "If Christians are to be kind and not to pay back evil for evil, and to exercise this love and compassion first of all to Christians, what is presupposed is that some of the attacks and pain that any Christian will experience will come from others in the church. As wonderful as Christian fellowship and Christian love may be—and at their best they are beyond price, beyond words—both experience and Scripture tell us in frank terms that sometimes Christians face the worst pain from others within the family of faith." (From **Love in Hard Places**, p. 52)

**Acknowledge the hurt.** Don't deny the painfulness of betrayal-- Jesus didn't. "Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified..." (John 13:21) Whether through betrayal, denial, disappointment, or finally death, all loves in this life experience pain. In the movie *Shadowlands*, the character playing C. S. Lewis was asked (after losing his mother as a child, and his wife to cancer), "Why love if losing hurts so much?" He answers, "Twice in life I've been given that choice, as a boy and as a man. The boy chooses safety, the man chooses suffering. The pain now is part of the happiness then. That's the deal".

**Do not take your own revenge**, or pay back evil for evil. "When he had dipped the morsel, he gave

it to Judas..." (13:26) Jesus traveled with and shared hundreds of meals with Judas over three years. He even washed Judas's feet to demonstrate his own willingness to bring cleansing to the betrayer's life. Miroslav Volf writes, "For Christians, forgiving, like giving in general, always takes place in a triangle, involving the wrongdoer, the wronged person, and God. Take God away, and the foundations of forgiveness become unsteady and may even crumble." (Miroslav Volf, from *Free of Charge*)

**Remember the a spiritual dimension** to those who oppose Jesus: "Satan entered into him." (13:27) Such broken relationships are never strictly intellectual or emotional in their cause. Prayer is so important!

To love as Jesus did **doesn't mean being a wimp or doormat**. "What you are going to do..." (13:27) Jesus did not run after Judas, nor did he prevent Peter's failure which would bring humility to Peter's life. (13:38)

**Rest upon God's sovereign ability** to bring glory out of shame. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him... (13:31) If he can bring glory and good from the most unjust, tragic, evil situation (Acts 2:23), then he can bring glory and good from yours. "God works against evil and suffering. But God, in immense divine power and inscrutable divine wisdom, also works through evil and suffering." (Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge*)

Be aware that **fellow believers in their self-confidence** will promise more than they can deliver: "I will lay down my life for you." (13:37)

**Take the initiative in reconciliation.** Jesus warned Peter, and prayed for his success (Luke 22:32). After the resurrection Peter was summoned by name to meet Jesus in Galilee (Mark 16:7). There our resurrected Lord prepared breakfast for the disciples and led Peter to re-affirm his love three times, and then put him back to work in ministry. (John 21)