

SERIES: Gospel of John: Seeing is Believing?
 SERMON: ***Just As I Have Loved You***
 SCRIPTURE: John 13:1-38
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black
 DATE: February 19, 2012

John 13:1-17 (ESV)

¹Now 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. ²During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵Then 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. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus 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." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²When 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?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

Everyone loves love.

Some people have a principled objection to Valentine's Day; I like to make a week out of it. Don't get me wrong; I'm not very romantic, but I do like candy. Since I'm making a week of it, I'd like to read a few quotes on the topic of love from our favorite source, children:

- I know my older sister loves me because she gives me all her old clothes and has to go out and buy new ones. - Lauren, age 4
- Love is when you go out to eat and give somebody most of your French fries without making them give you any of theirs. - Chrissy, age 6
- Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day. - Mary Ann, age 4
- I think you're supposed to get shot with an arrow or something, but the rest of it isn't supposed to be so painful. - Manuel, age 8
- Don't do things like have smelly, green sneakers. You might get attention, but attention ain't the same thing as love. - Alonzo, age 9
- Hey, Baby, I don't like girls, but I'm willing to forget you are one! - Will, age 7

“Everyone loves love.”¹ At least that’s what Mike McKinley says in his book new book *Am I a Christian?* In his book he points out that if you stood up in a meeting of Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, and Hindus and said, “God is love,” you would see a lot of head nodding. Most people like the idea of a God who is love and even like the idea of a religion that tells people to love. Everyone loves love.

So, when we come to John 13 and Jesus says, in verse 34, “*A new commandment I give you, that you love one another,*” we’re not surprised and we’re not offended. But the question remains, do we understand the nature of the love Jesus is speaking of in this verse? In verse 34 the sentence goes on, “*just as I have loved, you also are to love one another.*” Everyone loves love, but does everyone love the love that Jesus commands, and does everyone understand it. I would argue that many do not fully understand distinctively Christian love and may not like what it entails.

John wants us to understand the love Jesus is speaking of so much that it becomes one of the main topics in the Farewell Discourse in chapters 13-17. The word love was only used 12 times in the first twelve chapters, but is used 37 times in the Farewell Discourse alone.² And the foot washing is the beginning of this new emphasis.

We know that the washing of the disciples’ feet is going to teach us something about Christ’s love because John tells us. At the beginning of chapter 13, in verse 1, John tells us that “[*Jesus*] *having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*” But what does this mean? The rest of the book of John is going to unpack what this means. The foot washing is the first picture of Christ’s love we get in the last half of John.

Sermon in a sentence: The foot washing in John 13 teaches us that we must first understand Christ’s love in order to love as Christ loved us.

We are not going to cover all of chapter 13 this morning. Instead we are going to focus exclusively on the foot washing (1-17) and its significance for Christian discipleship (esp. 12-17, 33-35). Please open your Bibles to John 13. I want to answer two questions about the foot washing. What does it teach us about Christ’s love and what does it teach us about our love for one another?

CHRIST’S LOVE

First, what does the foot washing teach us about Christ’s love?

The setting tells us a lot. Jesus and his disciples are eating the Passover meal together. This is important for two reasons. First it informs who Jesus is; second it informs what Jesus does.

Christ’s love is humble service.

At this meal Jesus is serving in the same way as the head of a Jewish family would serve at a Passover meal.³ We know his disciples see him in this way. He’s referred to as Lord and master, Teacher and Rabbi (9, 13). And we know that he is more than all of these from our study in John.

¹ Mike McKinley, *Am I really a Christian*, p. 95

² Grant Osborne, Class Notes.

³ Don Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. NB. In v. 33 Jesus addresses his disciples as “little children.”

He is also the Christ, the Son of God (20:31). He is the Word of God. He actually is God. John 1:1 tells us this, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*

It was this Jesus, our Lord and our God (cf. 20:28), who in verses 4-5 *“...rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it round 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 round him.”* This gesture was no less than an extreme makeover. The Creator of the universe (cf. 1:3), the disciples’ Lord, was dressing like a servant or a slave and then begins to act like a servant or a slave.

And this explains why Peter reacts the way that he does in verse 6. Jesus’ actions are so radical Peter initially refuses to be washed. In that culture only servants or slaves would wash someone’s feet. And so for Peter to allow Jesus to wash his feet, is tantamount to acknowledging that Jesus is a slave and a denial that Jesus is the Christ, the Holy One of God (cf. 6:69).

The New Testament epistles in many ways serve as a commentary on the life and work of Christ. In Philippians 2:6-8 Paul gives us commentary on the significance of Christ’s actions in John 13. *“Though he was in the form of God, [he] 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.”*

So, the first thing that the foot washing teaches us about Christ love is that Christ’s love is humble service. But the foot washing is not an end in and of itself. The humble service of foot washing points to something else. It points to what Jesus will do.

Christ’s love is sacrificial service.

In verse 7 Jesus tells Peter, *“What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”* Jesus is essentially saying “hindsight is 20/20” or “the world looks clearer in the rearview mirror.” After the crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and especially after the coming of the Holy Spirit the foot washing will make sense to them (16:13-14).⁴ They will then understand that this act of humble service, this act of love, was pointing forward to the most loving, humble service in human history. Afterward they will understand that the foot washing points to Jesus’ death on the cross.

Again Philippians 2 serves as commentary. In verse 8 we’re told that *“...he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”* The Son of God went to the cross to die for the sins of his people.

I said earlier that the setting of the Passover feast informs the significance of the foot washing. And if the foot washing ultimately points to Jesus’ death on the cross then the significance is this: the Lord of the Passover feast becomes the Passover Lamb. His life is offered as a sacrifice for our lives. The Shepherd King lays down his life for the sheep (10:11). The Son of God becomes the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world (1:29). And that is the second thing we learn about Christ’s love in the foot washing. Christ’s love is sacrificial service.

⁴ Don Carson and Grant Osborne say “afterward” is primarily referring to the coming of the Holy Spirit.

This is what it means when we're told in verse 1 that he loved them to the end. His love was shown in the foot washing, but his love was shown to the uttermost when he came to the end of his life and gave up his life for the lives of his own who were in the world.⁵

And this loving humble sacrificial service was necessary. After Peter says in verse 8, "*You shall never wash my feet,*" Jesus answers him, "*If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.*" As we have established, the foot washing points to the cross of Christ – to his sacrifice. So, the cleansing of feet pointed to the cleansing of sin on the cross. Christ's cross cleanses us from sin. Without the sacrifice on the cross there is no atonement for sin.

So, in view of Christ's radical love, his humble and sacrificial service, how should we respond?

We should believe the gospel.

First, we should believe the gospel. The whole book of John calls us to believe very specific things about who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish in order to provide eternal life (20:31). In this chapter we are being called to believe that Christ's love is humble service, and that this loving humble service culminates on the cross, and that this cross is the only thing that can cleanse us from our sin.

This is good news. And if we believe this gospel then we have eternal life and are clean once-for-all. But while belief in the gospel cleanses us once and for all, there is a second response that is called for in this text.

We should live lives of faith and repentance.

Jesus explains this in verse 9-10. After Jesus tells Peter that it is necessary that he wash his feet, Peter says, "*Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head*" Jesus replies by saying, "*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.*"

What does this mean? Let me start by saying, John is not afraid to use one metaphor to teach more than one lesson (e.g. Jn. 10; 15). According to Don Carson, the foot washing has three lessons. The first points to Jesus' death (which we just covered), the second points to Christian discipleship (which we will discuss here shortly), but the third and less obvious lesson is found in what Jesus says in verse 10. Let me explain.

If you are going to a party you will hopefully take a shower before you go so that you won't stink when you show up. And when you get to the party you may wash your hands (if you're a germ freak), but you're not going to ask the host if you can take a quick shower. In the ancient world they wore sandals and walked on dirty roads. So by the time they arrived at a party their feet were dirty and needed washing. They didn't need to bathe again; they just needed to have their feet cleaned.

In the same way, those who have a "share" with Jesus (8) – those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb and have eternal life – do not need to be washed over and over again. Salvation is a

⁵ "...to the end" in v. 1 comes from the Greek *eis telos* which in this context can also be translated "to the uttermost." According to Grant Osborne both meanings are probably implied here – he did love them till the end of his life and in that act of love, namely laying down his life, he loved them to the uttermost. Cf. Don Carson, *The Gospel According to John*.

once-for-all thing (cf. Heb. 10:10). However, although our salvation is once-for-all we still sin daily. We don't need to be saved over and over again, but we do need to continually take our sin before the Lord, confess our sins, and believe the gospel anew.

In other words, we need to live lives of faith and repentance. It's not just something we do at conversion. Faith and repentance should mark our lives until our faith becomes sight and there is no more sin. (This is why we intentionally confess sin in this service every week.)⁶ And the good news is that *"If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 Jn. 1:9).

Remember that at the beginning I said that we must first understand Christ's love in order to love as Christ loved. We've looked at Christ's love and we've seen that Christ's love is humble service to the point of death. Let's look now at how Christ's love informs our love for one another.

OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

Or in other words, what does the foot washing teach us about our love for one another? Thankfully Jesus tells us a fair amount about how the foot washing applies to our discipleship in verses 12-17 and in verses 33-35.

John 13:12–17 (ESV)

¹²When 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?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

John 13:33–35 (ESV)

³³Little 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.' ³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus wants his disciples to understand the significance of the foot washing because he is going to the cross, then to the Father (vv. 1, 31-33), and he wants them to understand what discipleship will be like after he is gone so he gives some instructions.

His instructions in the Farewell Discourse (chapters 13-17) are to discipleship what premarital counseling is to marriage. They *think* they understand what discipleship is in the same way that an engaged couple *thinks* they know what marriage is. But they won't actually get it until they're in it. Nevertheless, it is still a good exercise to begin thinking about the realities of marriage before they hit you like a ton of bricks. In the same way, Jesus wants his disciples thinking about the realities of discipleship before he leaves them. And the first lesson they need to learn about discipleship is to love one another. But their love for one another as Christ's disciples needs to be a very specific kind

⁶ For more on how we structure our services listen to Josh's sermon "Deep and Wide," November 6, 2011.

of love – they are to love one another just as Christ loved them (v. 34). The very nature of discipleship is doing what Jesus does and obeying all he commands.⁷

Our love involves humble service.

So the first thing we need to learn about loving one another is that our love involves humble service just like Jesus' love. Humility doesn't come easy to us and Jesus knows this. As we have said in weeks past, we are prone toward self-promotion, not humility.⁸ We are prone to love the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God (43). So Jesus reminds his disciples in verses 13-15 that if he humbled himself then we need to humble ourselves as well.

The argument in verses 13-15 is an argument from the greater to the lesser. If the God of the universe (cf. Heb. 1:3) humbled himself then surely his disciples can humble themselves. *"You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am."*⁹ *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."* I don't think he is referring to literal feet washing here. There was something more significant going on in the foot washing and he is calling us to something more significant as well. He's calling us to a whole life of humble service to the body of Christ.

Again, Philippians 2:2-7 is helpful in tying all this together. *"[Have] the same kind of love (referring to Christ's love), being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, 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..."*

Humble service goes against the grain of our sinful hearts and the culture in which we live. We love fame, we love moving up the ladder, we love stories of the self-made man, and we love the prestige that comes from degrees and position; in short, we love pride, not humility. So we, like his original disciples, must be reminded that the Lord Jesus Christ served in humility and that we as his disciples are not above him.

You may be a top level executive in your company or a CEO, but you're not above Christ – he served humbly; he's calling you to serve humbly. You may be an accomplished physician, but you're not above Christ – he served humbly; he's calling you to serve humbly. You may be a top notch student or athlete, a killer trial attorney, one of the best engineers in town, an incredible school teacher or Bible teacher, but regardless of our position in society, high or low, we are not above Christ – he served humbly; he is calling us as a church to serve one another humbly.

Our love involves sacrificial service.

The second thing we need to learn about loving one another is that our love involves sacrificial service just like Jesus' love. Before I flesh out what this means let me make two qualifying

⁷ It's amazing to me that Jesus' commands are actually completely connected with who he is and what he does.

⁸ See the previous sermon in the series, "The Glorious King."

⁹ Many commentators point out the fact that this last phrase of verse 13, "for so I am," is yet another claim to deity; Jesus is referring to himself as the great I AM (cf. Ex. 3:14), as God himself. Whether or not he is doing that here isn't completely clear from the context; but Jesus has made claims such as this throughout John, so we shouldn't be surprised if he is doing the same here. See the 7 "I am" statements in John, esp. 8:58.

comments. First, while we are called to lay down our life as Christ laid down his life we cannot atone for sin; Christ's death on the cross is unique in this way.¹⁰ But Christ's sacrificial death is an example to be followed. Secondly, while we are called to lay down our life as Christ laid down his life that doesn't mean that we're all called to be martyrs. Many around the world are being martyred for their faith in Christ, and we all should be willing if faced with that someday, which may happen, but true sacrificial service doesn't necessitate martyrdom.

So if our sacrificial service is not atoning and doesn't necessitate martyrdom, then what does it mean? Let me offer a suggestion. I would say that loving one another involves sacrificial giving of time, talents, and treasures to the body of Christ.

Living a balanced life is really important to a lot of people. And while I want to encourage people to give adequate attention to the things that are important I'm not sure that some of the things that are on the "balance beam" are of eternal significance. In your effort to balance your time ask yourself if you are giving adequate time to serving the body of Christ. Do you view church as another product to be consumed or are you giving sacrificially of your time and talents to love one another in the body of Christ? I encourage you to make time to serve within your gifting even if it means a little less "me" time or a little less "room-to-breathe" time. This is part of what it means to love one another by serving sacrificially.

Another part of loving one another involves the sacrificial giving of our treasures.

1 John 3:16–17 (ESV)

¹⁶By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. ¹⁷But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

We are called to give sacrificially of our treasures to those in the body of Christ who are in need.¹¹ As you hear of those who are in need I encourage you to consider areas where you could give sacrificially. One tangible way to give to those in need in this church is by giving to our benevolence account. We collect an offering at the end of the service on the first Sunday of every month. Most of that money goes to those in our congregation who are in need; although some of it goes to those in the community.

My guess is many of you agree with the principles that have been laid out in our passage so far; love one another through humble service and love one another through sacrificial giving. But notice in verse 17 Jesus says, *"If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."* Jesus knows that we are a people who have good intentions, but often fail to follow through.¹² He wants to remind us that blessing doesn't come from simply knowing a principle or even believing that it is true. The blessing in discipleship comes from actually obeying the commands that Christ gives us. In our passage blessing comes from loving one another by humble service and sacrificial giving of time, talents, and treasures. This is counter-intuitive, so let us make every effort to follow Christ in his example.

¹⁰ NB. The irony in verses 37-38: Peter says he'll lay down his life for Jesus, when in fact it is Jesus who lays down his life for Peter.

¹¹ If we are in up to our ears in "consumer" debt (generally money spent on ourselves) we are handicapped and less able to give sacrificially.

¹² Cf. 13:36-38 Peter is a good example here.

We love because he first loved us

But let us also guard against legalism and moralism. Remember what we said when we began. We must *first* understand Christ's love *in order to* love as Christ loved. Or to put it another way, "*We love because he first loved us*" (1 Jn. 4:19). Our conduct in the Christian life is completely connected with what Christ first did for us.¹³ (I invite you to look up all of the references to loving one another in the New Testament and see how frequently this command is connected with the work of Christ.¹⁴)

He first loved us. He was the first to humbly and sacrificially give himself up for us. If it weren't for his humble and sacrificial death on the cross we would still be dead in our sins; we wouldn't be able to love as Christ loves. Our love for one another must flow out of who we are in Christ. Our love for one another doesn't earn us the love of God. No, we are saved exclusively by grace through Christ's work for us. Our love for one another comes from the love of God in Christ. But it is also true that without love for one another we cannot claim that we belong to Christ.

1 John 4:7–8 (ESV)

⁷*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.* ⁸*Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

If we don't have love for one another we have no confidence that we have eternal life. But if we do have love for one another which shows itself in humble sacrificial service then we can have assurance that we have been born of God – that we have eternal life. In the same way that life is connected with God, so is love. If we are in Christ we have eternal life because he has life in himself (5:26). And in the same way, if we are in Christ we will have love for one another because God is love.

We love that the world may know.

The last point I want to make about our love for one another is our love for one another shows the world that we are Christians. We love that the world may know.

Look again at verse 35. "*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

Some of you may be wondering why all of the love in John's writings seems focused on the church. You may think this all sounds a little exclusive or like we're trying to hole up in our holy huddle and keep the world out. Let me simply say that focusing our love on one another is not at the expense of our love for the world. Consider this statement from Don Carson: Christians are not to love the world less, but they are to love one another more.¹⁵ And the thing that is wild about this thinking is that when we love one another more we will actually have more of an impact on the world.

I believe that a parent's greatest impact they can have on their child is to love their spouse. But if you're being intentional with your spouse – you're taking regular date nights, making time to debrief in the evenings, etc. – there may be times when your children feel like they're being neglected. But

¹³ For more on this see Josh's sermon on Galatians 1:6-10 "Don't Mess with the Message," August 22, 2010.

¹⁴ Jn. 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; Eph. 4:2; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8; 1 Jn. 3:11, 23; 4:11, 12; 2 Jn. 5.

¹⁵ Adapted from Don Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 485.

in the end, spending time cultivating a relationship with our spouse is the best thing we can do for our children. In the same way, while I don't think that we should neglect our witness in the world, we are told in Scripture that they will know we are Christians by our love for one another.

And I think that must imply that our love for one another looks different from the love the world has. In the 3rd Century the church was being persecuted by the Roman government. Tertullian, one of the early church leaders, wrote to the government to give a defense for the Christian faith.

In his "Apology" he spoke a lot about the love Christians had for one another in the church.¹⁶ And it was a tangible love. Tertullian said in his defense, we are "one mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us but our wives." That's a good qualifier.

They paid for the funerals of the poor in the church, they took care of children of the poor in the church and the orphaned, they took care of the medical needs of those in the church, they cared for their elderly, and those in prison. And Tertullian points out that the outside world was noticing how counter-cultural the church was. The church truly considered one another family, brothers and sisters in Christ. Even the pagans of the day marveled at the love of the Christian fellowship, especially as it faced persecution, and the pagans were saying, "See how they love one another! ...how they are ready even to die for one another!"¹⁷

That's what the world noticed in the early church. I pray that is what people will notice about this church. That when they look at us they would say, "See how they love one another! The love of Christ is so deep in them and so profound that it just flows out of them. They serve humbly, they serve sacrificially; they give of themselves. They give of their time, and their talents, and their treasures. And they really love one another!" And that maybe by seeing that, they would want to know what is going on in our life and our community that is different than theirs. I pray that through our love for another the world may know that the love of Christ resides in us.

Benediction:

Ephesians 6:23-24 (ESV)

Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

¹⁶ See Chapter 39 in Tertullian's *The Apology*.

¹⁷ Don Carson, *The Gospel According to John*.

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