

As I Loved You
John 13:1-35

Turn to John 13 please. This is the first of four messages from John on love one another. We've been through a time when it has been unusually difficult for us all to love one another. That is never easy, but sometimes are harder than other. So this topic seems a good idea.

John 13:1 marks a big shift in John's Gospel. Chapters 1-12 tell us about the Lord's public ministry, and chapters 13-21 begin with the Last Supper. They are about Jesus and his disciples, and his death and resurrection. And how we live with one another comes up several times.

He Loved Them To The End – 13:1

V1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Jesus came from the Father, and he had a mission to accomplish, and then he would return to the Father. It was Passover time, which told Jesus that he was right at the end of his mission. He would lay down his life for his sheep, and rise from the dead, and return to the Father.

The emphasis of this opening verse is that the Lord's task was to love his own who were in the world, and he never got steered away from his task. When we have a had employment for quite a while, and then we know when it is ending, it can be hard to stay at it right to the end. We tend to slack off a bit, take it a bit easier, since we're leaving anyway.

Jesus did not do that. A big part of his mission was to love his own who were in the world, and he did that right to the end. From here to the end of John shows us how he did that. This verse tells us the underlying theme of John 13-21: he loved his own to the end.

Did you notice how John describes the twelve disciples? "His own who are in the world." This is the Last Supper, the other Gospels make clear that this is the twelve. But John won't say "the twelve disciples," because he wants to include every believer in this. You and I are "his own who are in the world." We belong to him, and we are in this difficult place. "In the world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world." We are his own who are in the world, and he loved us actively the whole time he was here. John writes so we'll understand it that way.

He Washed Their Feet: Love in Slow Motion – John 13:4-5

John describes what Jesus does with seven separate actions: *He **got up** from the meal, **took off** his cloak, **picked up** a towel, and **wrapped it** around his waist. He **poured water** into a basin, and started **washing** his disciples' feet, **drying them** with the towel that was around him.*

No one of these actions is special. If we know only that Jesus washed their feet, we could have guessed most of this. Why so much mundane detail? Because the act itself is astonishing. I like to watch sports on TV, and when something unusual happens in a game, they often replay it in slow motion so we can see what actually happened. John does not have a camera, so writes slow motion with words.

Jesus washed their feet. People wore sandals in those days, and they walked everywhere, and they walked in the same places where animals walked. So there will certainly be dust and dirt on everyone's feet, and probably also you walked in some old manure and some fresh manure. So feet were unclean, and they were very careful about that.

The normal custom was that when people came to your home, you gave each person a basin of water, so they could wash their own feet. That was proper hospitality. In Luke, Jesus was at the house of a Pharisee named Simon, and Jesus said, "You did not give me water for my feet." It was shabby hospitality not to give Jesus water to wash his feet.

But people did not wash each other's feet, unless there were slaves in the household. Then the lowest slave in the house would wash other people's feet. A Jewish teacher was not allowed to ask his students to wash his feet. That was unfair to the student. SO, Jesus washed the disciples' feet. That was unbelievable, and that is why John gave us this in slow motion. This shows Jesus loving his own who are in the world, and loving them to the end.

Unless I Wash, You Have No Part With Me – 13:6-8

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"
Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand."
"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter can see what Jesus is doing: his Lord and Teacher is about to wash his feet. Peter sees that, and that's just wrong! If Peter does not understand now but he will later, that means that there's more going on here than just the Lord washing feet, because that much Peter already understands.

Jesus ties his coming death to the footwashing. In a sense, his death explains the footwashing. John the Baptist said, "*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*" When Jesus washed their feet, he washed away all kinds of crud, new and old. When Jesus laid down his life for us, he took away all kinds of spiritual crud, new and old. His dying for us was an act of humble service for us, to clean us. Footwashing is a good object lesson of what his death did.

"Unless I wash you," said Jesus, "You have no part in me." "Unless the Lamb of God lays down his life for your sins, you are not one of mine." For Jesus, to die for us was serving us, just like washing our feet.

“*The Son of Man came to serve and to give his life as a ransom,*” says Jesus in Mark. To serve and to give his life a ransom are not two separate things, for Jesus. To give his life as a ransom for us was serving us.

In John, we don’t read that Jesus ever said, “This bread is my body, eat it; this cup is my blood, drink it.” In the other Gospels, we take the Lord’s death to ourselves by eating the bread and drinking the cup. In John, we let him wash our feet, and that way we receive his dying for us.

Do What I Did – 13:12-17

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

This is not complicated. We are to live this way with one another. “*Do you know what I’ve done for you? I’ve given you an example. I have shown you what to do.*” The emphasis is not on actual foot washing, although that is fine. The emphasis is on how we live with each other.

Did you notice that Jesus does not talk to them while he serves them? He just does it. If Peter hadn’t started a conversation, Jesus probably would have washed and dried all twenty-four feet without saying a word. We don’t have to talk, just act this way.

Jesus does not use the word “love” when he explains his example. He just says, “do this; do for each other what I did for you.” But the chapter began with Jesus loving his own to the end, and the foot washing shows us how he did that.

This paragraph ends: *Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.* People, we want that blessing. I do, and you do. We don’t know what the blessing is exactly, but it will certainly be worth having. We want that. Let’s nurture a hunger for that blessing. Let’s ask for that blessing. If we ask him for the blessing, that means God will help us live this way, and then we’ll receive that blessing.

The New Command – John 13:33-35

My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

My brothers and sisters, Jesus did not just give us an example with a blessing attached. He gave us a command. He turned the example into a command. Do it. Love each other as I loved you. Do it: the new command.

And this is not just the New Command, it is also the Last Command. *“I tell you now, I am leaving. Here’s what you’ll do when I am gone: love each other as I have loved you.”*

This whole chapter has the feel of Jesus leaving. V1 said Jesus knew it was time for him to leave the world and go to the Father. V3 says that Jesus knew that he was returning to God. So when he tells his disciples in v33 that he’s not here much longer, we already know what that means. So it is not just a New Command, it is also the Last Command.

And it is not just the Last Command, it is our mark in the world, our label, our brand. *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* Jesus is real clear about what everyone needs from us. Jesus said, everyone needs to see a community that loves each other as I loved you. Everyone needs to see that. I want this to be your mark.

And, Jesus says, it will work. If they see this, they will know that you are my disciples. This will convince them that you’re my disciples, it will persuade them. They will know you belong to me.

The Perfect Church was Like this – Acts 2:42-47

Did you know there was a perfect church in the New Testament? There is one, the most perfect church that will exist before the Lord returns. Real people in real time, the Jerusalem church at the end of Acts 2. In the morning of the day of Pentecost, those people were strangers to each other, Jews gathered in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, total strangers to each other.

The Spirit came, Peter preached, 3000 repented and were baptized, their sins were forgiven and they received the Spirit, and what then? Then they loved each other as Christ loved them. That perfect church did not stay perfect very long, but for a while they were, and since it is the only perfect church we get in the Bible, we need to pay attention to what those people did.

And here the thing: in six verses of details, their whole lives were one another: eating and sharing and praising God, all with one another. Here’s how it end: “they enjoyed the favour of all the people, and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

The non-believers in Jerusalem watched the life together of that new group, and were very impressed. They enjoyed the favour of all the people. They said to each other: “Wow! What happened to those people? Look at their life together. That’s amazing!” *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* That is the story of the one perfect church in Acts 2.

Beware

There is almost no voice in church circles these days that thinks the Acts 2 church is the perfect church. There is almost no voice in church circles that thinks the New Command, the Last Command, to love one another as Christ loved us, is what the world most needs from us.

Of course this is not exclusive. We, individually and also as a church, help unbelievers around us that are in need, and we are friends to them, we enjoy them and do good to them. Our church has always done that, and we will continue. It is not exclusive.

I'm talking about the voices that believe some kind of outreach activity is the sign that a church really follows the Lord. It is very hard to find a Christian voice that says our relationships with each other are the most important thing the church has to give the world. Jesus is clear about that in John 13-17, and it is the mark of the perfect church in Acts 2. But few take that and go with it.

Our relationships with each other are the most important thing the church has to give the world. They are *not* the *only* thing the church has to give the world. God calls some to work outside the church, the most important being those he calls to preach the gospel. But, our relationships with each other are the most important thing the church has to give the world, and this one another love is the most important measuring stick of our faithfulness to God.

What to Do?

The good news here is that there is lots of humble care for each other happening in this body of believers, and between us and believers in other churches. Much of this happens; so let's carry on. And for every single one of us, how we actually live it out will be different. What you and I actually do to imitate Jesus washing our feet will vary immensely.

So keep your eyes open as you go through life. Look for chances. Remember that it is the new command, and it is the last command, and living this way with each other persuades the world that we follow Jesus. Grab that, and keep your eyes open. The Spirit will take it from there. Amen.

PRAYER: Lord, you said we'd be blessed if we did these things. Thank you for how you've already led us like this. And Lord, we want that blessing, the blessing for those who follow your example. Help us, lead us, guide us, work in us, so that we do what you said and receive that blessing. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord direct our hearts into God's love and into Christ's perseverance. May the Lord of peace give us peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.