

How Now Shall We Love? (John 13)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton 3/22/2010
at Gold Country Baptist Church (www.gcb.church)

We need the word of our King who is above presidents and pandemics and who rules over all in His providence. This last week the world as we know it has changed in so many ways, even since our small gathering here last Lord's Day. The context of John 13 is the week that changed the world for Christ's followers. The Sunday before He cleared out the temple, that week He shut down religion as the Jews knew it, told them the temple was coming down, and taught them about His kingdom

The same night as John 13 He said what I read last week: *Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home* [sound familiar? That's the context of John chapter 13]

Sunday after John 13, these disciples were fearful, lock-down in their house, literally behind locked doors, only faithful women brave enough to go out. A day or two before John 13 He taught about Jerusalem's desolation in their lifetime, and beyond. He said *'When you hear of... disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first... in various places plagues... Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with...worries of life...'* He told them of coming persecution and events *'bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.'*¹ One translation says *'There will be pestilences in various places, and fearful events... This will result in your being witnesses ...'*² He said the gospel will be preached through all the world as a testimony to nations³

Jesus said when you see things like that and rumors of more, that's not the end of the world; don't fear, be faithful witnesses to the ends of the earth. We're to make disciples, knowing He is with us to the end of the age. Our great commission doesn't change, or Christ's great commandment behind it. Jn 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.*³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

That's our text for today, but in our coronavirus crisis context, how does it apply? The original context is Jesus talking in a living room to a very small gathering, the upper room of a house with no modern conveniences, no stockpiled food or toilet paper, no running water to wash hands, no servant here to wash feet Let's keep that in perspective, the blessings we normally take for granted haven't been a normal or essential part of church history for 20 centuries. In the 21st century much of the world in the persecuted or poor majority of the global church has faced limits. Plagues have done worse in the early church, through the dark ages, the Reformers saw 25-33% of Europe wiped out by what they called the Black Death, the Puritan church in the 1600s battled nationwide contagion, Spurgeon in the 1800s ministered through a cholera epidemic with a 13% mortality rate, 20th century America Spanish Flu, etc.

Our modern church has just joined the rest of church history and the world. Proud America has been brought to its knees. Jesus served from that posture in Jn 13, and said in v. 16 *'Truly, truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master...'* This is the context where He showed them what's really great and what Christianity would really be all about. The Son of Man who had no place to lay His head, who had no shelter or place to shelter in place, the Lord who depended on women to provide food for them and their needs, let's remember we're not greater than our Master. Let's not complain, let's thank the Lord who lets us tune in to His teaching from a home in John 13.

This week all of CA has been given a stay at home/shelter-in-place order, no public or close gatherings of any size outside of homes (some visitors still allowed in your home, or outside your home to exercise if at safe distances). If you struggle with the idea of being called to shelter, it seems all negative, remember in the Bible, the Lord is called our shelter, positively protectively.

Ps 55 NIV *'My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught... My heart is in anguish within me... Fear and trembling have beset me... I would hurry to my place of shelter ...'* That's a biblical shelter in place: refuge in the Lord. Ps 55 goes on to say *'Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you'*

Ps 61 NKJV *'When my heart is overwhelmed; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a shelter for me, A strong tower ...'* If it seems overwhelming at times as you shelter in place, look higher, a shelter amid the flood of mortal ills, a mighty fortress, a bulwark never failing.

Ps 91: *He who dwells in the **shelter** of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge... from the **deadly pestilence**. He will cover you... You will not fear the terror... nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the **plague** that destroys at midday ... Rev 7:15 'he who sits on the throne will **shelter** them with his presence.'*

PTL for the shelter He provides, and with food and shelter let's be content. If we can't gather in God's house, and have to be smaller gatherings in our houses, let's continue what Acts 5:42 says: *'from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.'*⁴

And don't think it can't be worshipful or meaningful to hear from the Lord in a home setting. That's what Jn 13-17 is, and many of the NT letters are written to churches that met in homes. The Jerusalem church had to gather in homes after the authorities said the church couldn't gather in the temple. What's unique to our times is so many homes can hear the same sermon at the same time. The church isn't a building, it's a body that can meet in building.

But a family isn't church, a true church has pastors, discipline, communion and baptism (last 2 I pray we resume in April?). Today can't replace actual church, it's just the best we can do to engage the church until it can regroup with full biblical fellowship. A screen can't substitute for the body, but PTL we live in a day and age where a screen can connect the body till it reunites.

Many years ago Francis Schaeffer wrote a book How Then Shall We Live? In this year the question before us is how now shall we love? With CA on a lockdown, does that shut down our biblical calling to love? How do we love one another in the church if we can't gather as a church? This isn't ideal or normal. PTL we can stream live but spiritual life needs more. Many millions in our State are to be mostly homebound for weeks except for the essentials, but we're also bound biblically to love neighbors who aren't in our home. It's tension: essential biblical call to care but be careful not to spread illness. Our church has 122 aged 65 or older.

Christians bravely risk their own lives, but putting others at risk isn't loving. Normally loving others is expressed best in person, face to face, by physical touch, and by being close (at least closer than 6 feet). But when you know you're sick and contagious, the loving thing actually is to keep germs away (the same Bible that commands love also commands quarantines of the ill). God's law with love your neighbor also isolated some diseased days, weeks.

With a normal flu virus you have symptoms and it's short-lived, this virus is different as you can have it for days without symptoms or never have any as you pass it on to others, at least some of which will die. So it isn't just about whether you're afraid to die or not, or whether or not you like a government telling you what you can't do for awhile (let's be honest, we don't like that, and especially about church we love). But we need to think about showing care by being careful in this unique time, instead of usual ways of affection.

Maybe you say *'I don't care if I die, I'm ready because I love the Lord,'* but the 2nd command after *love the Lord* is *love your neighbor*. And it isn't love to disregard and disobey our government and potentially pass on what you might have that can make your neighbor or those close to them pass away. I read Rom 13 last week on our duty to submit to governing authorities, and to resist them is to resist God.

Rom 13 goes on to say “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” **Love does no harm to its neighbor.** Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time (NIV).

For us who are inconvenienced and impatient, or irritated we can’t do what we want now and in the way we want, remember in 1 Cor 13 ‘*love is patient ...it does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful... Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things endures all things...*’

Notice in Jn 13, v. 35, by love is how people know we’re Christ’s followers. I started the year 2020 with a series on the church, Paul’s Acts 20:20 vision, where he says he ministered in public and from house to house, teaching the gospel of repentance and faith in Jesus as Lord. We can only do half of that for now, house to house, not public gatherings, but the gospel is unchanged.

Messages: 2020 vision for body life (Hebrews 10:24-25)

- ... stirring encouragement (discuss each of these)
- ... growing in communication (convicting to me)
- ... gospel as motivation (exhort to memorization)
- ... church commitments (still apply, how to apply?)
- ... church unity (being apart can draw us together)
- ... deacons and elders (discuss AV, care team, etc.)
- ... church love **so the world will know**

Our monthly leadership group in 2020 has been studying Leading in Love. SC booklet: “Twenty-twenty is a term used to express perfect visual acuity measured at a distance of twenty feet. Someone with twenty-twenty vision can see clearly, at twenty feet, what should normally be seen at that distance. This is the benchmark for accurate focus. [In the year] 2020 ... It is vital to maintain our focus through the lens of Scripture ...”

13:1 *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 [v. 4] he rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist...he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet...*

In Jn 13, v. 23, John calls himself for the first time the disciple Jesus loved, as he reclines at the table and leans on him, close to the heart of Jesus. Look at 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.* ³⁵ *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*”

Love isn’t a brand-new command, it’s in the OT Law, it sums up the Law, but Jesus gave it new significance, *as He loved them* (washing feet, dying). Jesus called love of the Lord the great commandment, the second like it, is to love your neighbor. The first and greatest upward love must also be an outward love. Vertical love toward heaven then moves out horizontally to others on earth. And here it’s so the world will know, all people, this love.

Francis Schaeffer called love the mark of the Christian. Faith is important, but love is what Drummond called the greatest thing in the world. 1 Cor 13 ends ‘*faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love.* 14:1 *Pursue love...*’ Look at v. 31 right before this, Jesus said ‘*Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.*’ ³² *If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.*’

That’s the higher purpose of love in v. 34, that God be glorified in Himself in His Son. That’s the great motivation for the great commandment of love. **17:1** *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you ... [that’s His ultimate purpose, look at v. 22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,*

²³ *I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.*

Christ's great commission is really part of His great commandment to love.

GCBC Purpose Statement: **This church exists by the grace of God, for the glory of God, which shall be the ultimate purpose in all its activities**

This church shall seek to glorify God by:

- The worship of God (praise, preaching, prayer, etc.)
- Loving and obeying Christ, sharing Him with the lost
- Equipping, edifying exhorting, discipleship, fellowship

But how and when? That's the motivation and explanation, but what about application? This is where I asked for your participation in the video, ways we can show love to one another when apart and share love with those apart from Christ. It's been said fear is more viral than any virus. Love drives out fear (1 Jn 4).

One mom wrote: been shopping for the elderly and family, calling people, child has been drawing pictures for friends and mailing them. We also made baskets of food for a couple of elderly neighbors which was fun to deliver and went for walks together as a family. We are only on week 1 of this so it will be good to remember to act not just this week but for the weeks to come

WHAT PEOPLE HAVE BEEN DOING TO REACH OUT TO 65+ LIST

Many on that list are reaching out to each other and younger people as well. Great stories of how love being shown is being noticed by unsaved family.

TALK ABOUT GOSPEL HERE

Disease smashes the idol of security ... prosperity ... wellness⁵ ... control.

Trevin Wax writes: 'By giving, when everyone else is hoarding, we show the world we trust in God as our great provider. When Paul said that the love of the Thessalonian church was evident in the entire region of Macedonia (1 Thess. 4:9-10), he meant that the people had been sharing their resources with one another. They'd been giving generously... What are some ways we can be generous in a time of hoarding? ...

Be aware of the people at your church who might be struggling. Single moms or dads, widows and widowers, and people who live off the beaten path. Make contact to make sure they have their needs met... If you have enough paper products, canned goods, and other supplies, don't worry so much about the future that you can't offer something to those in need—a neighbor, a friend, a co-worker.

Be generous with benevolence funds [and giving to] *church*, so if a need arises in the body, your church will have money to be given to those most affected.

Be generous for the future. Every church should brace for the possibility that some in our fellowship will lose their jobs. How can we support and assist others ... It matters that we share the love of God with the family of God courageously, creatively, and sacrificially. God's love is poured into our hearts and then poured out through our lives in tangible expressions of generosity. We're there for one another. We show compassion. And by this, the Scriptures say, the world sees our love and recognizes: There's something powerful there. There's something special and distinct about this group of people, who call themselves family, who give generously and love compassionately because of their Jesus.¹⁶

In the 1500s black plague, Luther believed love of neighbor included caring for the sick, but also quarantining self, fumigating, not endangering others. A modern believer in Hong Kong writes: 'The first sacrifice Christians must make to care for our neighbor is our convenience, as we enthusiastically participate in aggressive sanitation measures and social distancing. This kind of humble care for others is a powerful force. I've seen it at work in my neighbors in Hong Kong, whatever their beliefs...

When good sanitary procedure stops being about saving our own skin and starts being about loving our neighbor, it becomes not just life-saving but soul-enlivening.⁷

The Gospel Coalition Article: Ways to Love Your Neighbor in This Pandemic:

-Glorify God by Obeying Authorities... not in fear and self-preservation, but as an act of love... compliance can become worship-filled acts. Wash your hands and say a 20-second prayer for your neighbors while you do so

-Organize Errands for the Elderly and the Immuno-compromised

-Economic love [support local business as a way to love literal neighbor] ...

-Watch Other People's Kids While Schools Are Closed... Many can't work remotely or leave their kids alone to go to work

-Renew Your Household with Spiritual Rhythms. Your household is at an incredible moment. Suddenly, what has always been true is plainly evident—we live in a dangerous world, and your house stands as a mission outpost of love amid that danger... all normal household rhythms have been disrupted, which means this is an incredible opportunity to form new rhythms that guide you toward God's power in a time of human powerlessness (read Scripture together). Take this as an opportunity to reframe how your household spends its time and ... habits that guide you ... (pray together). Cultivate rhythms that guide you to concentration and presence, in a blitz of information and alerts (strongly consider limiting the frequency you check the news to twice a day). Above all, cling to spiritual disciplines that guide you toward a household gathered in love

-Christian community is the primary place where we process our anxieties, and preach the good news of Jesus to each other. While now is a time where we absolutely must significantly alter the way we meet, we must not give up small and safe gatherings, even if that means we have to connect by digital means.

... this is an amazing time to live in solidarity with the global persecuted church, which always has to meet in homes. Consider... by clinging to small and safe gatherings, we resist isolation... your soul needs friendship like your lungs need air. Your spirit needs community much more than your house needs more supplies... We can—and we must—find ways to gather ... Our bodies don't just need health; our souls need hope... Listen to authorities to stay safe, but fight for Christian community to stay alive...⁸

¹ Luke 21 NASB.

² v. 11, 13 NIV.

³ Matthew 24:14.

⁴ NIV.

⁵ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/theological-reflections-pandemic/>

⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/christians-as-givers-in-a-time-of-hoarding/>

⁷ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/13/christianity-epidemics-2000-years-should-i-still-go-to-church-coronavirus/>

⁸ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/love-neighbor-pandemic/>