

Maundy Thursday

The Love of Jesus

John 13:1-17

Rev. Freddy Fritz

April 13, 2017

The Love of Jesus

Scripture

On the night of Jesus' betrayal and arrest, he had his last supper with his disciples. This was when Jesus instituted what we know today as the Lord's Supper, which has been eaten by Christians for almost two millennia.

John's Gospel has the most detailed account of what happened during Jesus' last supper with his disciples. John 13-17 contains the final discourse and prayer of our Lord with his disciples prior to his betrayal, arrest and crucifixion, and teaching about heaven, the new commandment, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the mutual union of Christ with his disciples, and prayer.

Let us read John 13:1-17:

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

¹² When 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?”¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. (John 13:1-17)

Introduction

We could easily spend several weeks on this text of Scripture. Tonight, however, I want to direct your attention primarily to the second part of verse 1: “... **having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.**”

The Scriptures teach us that God makes a distinction between “**the world**” and those who are Christ’s “**own.**” The Scriptures further teach that God has done some things for all men, that is, for everyone in the world. God has created them, sustained them, kept them from the worst that is possible, even tolerated them and thus kept them for a time from hell. In theology, we call this *common grace*.

On the other hand, God has done all things for some men, that is, for “**his own,**” to use the words of John. God has chosen them, called them, regenerated them, converted them, justified them, sanctified them, and glorified them. This is God’s *special grace*.

Now, we might ask the question, “Why does God make a

distinction between **“the world”** and those who are Christ’s **“own”**? The answer is in our text: **“...having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”**

Love is the reason why God makes a distinction between **“the world”** and his **“own.”**

Lesson

I would like us to see three things about the love of Jesus.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Love of Jesus Is Inexplicable
2. The Love of Jesus Is Eternal
3. The Love of Jesus Is Complete

I. The Love of Jesus Is Inexplicable

The first thing we learn about the love of Jesus is that the love of Jesus is inexplicable.

When we ask, “Why does Jesus love us?” there is no answer.

Jesus does not love us because we are lovable. We are not lovable. It is true that some of us may be lovable to some others of us, but this is only when we look at the matter from a human perspective. From Jesus’ perspective, there is nothing in us to make us even remotely desirable. He is holy; we are unholy. He is just; we are unjust. He is loving; we are unloving. In short, we are sinful and in willful rebellion against him. Yet he loves us. In fact, this is so great a marvel that God even uses it to commend his love to us. He says, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:6-8).

Moreover, Jesus does not love us because we first loved him. That is, he

is not merely returning our love. We did *not* love him. On this point the apostle John writes clearly: “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10).

Or again, Jesus does not love us because of anything we have to offer him. In fact, we have nothing to offer him. He does not need our praise; the angels praise him. He does not even need spiritual children; for as he said, “God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham” (Luke 3:8).

So why does Jesus love us? The only answer is the one he gave Moses concerning the children of Israel in Deuteronomy 7:7-8: “It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” Thus, the reason Jesus loves us is simply that he loves us. Beyond that, his love is inexplicable. It is without reason, at least without reason known to us.

If we were to stop at this point, I suppose that in that thought alone we would have enough to keep us pondering on the love of Jesus for eternity. But there is more.

II. The Love of Jesus Is Eternal

The second thing we learn about the love of Jesus is that the love of Jesus is eternal.

Why should we believe that Jesus’ love is eternal? The answer is an empirical one. It has to do with observable data, particularly data from the past and from the present. First, there is the past: **“Having loved.”** Second, there is the present: **“He loved them to the end.”** This second occurrence of the word **“loved”** in the

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Greek is a past tense (an aorist); but the sense is present, for it refers to what Jesus was then doing and was about to do.

In other words, the verse calls our attention to the observable past and present love of Christ, and it is asking us to reason on that basis. Is not love his nature? Will not he who loved in the past and loves in the present also love in the future? If he loved his disciples to the end, will he not do the same for us today?

What do we know about the love of Jesus in the past? Obviously that is a big question. The answer can never be fully given. But we can suggest some areas in which the answer can be seen.

First, we can see the love of God in the creation of ourselves and other human beings. We refer at this point, not merely to the fact of our existence, for our existence in itself might prove nothing. We refer rather to the fact that God created us with a spiritual vacuum within that can be filled only by himself. In other words, he created us, not to a meaningless existence, but to an existence that is the highest possible for any created object, namely communion with himself. So, as Augustine said, “Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.” The fact that we can know God and are restless until we do know him is proof of his love.

Second, we see the love of God in regenerating sinners. God sent the Holy Spirit to create a new heart in us. He took away our heart of stone and gave us a heart of flesh. And all of this was done because of his love for his people.

And third, we see God’s love in Jesus’ death for his people. Jesus went to the cross and died in place of his sinful people. He bore the curse of God so that we might know the love of God. And he did that because he loves us.

This, if you will, completes the Trinitarian formula, for in creation we see the love of the Father. In the regenerating work of God’s people, we see the love of the Holy Spirit. In the act of redemption, we see the love of Jesus Christ, the Son.

III. The Love of Jesus Is Complete

And the third thing we learn about the love of Jesus is that the love of Jesus is complete.

John said about Jesus and his disciples that **“he loved them to the end.”** The Greek word for **“end”** is *telos*, which means “completely, fully, or perfectly.” Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them completely. He demonstrated his love by washing his disciples’ feet. This act was a powerful expression of his love to them. And yet the greatest demonstration of his love was when he went to the cross less than 24 hours later and died for them.

Jesus knew that he was coming to the end of his earthly existence. John tells us this in the first part of verse 1: **“Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father.”** We take Christ’s love for granted, and we don’t always appreciate that he was demonstrating his love in the hour of his greatest trial. If we were to read that in these moments Jesus’ thoughts turned from his own to himself, at least for a time, who could blame him? Yet the knowledge of his impending death did not deter him from loving his disciples.

Furthermore, his disciples were not worthy of his love. They were worldly, for instance. He thought spiritually. But every time he tried to teach them spiritual things, they interpreted his words on a worldly level. Moreover, they were dull. He explained great truths to them, and they did not understand. In fact, he had been explaining that he was about to leave them to go to the Father, but they could not understand even this. Not one of his disciples was a fit companion for the Lord Jesus. So, if he had said to himself, “I have thought about these men long enough; I have done everything for them that I know how to do; it is time I thought of

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myself,” who could blame him? No one! Yet he loved them, completely and unselfishly, to the end of his life.

The love of Jesus in dying for us may be illustrated by the following story. Many years ago, Czar Nicholas I of Russia knew a young man for whom he cared a great deal. He was the son of a good friend of his. Because of his interest in this young man, Nicholas had him assigned to the Russian army and caused him to be given charge of the money used for paying the soldiers. The young man started well. But he fell into bad habits, took to gambling, and eventually gambled away not only his own wealth but also a great fortune taken for government funds. He had taken just a few rubles at a time, but these had mounted up and become prodigious. One day he received notice that on the following day an official would be coming to inspect the books. The young man knew he was in trouble. So, he took out the records to find out how great his debt was. He totaled the amount. Then he went to the safe, took out his own small amount of money, and counted it careful. He subtracted the lesser from the greater. The debt was astronomical. As he sat looking at the final figure, the young officer picked up his pen and wrote in large letters, “A great debt; who can pay?” Then, because he did not see how he could face the terrible dishonor the next day held, he determined to kill himself with his revolver at the stroke of midnight.

The night was warm and drowsy. So, as he waited for midnight, despite himself, the young man’s head dropped lower and lower and he fell asleep.

It happened that Nicholas, who was in the habit of sometimes putting on the uniform of a common soldier and visiting the troops to see how they were getting on, did so this night, coming around to the halls of the very fortress in which the young officer was sleeping. Most of the lights were out, as they should have been. But when Nicholas got to the door of this one room he noticed a light shining under it. He knocked. No answer! He tried the latch

and opened the door. There was the young officer, whom he recognized, asleep. He saw also the books and the money. The whole thing became clear in a moment. His first thought was to awaken his young friend and place him under arrest. But as he read the young man's note, his heart went out to him. "A great debt; who can pay?" Moved by a generous impulse, the Czar leaned over, picked up the pen that had fallen from the sleeping officer's hand, wrote just one word, and tiptoed out.

For an hour or so the young man slept. Then he suddenly awoke and, seeing that it was long past midnight, reached for the revolver. As he did so his eye caught sight of his note – "A great debt; who can pay?" – and under it one word that had not been there before: "Nicholas." He was astonished. Dropping his gun, he raced to the files where the signature of the Czar was available. He pulled this out and carefully compared it with the signature on his note. It was the real signature. He said to himself, "The Czar has been here tonight and knows all my guilt; yet he has undertaken to pay my debt; I need not die." So instead of taking his life, he rested upon the word of Nicholas and was not surprised when, early the next morning, a messenger came from the palace bearing precisely the amount of money needed to satisfy the deficit. Later, when the inspector came, everything was found to be in order.

Thus, did Jesus love us and pay our great debt. We are sinners. There is no possible way for us to atone for that sin. But Jesus has paid that debt. He has signed his name to our bankrupt account. No wonder we sing:

*Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow.*

Conclusion

How shall we apply these truths? The word to Christians is this: If this is the way in which Jesus has loved us, then should we

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not fervently love him? We will never in this life love as he loved, but we can begin to try to love as he loved – unselfishly, with discrimination, without wavering. We should also serve him. For as the hymn declares:

*Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

And, there is a word for those who have still not become Christians. If you are not yet a believer in the Lord Jesus, let me ask you a question that flows from everything I have been saying. If Jesus loves like this, how can you reject such a great love? There is no love on earth like it. Your husband or wife will not love you like this. Your children and parents will not love you like this. Your neighbors and friends will not love you like this. Only Jesus Christ loves with a perfect and everlasting love! Moreover, one day you must stand before the judgment seat of his Father, whom you have offended by your ungodly conduct and by your rejection of his great grace. What will you do in that day – if you refuse the love of the Lord Jesus Christ? What will you do without having him to stand by you and say, “This is one of my own; this is one for whom I died; this is one whose debt I undertook to pay; this is one I love unto the end”? Without such love, you will be lost forever. Fortunately, the day of God’s grace is still present; you may yet come to Jesus Christ as your Savior. I pray that you do so today. Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org