

Sunday, July 5, 2020

Lord willing, starting today, I would like to embark on a series of sermons on John 13-17, which is commonly referred to as “The Farewell Discourse” (aka, “The Parting Discourse,” “The Upper Room Discourse,” “The Final Discourse,” and probably a few other names). This is a very precious passage in the scripture to me, and I know to a lot of people in this church, where Christ shows His love for us, His care for us, and His promises to us. I’ve gone through the text and broken it down into a preliminary outline as follows:

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Jesus loves His own (13:1) 2. Foot washing (13:2-17) 3. Identifying the Traitor (13:18-30) 4. Christ’s Glory and how we are to live in His temporary absence (13:31-38) 5. Preparing a Place (14:1-4) 6. The only way to the Father (14:5-7) 7. Seeing God (14:8-14) 8. Peace and Comfort (14:15-27) 9. Loving God (14:28-31) 10. Abiding in Christ, the True Vine (15:1-11) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Friends of Christ (15:12-17) 12. The hatred of the world (15:18- 16:4a) 13. The work of the Holy Spirit (16:4b-15) 14. Your sorrow shall be turned into joy (16:16-24) 15. Prayer in His name (16:25-32) 16. He’s spoken that you might have peace (16:33)
<i><u>The High Priestly Prayer (Intercessory Prayer)</u></i> 17. Jesus prays for Himself (17:1-5) 18. Jesus prays for His present people (17:6-19) 19. Jesus prays for His future people (17:20-26) |
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My intention today is to give a brief overview of the book of John so we can see the context of where and when this Farewell Discourse takes place, and then spend the rest of my time on John 13:1, which reads:

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” (John 13:1)

As we should all know, the book of John is the fourth of the four Gospels (the historical narratives of Christ and His work), the other three being Matthew, Mark and Luke, which are known commonly as the Synoptic Gospels because of their similarity to one another in form and content. Anyone who has read these Gospels will be able to tell almost immediately that the book of John is a different animal. John has always seemed rather enigmatic to me, especially a lot of what Christ says and does in chapters 13-17. I have often found myself reading it and thinking, “I really like that...but I only have a vague, hazy idea of what it means,” so I’ve been spending time trying to get to the bottom of it.

It appears to me that the book of John focuses more on the divinity of Christ, where the other three Gospels focus more on the humanity of Christ. No doubt, John speaks to the humanity of Christ and the Synoptics speak to the divinity of Christ, but I believe that John has a greater

focus on the divine side. The book opens with this amazing language declaring Jesus to be the eternal God:

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
(John 1:1)**

And near the end, we read Thomas’s wonderful profession of faith in Christ as God:

“And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.” (John 20:28)

It is in John that we find what are known as the “I Am” statements, where Jesus identifies Himself with Jehovah who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and declared Himself to be “I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Jesus says “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35), “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12), “I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7), “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:11), “I am the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25), “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), “I am the true vine” (John 15:1), and of course:

“Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.” (John 8:58)

Another theme that pervades the book is the sovereignty of God in salvation (aka, the doctrines of grace, or the five points of Calvinism). That theme, in fact, is the golden thread that runs through the entire Bible. I haven’t confirmed this, but it seems to me that this book of John has more to say about it than any other book in the Bible, and Jesus preached more on it than any other preacher in the Bible. And running parallel to that theme is the responsibility of man to believe and obey God. In other words, the book of John presents God’s requirement that everyone believe and obey, while also presenting the reality that you CAN’T believe without God’s sovereign grace, which He does not give to everyone. As just one example:

“In the last day, that great [day] of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:37-38)

“No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44)

John, as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, wrote this book with a purpose. And he tells us the purpose:

“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.” (John 20:30-31)

In other words, he has presented a representative sample of “signs” that Jesus did, with the intent that if you don’t already believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, then you will believe that, and have life through His name. And if you do already believe it, then you will continue believing it, being confirmed and comforted in your faith. [Gill and others restrict these “signs” to those He did after His resurrection, but I don’t think that’s right. It certainly includes those done after the resurrection, but I think it refers to the whole book. John uses the same word throughout the book (often translated as “miracle”) to make the point that people who saw the signs believed (“This beginning of miracles did Jesus...and His disciples believed on Him” – John 2:11), or to point out that even though He did so many miracles, many still wouldn’t believe because God had sovereignly blinded them (“But though He had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on Him” – John 12:37).]

The book of John is not some disorganized piece of work that’s been haphazardly cobbled together. On the contrary, it is very carefully laid out. The book is divided up into two main sections, with a prologue and an epilogue. The prologue goes from John 1:1-18, and is that profound section of scripture that immediately introduces us to Christ’s eternal deity and His incarnation (“The Word was God...and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” – verses 1 and 14). And the epilogue is chapter 21 and ties up a few loose ends (including the restoration of Peter).

The first main section of John goes from 1:19 through chapter 12. This section, in broad strokes, speaks to His public ministry. I count seven specific miracles that are laid out in this section, as follows:

1. Turning water into wine (2:1-11).
2. Healing the nobleman’s son (4:46-54).
3. Healing the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-9).
4. Feeding the 5000 (6:1-14).
5. Walking on water (6:15-21).
6. Healing the man blind from birth (9:1-7).
7. Resurrection of Lazarus (11:38-44).

These aren’t all of the miracles He did...these are a representative sample which show His power over nature, power of creation, power of sustaining us, transcendence over space (that

is, He doesn't even have to be present to heal someone – He just has to say the word), sovereignty (He heals who He wants to heal), and power over death.

Many of these miracles are accompanied by words from Christ that shed light on the spiritual meaning of the miracle. For example, He healed the man at the pool of Bethesda and then said, "The Son quickeneth whom He will" (John 5:21). He fed the 5000 and then said, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). He said, "I am the light of the world" (John 9:5), and then healed the man who was blind from birth. He said, "I am the resurrection, and the life" (John 11:25), and then rose Lazarus from the dead.

This section also contains a lot of other well-known events. For example, cleansing the temple with a whip (2:13-17), His meeting at night with Nicodemus (3:1-21), His meeting with the Samaritan woman (4:7-42), forgiving the woman taken in adultery (8:3-11), and the "Good Shepherd" discourse (10:1-30).

After all these events, and all these miracles, His public preaching ministry winds down in Chapter 12, and it's not looking good for those people to whom He has been preaching. Despite it all, they still do not believe, and those who do believe that He is who He says He is are too cowardly to confess it. In that sad state of affairs, He still mercifully warns them that they must believe. Here's how the section ends:

"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with [their] eyes, nor understand with [their] heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him. Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess [him], lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me. I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak. And I know that his commandment is life everlasting: whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak." (John 12:37-50)

The second major section of the book of John starts with the Farewell Discourse, followed by His betrayal, arrest, trials, crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances (chapters 13-20). I'd like to take a minute to give a little bit of high-level context to the Farewell Discourse and where it fits in the last week of Christ's life. Each of the four Gospels gives complementary information about His final week. In order to harmonize all of that together, there are a lot of people who are a lot smarter than I am who have come up with plausible chronologies of that last week, and these chronologies don't always match one another. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on that, and I'm willing to be corrected if I have some of this wrong, but here's how it looks to me:

- Sunday – Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.
- Monday - Cleansing the temple (overthrowing the tables of the moneychangers).
- Tuesday - Jesus is in the temple speaking in parables, answering questions, asking questions, condemning the Pharisees, and then in the Mount of Olives, giving the prophecy of His second coming (known as the Olivet discourse).
- Wednesday - Judas promises to betray Jesus.
- Thursday - Lord's Supper, Farewell Discourse begins.
- Friday – Farewell Discourse ends, Christ's betrayal, arrest, mock trials, crucifixion, burial.

So, I believe that the Farewell Discourse begins on Thursday afternoon/evening, and continues into the beginning of Friday (as the Jews measured their days from sundown to sundown.) It begins around the time of the Lord's Supper in the Upper Room, and then the bulk of it takes place after the Lord's Supper. Christ washes their feet, dismisses Judas, prophesies of Peter's denial, and then goes into a lengthy discourse. At the end of Chapter 14, they appear to leave the Upper Room (Christ says, "Arise, let us go hence" – 14:31), and begin a journey to the Garden of Gethsemane which sits at the base of the Mount of Olives (some believe that this coincides with "and when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives" – Matthew 26:30). I imagine that He continues the discourse in chapters 15 and 16 during their walk through the streets of Jerusalem, and then He stops near the brook Cedron (or, Kidron) to pray to His Father, which is the longest recorded prayer in the New Testament and is commonly known as the "High Priestly Prayer." After He prays, He and His disciples cross the brook and enter the Garden of Gethsemane (see John 18:1).

Common themes in the Farewell Discourse are His departure, His glorification, the need to love one another, the need for the Holy Ghost, the hatred of the world, prayer, joy, peace and comfort. The overall theme is His love for His own. Jesus had a lot to say about Hell – in fact, He preached on it more than any other preacher. But He also had a lot to say about His love for His own.

It is striking to me that Christ is preparing to endure the cross within 24 hours, and His return to heaven to sit at the right hand of the throne of God is in view - yet He is so concerned about His disciples that He spends this time with them to comfort them, instruct them, and otherwise prepare them for the absence of His physical presence. This is a selfless love that is to such a degree that most of us are unfamiliar with it, and something that we should recall often if we claim to abide in Him, because “he that saith he abideth in Him ought himself also to walk, even as He walked.” (1 John 2:6).

Now, to start going over the Farewell Discourse in detail, that brings us to John 13:1. As a reminder, here’s what it says:

“Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” (John 13:1)

This is one of the pivotal verses in the book of John. It points to everything that had led up to this point (“having loved His own which were in the world”), and then points to everything that was being done presently and into the future (“He loved them unto the end”). This verse doesn’t just introduce us to the Farewell Discourse - it is really an introductory verse to the rest of the book of John. He shows us how He loves us in chapters 13-17, in word and in deed, and then He goes on to show that love further in His crucifixion, etc.

The time is “before the feast of the Passover.” As mentioned before, His public ministry had winded down, He had been rejected by most of the people He had preached to, and now He separates Himself from the masses of people so He can spend some focused time with His own. We learn from Luke that earlier in the day, He had sent Peter and John to prepare the Passover meal in “a large upper room furnished” (Luke 22:12). That is where we find ourselves at the beginning of John 13.

It is significant that the death of Jesus is tied to the Passover. We all know the story, I hope, of the Passover. You can review it in Exodus 12. This is the time that the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, while passing over the houses of the children of Israel who had killed a lamb and struck the lintel and two side posts with its blood. It was a feast that was to be engaged in yearly to remember that God had delivered them out of bondage through the death of an innocent lamb, and to look forward to the true Lamb of God who would deliver them from the bondage of sin. It was a big deal – a huge feast. Lots of blood. Lots of dead lambs. But it had to keep happening year after year, “for it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:4). John the Baptist said:

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

And lest there be any confusion, Paul tells us the following very clearly:

“For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” (1 Corinthians 5:7)

It is at this time, just before the feast of the Passover, that “Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father.” His hour had finally come. The hour had been fixed in eternity. He knew in John 2:4 that His hour had not yet come when He said to His mother, “Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.” When they sought to take Him in John 7:30 and 8:20, no man laid hands on Him. Why? “Because His hour was not yet come.” We are operating on God’s timetable, and the hour has finally come “that the Son of man should be glorified” (John 12:23). All human history so far had led up to that moment, just like all history is leading up to His second coming in our own era. And just like then, there is an hour appointed. A fixed, immovable hour, decreed from eternity past.

And Christ **knew** that His hour had come. He was not taken by surprise. He was not ignorant of the matter. His disciples were absolutely clueless...but He knew exactly what was getting ready to happen. He knew that the only reason that He was on earth was for this hour – “For this cause came I unto this hour.” (John 12:27). And what is it that He knew would happen at this hour? The text says He knew “that He should depart out of this world unto the Father.” And of course, there would be no departure in any other way than by the cross. In order to depart and return to the Father, where He had come from, He would have to die. (See John 3:14; 12:32-33). He knew He was getting ready to die. He had come to carry out the will of His Father, to secure salvation for His elect, and He was doing it willingly – no man would take His life from Him, but He would willingly lay it down. (John 10:18). A wonderful thing about His sacrifice is that it was purely voluntary – He didn’t have to do it; He wasn’t compelled to do it; He didn’t owe it to us. This is the amazing grace of God.

I can’t help but think of Hebrews 12:2 when I read this verse:

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [our] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:2)

If I knew that I was getting ready to die in the place of a bunch of worthless sinners in the next 24 hours, I might not look at this the same way that Jesus did. In fact, I know I wouldn’t. I might have some resentment. Or some sanctimony. Or maybe a hero complex. But on Christ’s mind was two things: departing out of this world unto the Father, and His love for His

own. This is the joy that was set before Him. The joy of redeeming His people, and the joy of returning to the Father. Spurgeon says about His departure, *“just as though he were merely going on a journey, leaving one land for another.”* One of my Bible dictionaries says, *“In Jn. 13:1 there is a sharp distinction between this world and the heavenly world of the Father. For Jesus the hour of death means a change of scene and therefore transition into the state of glory which He enjoyed as the Pre-existent prior to His incarnation.”* It sounds like a peaceful departure. He came to do a job, He did it, and then He victoriously returned to glory.

So, His hour has come, and He turns His attention to His own. The immediate audience is His eleven disciples (Judas Iscariot is there at the beginning but will be dismissed shortly). These men stand representative of God’s people in all subsequent ages. Every word in the Farewell Discourse applies directly to us who believe, just like it applied to those apostles. If there’s any doubt about that, Jesus clears that up for us in John 17:20, when He says, *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their Word.”* And contrariwise, none of this applies to you if you don’t believe on Him. These promises aren’t for you. You don’t get this comfort. You don’t get this peace. These blessings are only for believers – the elect of God.

“Having loved His own which were in the world” – yes, having loved them from eternity past. And having displayed His love to them time and again while He walked on the earth with them. These loved ones *“were in the world,”* just as Christ was in the world (see John 9:5) – we’re in the world, but we’re not of the world; we’re in the world, but we don’t belong to the world. All of God’s people have to dwell in this vale of tears, this world that is estranged from and is at enmity with God. The idea is that no matter what afflictions we go through while we walk in this world, we cannot be separated from His love. Matthew Henry: *“Though they are in this world, a world of darkness and distance, of sin and corruption, yet he loves them. He was now going to his own in heaven, the spirits of just men made perfect there; but he seems most concerned for his own on earth, because they most needed his care: the sickly child is most indulged.”* He has a special care for us while we are dwelling here on earth, because we need help here. We need comfort. We need fresh reminders of His mercy and grace.

And what is significant about us being called *“His own?”* It means we belong to Him. Spurgeon says we are *“His by election, His by redemption.”* We were each personally chosen by the Father and given to the Son. Jesus says, *“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”* (John 17:9). Matthew Henry: *“his own, for they were given him by the Father, he has purchased them, and paid dearly for them, and he has set them apart for himself,--his own, for they have devoted themselves to him as a peculiar people.”*

Belonging to Christ means that we are not our own – we are His. He purchased us with a price, that is, His precious blood:

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost [which is] in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

“Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, [as] silver and gold, from your vain conversation [received] by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:” (1 Peter 1:18-19)

This is a tough pill to swallow – we, by nature, want some rugged individualism. We want to be autonomous and independent. But we're not. Outside of Christ, we are slaves to sin. We belong to Satan. (See 2 Timothy 2:26, John 8:34). In Christ, we are slaves to righteousness. And we belong to Christ. The world has its own (John 15:19), and Christ has His own (John 10:3-4). Either way, we're willing servants to something.

“Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.” (Romans 6:16-18)

“He loved them unto the end.” To the end of what? Some think to the end of His time on earth. When He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30), the word “finished” is a form of the Greek word translated “end” in John 13:1. The idea is that He came to do a job out of love for His people, and He completed the job to perfection. He never stopped loving them during His suffering, and in fact, the display of His love for them only intensified up to the point that He died. That's good; that's true. But I think it's more than that. The word “end” here in John 13:1 means “to the full; forever; in full, supreme measure; to the utmost; to the perfection; entirely; totally.” The idea is that God loves us as much as possible. He is eternal and infinite, so His love for us is eternal and infinite. This is absolutely astonishing. It is the same word, incidentally, as is translated “uttermost” in 1 Thessalonians 2:16, when it says, “for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.” God loves His own to perfection, and God pours His wrath out on wicked men to perfection.

Just consider this love that He has for His own for a moment. This is the whole reason He came to earth, after all. This love is not a sentimental, sappy, emotional love. It is not a conditional love. It is not a universal love. His love for His own is a special love. A peculiar

love. It is a love unto salvation. This is the eternal love of God for His elect whereby He has determined to save them. This is the type of love that caused John to exclaim:

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” (1 John 3:1)

This is a different species of love here, this love that He has for His own. We are unfamiliar with this type of love in our human relations. We have a hard time identifying with it and understanding it. It is the same language Christ’s disciples used when they “marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (Matthew 8:27). In other words, what are we dealing with here? As humans, we like to categorize things. But this is a thing that can’t be categorized along with other things. It stands alone - it is the eternal, gracious, unconditional love of God, reserved exclusively for His elect. He certainly uses metaphors and types to teach us something of this love (for example, marriage), but the real thing passeth knowledge, which leads Paul to pray:

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what [is] the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17-19)

The Father elected us from eternity, and the Son willingly “took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:7-8). Why? Because He loved us. Why did He love us? Because He loved us! (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). There was nothing lovely in us to cause Him to love us, but He loved us while we were yet sinners, and He loved us when we were enemies (see Romans 5). It’s “not that we loved God, but that He loved us.” (1 John 4:10). He loved us because He chose to love us, “to the praise of the glory of His grace.” (Ephesians 1:6). It’s this love for His own that is the overarching topic of John 13-17, and Lord willing, I will be able to flesh this out in future sermons on this amazing portion of scripture.

I love you. Amen.