

Sunday, August 15, 2021

This is the ninth in a series of sermons on John 13-17 (“The Farewell Discourse”).

1. [Jesus Loves His own \(13:1\)](#) [7/5/2020]
2. [Foot Washing \(13:2-17\)](#) [8/30/2020]
3. [Identifying the Traitor \(13:18-30\)](#) [10/18/2020]
4. [Christ’s Glory and How We Are To Live In His Temporary Absence \(13:31-38\)](#) [12/6/2020]
5. [Preparing a Place \(14:1-4\)](#) [1/31/2021]
6. [The Only Way to the Father \(14:5-7\)](#) [3/21/2021]
7. [Seeing God \(14:8-14\)](#) [5/9/2021]
8. [Peace and Comfort \(14:15-27\)](#) [6/27/2021]
9. **Loving God (14:28-31)**
10. Abiding in Christ, the True Vine (15:1-11)
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)
The High Priestly Prayer (Intercessory Prayer)
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)

We’ve been making our way through John 13-17. It’s the time of the Passover feast (Thursday night in early April of probably 30 or 33 AD), and this relatively tiny city of Jerusalem (about 1 km², plus its environs) is teeming with pilgrims who had traveled from afar to take part in the feast. Several decades later, the historian Josephus would estimate that the population of the city and surrounding areas would swell to upwards of 2 million people during the time of the Passover (even if that’s an over-estimate, it is reasonable that 100,000s to even 1 million would be in the area at the time of Jesus). Those are the conditions in which Jesus sent Peter and John to find a man carrying a pitcher of water to lead them to an upper room. The massive number of people in the area makes the following account all the more remarkable:

“Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.”
(Luke 22:7-13)

Who other than God would know that a room would even be available when so many people would be looking for lodging, that the goodman of the house would let them use the room (apparently free of charge), and of all of the men with pitchers of water walking around in that throng of people, they would meet the precise man they needed to meet upon entering the city. Well, it did happen, just as Jesus told them it would happen. They did secure the upper room, and it’s in that room that all the events we’ve gone over so far have occurred (foot

washing, identifying Judas as the traitor, announcing that Peter would deny Him, words and promises about comfort, faith, love, obedience, the Holy Ghost, peace, etc.). And we're coming to the end of the upper room today. Jesus has a few more words to say, and then they will leave:

“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come *again* unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.” (John 14:28-31)

This amazing little passage concludes what Jesus has been talking about, and there are a lot of ways I could tackle this, but I'm calling this sermon “Loving God,” and I'm going to break this down into two sections: “Deficient Love of God” and “Perfect Love of God.”

Deficient Love of God

**“Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come *again* unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.”
(John 14:28)**

He's told them repeatedly that He's going to go away and He's going to come back. He's going to die, He's going to come back three days later after being resurrected, He's going to return to His Father, He and the Father and the Holy Ghost are going to come abide with us, and finally He's going to come and receive us unto Himself so that where He is, we may be also. He's made it very clear. And this isn't the first time that He's brought up the subject. For example:

“From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matthew 16:21)

And these guys aren't happy about it. You'll recall in the Matthew 16 account, Peter identifies Jesus as “the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus pronounces a blessing on him, Jesus tells them He's going to die and then rise the third day, Peter says, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee,” and Jesus says to Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” Now that's a pretty harsh (but necessary) rebuke. These guys still aren't happy about it,

though. They're devastated. Their expectations aren't being met. They're distraught. They have troubled hearts. They don't like the idea that their Messiah is going to leave them! So, He says, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice." In a lot of ways, this is a more stinging rebuke than, "Get thee behind me, Satan." He's questioning their love for Him! He's bringing their motives into question! And He isn't mincing words about it. This is the kind of plain talk that would send the snowflake generation on a desperate search for the nearest "safe space" and end with multiple visits to "therapists" and prescriptions for psychotropic drugs. "How dare you suggest we might be doing something wrong? You're supposed to beat around the bush and make me feel important and validate me. You're supposed to be loving your neighbor, Jesus."

So, what is He saying here? Is He suggesting that they are completely devoid of love for Him? I don't think so. I think He's saying that they don't love Him properly, completely, adequately. They are deficient in their love for Him. How so? Because they are selfish. They are so busy looking at how this whole situation affects them that they are blind to how it affects Jesus. Last time, I mentioned that true "agape" love involves action (specifically, if you love God, obey Him). We can learn a little bit more about true love in this passage – that is, one of its necessary components is that it's not selfish. As we learn in 1 Corinthians 13, charity "seeketh not her own." (v. 5). [Note to self: I could use some work here.]

True love for God has an interest in the glory and honor of God – if I really love God, it's not all about me and whether it's comfortable for me, it's about God and whether it brings glory and honor to God. He tells them the reason why they should be rejoicing in this instance: "for my Father is greater than I." What does this mean? That God the Father is a greater God than God the Son? Is He denying His divinity here? Not at all. The Lord Jesus had come from the ivory palaces into a state of humiliation. He had been made "a little lower than the angels" (Hebrews 2:7,9). As Jesus "took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7), God the Father was greater than Him in state and condition, but not in essence. [If I say, "Joe Biden is greater than I," I don't mean that Joe Biden is essentially more of a human than I am. I mean that in his current office, state, and condition as compared to my current office, state, and condition, he is greater than I am.] But now He gets to return home to His Father – to return back to glory – to ascend to sit on the right hand of God. This should be a cause of rejoicing for them, and it should be a cause of rejoicing for us, too. He tells us to rejoice. Not to flippantly or carelessly acknowledge, but to rejoice!

How does this impact us practically today? It impacts us in everything we do! Everything! 1 Corinthians 10:31 tells us, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." We should always make time to reexamine our motivations. Why do we do what we do? Why are you here? Is it because you love God? Look at your motives. Is it

REALLY because you love God? Or have you just been going through the motions? You might get some insight by being honest with yourself and examining how you look at the people of God and the providence of God. People and providence. Are you envious, bitter, angry, proud, etc., in relation to your brothers and sisters? Are you a backbiter? Are you impatient that God isn't moving as fast as you think He ought to? Ask some questions like that about everything in your life. Is your motivation really because you love God? Or is it self-serving? Listen – if you had been in this room with Jesus on this night, and He said to you, “if you loved me, you would rejoice,” would that not have been a devastating thing to hear? Wouldn't you be reduced to rubble if He said such a thing to you? Well, let me suggest that He IS saying this to you, right here in this passage. He's talking to me, and He's talking to you.

And one more thing about this – their selfishness and self-interest is short-sighted and shallow. If Jesus doesn't go to the Father, guess what? They lose their redemption. They lose the Comforter. They lose out on Him leaving them His peace. They lose everything important! In focusing on what they think is in their best interest, they're actually working against their best interest. How many future blessings are you kicking against when you don't rejoice in the works of God? “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.” (Mark 8:35).

Perfect Love of God

“And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.” (John 14:29-31)

So, we have the apostles' inadequate love put up against the perfect love of Jesus for His Father, which manifests itself in unwavering obedience. This is all about obedience. The apostles weren't being obedient here – at least not fully obedient. They're breaking the greatest commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and instead focusing on their own sadness and selfish desires. But not Jesus – He is perfectly obedient. He's told them some stuff so they'd believe, but He can't talk much longer, because He needs to go do what His Father told Him to do – to be obedient. Let's break this out piece by piece.

First, He tells them that He's been telling them all this stuff before it happens (which only God can do), so when it does happen, they will believe. He's not telling them just to break them down – He's telling them also to build them up (edify them). This is a great condescension on His part – He doesn't have to do this. But He loves them, so He's telling them these things so their faith will be confirmed and increased. Does this mean that they're in a state of unbelief,

and then as soon as they see the resurrected Christ, they'll suddenly start to believe? No. I think we all live in a perpetual state of, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). We can understand what it means for someone to have a weak faith, and then have their faith bolstered by something (a word, an event, etc.).

He could have said, "I'm going to the Father, and if you loved me, you would be rejoicing about that...and by the way, I've had enough of you and your weak faith. Get out of my sight." But He doesn't say that. Instead, He helps them. I don't want to read too much into the text, but when I look at the context of the whole discourse, I don't think I'm going too far to say that one of the messages here is, "I know you're troubled of heart, I know you're weak in faith, I know you don't love me like you should, I know you're selfish, but what you ought to be doing instead of wallowing in despair is rejoicing that I'm going, because I'm doing just what my Father sent me here to do – I'm here to redeem you, I'm here to take care of all of those sins, and I'm not going to lose one of you. I've told you before it even happens that I'm going to die, I'm going to come back the third day, I'm going to ascend to my Father, I'm going to send the Comforter, you're going to be hated of all men for my sake, and then I'm going to come back one day and retrieve you. And I've told you all this for your own good – so when you see that everything that I said would happen, happens, your faith will be confirmed, you will know that I'm God, and you will know that everything is according to the divine plan."

So, moving on, He says that "hereafter I will not talk much with you." Well, that is true in the grand scheme of things; in comparison to all that He's said to them over the last three years, He's not going to talk much longer. But He still has a lot of good things to say in chapters 15 and 16, and an amazing prayer in chapter 17. As they leave the upper room, they walk probably around a mile to get to the brook Cedron, where they'll cross over into the Garden of Gethsemane. I imagine that it's over that mile or so that chapters 15 and 16 take place, and then He prays His prayer by the brook. It's not long after that that He will be arrested.

And why is it that He's not going to talk much longer with them? The reason He gives is, "for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." Satan is on the scene, called the "prince of this world" because of the relative power that God has granted to him for a season, and because this world views him as their prince. Very few people will say outright, "I consider Satan to be my prince," but their actions and thoughts and words prove that they do. Jesus sees what's about to happen as a conflict with Satan. What we're seeing here is a fulfillment of the very first prophecy of the Messiah:

"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

At the cross, we see Jesus bruising the head of Satan, “that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14) and “for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

You’ll recall that Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness and was unsuccessful. “And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.” (Luke 4:13). Well, that season is over, and he’s back. Some commentators think Satan came in some bodily form, like he did in the wilderness. I don’t know if that’s true, but he certainly came in the person of Judas Iscariot, and he certainly had a great influence over the other players in His crucifixion (Pilate, the Jews, the soldiers, etc.). Remember that Satan is a mighty adversary – he’s smarter than you, stronger than you, more diligent than you. He knows a lot about you. He’s had 6,000+ years to perfect his craft. He’s dealt with people just like you. He knows what he needs to do to tempt you, personally, to sin, and he tailors his attacks to do so. And as long as you “give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27) and as long as you refuse to submit to God and don’t “resist the devil” (James 4:7), it’s like taking candy from a baby. Just look at how he played Judas like a fiddle. Three years before this, I bet that Judas never imagined what he’d be up to on this night, but his envy, greed and hatred had been growing in him like a cancer, and look how that ended for him.

But when it comes to Christ, Jesus says that he “hath nothing in me.” No weakness to take advantage of. No sin to accuse Him of. No corruption that he can leverage. No charge he can bring. No claim he can stake. Nothing! This is why Pilate could only say, “I find no fault in him.” (John 19:4,6). And beloved, this is a glorious truth, and I’m going to tell you why. If Jesus had had just one blemish, one spot, one moral imperfection...He wouldn’t have been qualified to atone for His own sin, let alone for all the sins of all His people! “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Our lives are hidden with Christ in God, so Satan has no claim on us, either. We are saved! We are redeemed! When Satan and his minions accuse us, and whisper, “your sins are too much...you don’t really love God...when the last day comes, you’re going to be finally lost,” we can flee to our high tower and boldly say:

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” (Romans 8:33-34)

So, Christ’s death was not due to any defect in Himself, nor was it due to Satan prevailing over Him. He willingly laid His life down. Why? Because He’s obeying His Father. He dies as an obedient Son...not as a wicked criminal who can’t overpower Satan:

“Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.” (John 10:17-18)

And He’s going to make it a public event, “that the world may know that I love the Father.” He is putting His love for the Father on display. “This thing was not done in a corner.” (Acts 26:26). He wants everyone to know that He loves the Father, and the way He shows that love is by obeying the Father. A perfect example of loving obedience – not a hint of sinful selfishness or ulterior motives.

When we think of the death of Christ, we generally look at it as, “Jesus died because He loves me.” And that’s true – “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16) and “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us” (1 John 3:16). But don’t forget this other aspect of it – Jesus died because He loves His Father. And His Father loves Him because He laid down His life. So once again, it’s not all about us. One way to look at this is that we are the happy beneficiaries of the result of that eternal love between the Father and the Son.

The passage ends with Jesus saying, “Arise, let us go hence.” I take this to mean that they are leaving the upper room. I also think that it fits well into what He just said, as if to say, “the Father has given me a commandment, so let’s leave from this place so I can go obey Him and show the world that I love Him. I’m on a divine timetable here, and I have a meeting shortly in the Garden of Gethsemane.” This also may correspond to, “And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives” (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26).

So, to wrap up, we see here the deficient, self-centered love of the apostles laid out in comparison to the perfect love of Jesus. We see Jesus showing His love for the Father here in at least four ways. First, in His love for the people of God – He doesn’t just rub their sins in their face and then walk away; He speaks to them for their own good, edification and comfort. Second, He resists and doesn’t give place to the devil. Third, He unselfishly obeys His Father. Fourth, He glorifies His Father to the world by demonstrating His obedience to Him.

**“The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.”
(Numbers 6:24-26)**

The Lord's Supper

Continuing on the theme of loving God, let's take a look at the letter to the Ephesians in Revelation 2, with a particular emphasis on verses 4 and 5:

“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks; I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”
(Revelation 2:1-7)

We frequently pray to God that He would not remove the candlestick. We find that terminology only one place in scripture, and it is here. And the reason that God threatens such a thing is “because thou hast left thy first love.” The Ephesian church had been blessed by the presence of Paul, Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla, Apollos and (traditionally) John. It was founded in the early 50s AD, Paul's letter to the Ephesians is commonly dated to the early 60s AD, and this letter to the Ephesians here in Revelation is commonly dated to around 95 AD. So we're talking around 40-45 years since the church started, and 30-35 years since Paul's epistle. In that relatively short span of time, look at what happened. They left their first love. They had great doctrine. They had great practices. They wouldn't put up with evil in their midst. They wouldn't put up with false prophets. Everything looked great...except one thing. They had left their first love. Their doctrine and their practice had become rote, meaningless, cold, dry, and dead, because it was no longer based on love for God. That happened quickly, and God promises to do something quickly also: “I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” I don't know precisely what that looks like in each individual case, but it's not good. If we have those among us who are drifting away from the Lord Jesus and have lost their fervency and zeal for Him, we need to return to our first love, or something bad is going to happen, and quickly. The church will cease to be a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I say, consider if Jesus wrote a letter to this church today – what would He say? Brent did an excellent sermon on this letter to the Ephesians located here: https://www.godhatesfags.com/sermons/outlines/Sermon_20141102.pdf.