

The Inner Sanctums of Communion

He Showed Them the Full Extent of His Love - John 13:1

The narrative of John 13-17 is one of the most precious portions of Scripture. The whole of the account took place on the eve of the Passover and Jesus' crucifixion. These chapters detail Jesus' last hours; what He was doing, what He was saying and what He was concerning Himself with.

The account of that memorable night begins in chapter 13 verse 1 with one of the strongest statements of Jesus' affection and commitment to His own in all of Holy writ. This moving verse – which will be our focal point in this article – begins a new section of the book of John transitioning the reader from “the Book of Signs” (1-12) to “the Book of Glory” (13-20).

The Upper Room Drama of John 13

Our attention will be fixed upon chapter 13 for the next few articles. The chapter can be broken up into 4 units:

An Introductory Statement – 13:1

The Foot Washing of the Disciples – 13:2-17

Identifying the Traitor – 13:18-30

Words to the Eleven After the Traitor's Departure – 13:31-38

The storyline consists of an introductory statement that leads us away from Jesus ministry (1-12) and onto Jesus' preparation of the 11 for His departure from the world (13-21). This introductory statement articulates what Jesus was going to do that night for the 11. Following that statement Jesus disrobes and proceeds to wash the feet of His disciples – including the traitor. While doing so He mentions that “not all” of the young men are “clean.” This leads into the inquisitive questioning of Jesus concerning the identity of the alleged betrayer. Jesus identifies him to the one leaning on His breast – John – and tells Judas to go do the rest of the shopping for the Passover. Once Judas leaves the presence of the 11 Jesus begins to speak to them in such a way that they had never heard and surely did not expect.

The apostle recorded a profound statement at the outset of this account that deserves our full attention and loving contemplation. In 13:1 we read:

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He showed them the full extent of His love.”

Turn your attention to the second half of the verse beginning with “having loved His own...” I want to draw 3 things out from the text: First, the objects of His love. Secondly, the personal history of love as recorded in Scripture. And third, the full extent of His love.

The Objects of His Love

Let your eyes fall on the word “own.” And let your heart embrace all its sweetness. While it’s true that Jesus does in a very real sense lay claim to everything in the created order as His “own,” the use of the word here is to be understood in a much different light. These ones that are referred to as Jesus’ “own” are in contrast to the wicked of the earth that despise His name and curse His cross. Peculiarity is what is being communicated here.

The wicked are owned by Jesus, but not by blood in the way that we are. They fall under His ownership in the same way that a property owner lays claim to all that is on His property. His “own,” in this context, are those who have been “given” to Him by His Father,¹ who have been called and born of the Spirit² and who have been purchased³ with blood.⁴ A paraphrase for these ones is “lilies among thorns” as found in the Song of Songs. Among the thorns of rebellious humanity are lilies who have been chosen, redeemed and born of the Spirit who now delight in the One who loved them and gave Himself for them.⁵

‘The objects of His love are described not only as His own, but more particularly as His own that were in the world.’⁶ Jesus had and has many that are in glory and in paradise. And while these ones in the sublime presence of the Holy are most assuredly the objects of divine love, affection and delight, the ones in the world can claim a much different nature of Jesus’ attention. It’s not that Jesus loves them more; it’s that He loves them differently based on their circumstances.

The dangers of this age provoke the Lord to care for us and love us and relate to us much differently than He does with those who are in the presence of angels. The one in glory who is His “own” is not affected or swayed by the spirit of the age. There are no casualties of sin in paradise. No one around the throne can be tainted by the flesh or tempted by the devil.

Charles Ross writes, ‘Ask any tender-hearted mother, which of her many children recurs oftenest to her memory – those of them who are safe at home under the parental roof, or the one that is far away at sea? And she will tell you, with tears in her eyes, that, while she loves them all, it is her sailor-boy who is exposed to so much danger.’ He continues, “And just so, only

¹ The term “given” is a major theological theme in the book of John. In chapter 6 Jesus speaks to the crowds about how the Father must draw individuals to Him for them to come to Him. In that same chapter He says that all who are given to Him will come to Him and will be raised up on the last day. And in chapter 17 we read the term repeatedly as Jesus prays to His Father in regards to those who have been set apart and given to Him.

² See John 1:12-13 and 3:3-5 for an explanation of regeneration; its necessity and benefits.

³ See Revelation 5:9-10

⁴ One of the clearest statements of this Trinitarian redemption is in Ephesians 1:3-14. Paul declares that the Father has elected individuals to salvation (1:3-4) and that because of this Jesus shed His blood to purchase them (1:5-12). He then says that the Spirit is sent to apply and appropriate what the Father has done in election and what the Son has done in redemption (1:13-14).

⁵ Galatians 2:20

⁶ Charles Ross, *The Inner Sanctuary*; page 15

in an unspeakably higher sense, while Jesus loves all His own, He regards with peculiar care, corresponding to their necessities, those of them that are still in the world.’⁷

Now contrast the phrase at the beginning of the verse “His hour had come that He should depart from this world” with “loved His own who were in the world.” Note the power of this contrast! His heart was turned in love towards these precious 11 knowing that the pressure of this age, if it were not for His sustaining power,⁸ would swallow them up and destroy them in His absence.

If Jesus, on the eve of His horrific execution was concerned for the well being of His precious 11, how much can we be assured that He is concerned for us now who are still in the world while He is in glory?! What confidence we have. The 11 took courage in the strength of Jesus’ affection for them knowing that He cared for them so well even hours before His betrayal. We take courage in the strength of Jesus’ affection for us knowing that He cares for us so well because He knows the intensity of the pressures and dangers that threaten us in this present evil age.

A Personal History of Steadfast Love

We read next that Jesus “having loved His own that were in the world...showed them the full extent of His love.” The sentence is constructed in such a way to emphasize as much as possible Jesus’ love for His disciples. The statement tells us that the entire history of Jesus’ relationship with His disciples was one of affection. Though the focal point of the sentence is undoubtedly the “full extent” of Jesus’ love being displayed for the 11, we cannot skim over this history of love as it is also in clear view.

The full extent of Jesus’ love – from the foot washing to the crucifixion – is like a mountaintop. But the history of His love expressed to the 11 was just as much a part of that mountain as the peak. And that is what John is communicating here: the strength and fervor of Jesus’ commitment to the 11 over the last 3 ½ years. So, we might ask, “In what ways was this strength and fervor of commitment and love expressed to them?”

The answers to that question are infinite. But let’s name a few:

He gave them Unceasing Fellowship at the height of their immaturity. Think, for the last 3 ½ years Jesus remained in the most intimate fellowship with these young men. He lived with them and never left them. For over three years Jesus was a constant companion of young immature disciples who – most of the time – put their foot their mouth and did the opposite of what Jesus wanted them to do. The Gospel accounts don’t tell us all of the episodes of the stupidity of these young men; but we can be sure that the 3 ½ years was full of it (the Gospel writers included many!). Jesus remained committed to them. We struggle to believe that Jesus would desire or consent to remain in unceasing fellowship with us when we are so immature. We

⁷ Ibid; pg. 16

⁸ Remember the phrase to Peter, “Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith will not fail.” Jesus keeps those who are His own. See Jude 24-25 and Philippians 1:6.

think that only when we're mature He'll enjoy spending time with us. But that is simply not the case. This night, on the eve of His betrayal and crucifixion, Jesus assured all the disciples that they would all forsake Him and leave Him. And in the same breath He assured them that He loved them in the same way that His Father loved Him.

He led them gently in every circumstance. Though the Gospel accounts contain a number of harsh rebukes to the disciples, in every case Jesus can be seen leading His own with perfect leadership and unfathomable gentleness. Without doubt Jesus' rebuke of Peter in Matthew 16 is the most brutal in Scripture: "Get behind Me Satan!" But even then, Jesus was just as committed to Peter as He was when Peter was saying "You are the Christ the Son of the living God!" Though always straightforward and to the point, Jesus always leads His sheep with a gentle voice. He doesn't relate to His sheep the same way that He relates to the wolves. This is most observable in Matthew 23 with the "woes" against the Pharisees. Jesus' voice is a torrent of rage and hostility to the obstinate rebels who resolve to blaspheme His name but its a gentle refreshing breeze to those who have "a willing spirit" but "weak flesh." Jesus' declarations of love and delight in the following chapters (14-17) magnify the gentle leadership of weak believers profoundly.

He treated them as those who are willing but weak not unwilling and committed to sin. There is an incredible difference between being "willing and weak" and being "unwilling and committed to sin." The disciples genuinely desired Jesus. And they genuinely desired to fight sin and embrace obedience. And they were genuinely weak. Jesus knew this. He knew that they weren't rebellious liars who were inclined to blaspheme Him. Even as Peter was denying Him and as the other 10 were abandoning Him on the night of His betrayal Jesus knew that they still had willing hearts. They were expressing their immaturity and their weakness, not their rebellion and their commitment to sin. He never treated someone with a willing heart as a hopeless rebel.

He told them of the strength of His love for them in their hour of greatest compromise. The greatest example is seen when we compare Matthew 26:31 with John 15:9. In Matthew 26 we hear Jesus say "all of you will fall away because of Me this night." And in John 15 we hear Jesus saying "As the Father has loved Me so have I loved you." What's profound about this is the fact that these statements would've been said in context to each other. Jesus assured them of their inability to perform and the surety of their imminent failure. And then He began to tell them of the strength of His love. Think! He knew that they would fail Him! And still He declared His love for them! We cannot find anything like this in any of the man made religions like Islam or Buddhism. The gods that men make in their image are either cruel and vindictive or impotent and unoffended by sin. But in Jesus we find a resolute hatred of sin – so much so that Jesus would die to destroy it – and a resolute commitment to love those whom He knows are incapable of being worthy of His love as He joyfully extends sure and steadfast mercy to them. In the hour of their greatest compromise Jesus spoke of His great love that cannot be earned or driven away.

The Full Extent of His Love

The last idea in the verse is that Jesus "showed [the disciples] the full extent of His love." Some translations read "and He loved them to the end." That is "He loved them unto the end" – 'not

only to the end of life, but to the utmost extent, and under the most affecting circumstances. The meaning plainly is that He had always previously loved them, so now, on the verge of His final sufferings, when it might be supposed that He would be wholly taken up with His own awful prospects, He was, even then, so far from forgetting them that He scarcely seems ever to think of Himself, save in connection with them. Herein is love, not only enduring unto the end, but moreover, most wondrously and conspicuously displayed, when, judging by a human standard, it was least to be expected. Oh, surpassing love of Jesus, with the fire of justice and the furnace of divine wrath, and the sea of His own blood – all, all in vivid array before Him – He yet spends the last moments before His final sufferings in words and deeds of love to His disciples!⁹

And if He loved them then, as He was being swallowed up in the sea of agonies and torments of Gethsemane and Golgotha, would He love us now? – Now that He has passed into the Holy Place on our behalf with blood to plead for us? – Now that He has scars in His hands that secured our redemption? – Now that the Holy Spirit has been poured out to lead us into truth? – Now that the accomplishments and achievements of Calvary are freely His? – Now that He can freely justify us having quenched and satisfied the full strength of God's wrath against sin?

Jesus, knowing that it was time to leave His own who were in the world, having loved them so well for these last 3 ½ years, now set His face like flint toward Golgotha and showed them the full extent of His love. The glory of Jesus and His deep love for us is staggering. Especially as it was displayed and expressed to those whose weakness and immaturity would cause them to stumble so as to forsake the Lord for a season. As St. John of the Cross once said, we must remember that “He is the Lover and we are the beloved.” Far too often we live as though we are the lovers in pursuit of Jesus. No! We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Let us live as those who have been pursued by One whose love is greater than our failures, our shortcomings and our immaturity.

And let this first verse of John 13 be the banner over all that we read hereafter from 13:2 to the end of 17:26: Jesus, having loved His own, now showing them the full extent of His love.

⁹ Charles Ross; pg. 20