

John 13:1-17

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[0 : 00] John chapter 13 is our reading, and we're going to read the first 17 verses of that chapter. As you read any of the gospel accounts, it seems quite remarkable that so much of the narrative deals with the final week of Jesus's earthly ministry, that time between Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday.

Palm Sunday, the triumphal entry had just happened in John chapter 12, so we're in the middle of Passion Week, the final week of Jesus's earthly ministry. John chapter 13, it was just before the Passover feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and to go to the Father.

Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God. So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, are you going to wash my feet? Jesus replied, you do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand. No, said Peter, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered, unless I wash you, you have no part with me. Then Lord, Simon Peter replied, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well. Jesus answered, a person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet. His whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you. For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. Do you understand what I have done for you? He asked them. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth. No servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Amen. And may God add his own blessing to this reading of his word.

I'd like to focus our attention this morning on that first verse, which really gives us a profound insight into who Jesus is and into what Jesus has come to do. We enter into the very heart of Jesus here. It was just before the Passover feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. I have to make an admission. When I've got free time, what I love to do is watch YouTube. I'm sure people watch YouTube, but I realize that there's a feature of YouTube, which I'm now only beginning to understand, is that if you watch a series of things, they'll begin to show you similar things. They'll get an idea of what they, I'm not sure who they are, but you know, YouTube will get an idea of the things you like to watch, and then they'll say you might want to watch this or suggest, well, yesterday

I was watching famous speeches in the 20th century. That's, you know, my idea of an exciting Saturday afternoon. So I was watching different speeches, and then a speech came up, or, you know, on my YouTube column that I'd never seen before. So I clicked on it. It's quite remarkable, because it was over 50 years ago. It was 1967, and it was recorded. You could tell that, you know, the recording was quite primitive.

[4 : 56] The camera shook quite a bit, and the, the, it was black and white, and the color wasn't, the focus wasn't always perfect. But the scene was quite remarkable, because it was set in Philadelphia, and it was at a junior high school. Now, in the United States, a junior high, I think, tends to be about 13 and 14, 13 and 14 year olds. So it was a junior high school in the city center of Philadelphia.

Now, Barrett Junior High School was not in the most affluent of areas. It didn't have the highest test results, and it probably didn't have many distinguished visitors come to speak to it.

I would say very rarely did Nobel laureates come to Barrett Junior High School, but on this day in 1967, a Nobel Prize laureate did come to Barrett Junior High, spoke for about 20 minutes.

Martin Luther King Jr. wanted to speak to this group of young people. You see, Barrett Junior High was in a predominantly African-American section of Philadelphia, so most of the children were African-American, and he had a short speech that he wanted to deliver to them.

And he began this speech in this note. He said, what is your life's blueprint? An architect makes a blueprint to direct those who are doing the building. Do you have a proper, solid, and a sound blueprint? And I thought today that this illustration of an architect in a blueprint was a helpful way of entering into the text that is before us. Because what we have here is the architect, the Lord Jesus Christ. And he's giving us an insight into his blueprint, what he is going to do, what he has done, what he is going to do, and what he is going to complete.

[6 : 51] And for you and for me, if we have this architect, and if we have this blueprint, we can be sure that we indeed have a proper, solid, and sound blueprint for life.

And if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, this text gives us an insight into what he is offering, into what he is providing, into what he is able to do, and will do, on behalf of all who place their trust and faith in him. So in this first verse, I'd like to notice two things that really come before our attention. I want to look first at the time. I don't know if you've ever been a guest in somebody's home, and you've had a lovely evening, you've had a nice meal, you've been relaxing and talking, you take a look, you're walking, and you say, oh, look at the time. It's getting quite late, we had better go home.

In chapter 13 and verse 1, we have two indications of the time. Both are significant. First of all, we're told it's Passover time, and secondly, we're told it's time for departure.

Jesus is leaving. So it's Passover, and it's Exodus. That brings us right back to the Old Testament, to the key event that happened on the pages, in the pages, and in the life experience of God's people in the Old Testament, Passover and Exodus. And if you want to, you can read for yourselves Exodus chapter 12 and 13 and 14, and you can see this climactic event. You see, God had chosen a man called Moses to lead out his people from Egypt. Egypt was a place of slavery, a place of oppression, and that God was going to protect and preserve and redeem and rescue for himself this people.

They couldn't do it themselves. We can't do it ourselves. You see, the Christian faith at its very heart is a redemptive faith, a redemptive religion. A redemptive faith means that we need a redeemer. We need someone who can help us, someone who can rescue us, someone who can free us.

[9 : 14] Now, 2,000, 3,400, 3,500 years ago, the Israelites were literally slaves in the land of Egypt.

God rescued them from that place of slavery. 3,500 years later, we too are slaves. We're not in Egypt. We are not literally slaves, but Jesus makes it quite clear. He said, whoever sins is a slave to sin.

But if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. So Jesus tells us, or John tells us, that it's Passover time, and that Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and to go to the Father. Passover was a time of sacrifice. You remember the story that the Israelite families would all have a lamb in their home, and at the appointed time, the lamb would be slain. The blood then would be painted on the doorposts, so that when God visited Egypt, instead of destroying the firstborn in these homes, those who had the blood on the doorposts, they would be secure. God would pass over those houses.

But where the blood wasn't, where no sacrifice was made, the firstborn in that home, the firstborn both man and beast, man and animal, would be taken. So Passover time was a time of sacrifice.

Passover time was a time of judgment, that God judged the Egyptians and God judged Pharaoh, and it was a time of deliverance. You see, God had a plan. God was not going to leave his people as slaves in Egypt. He was going to take them from a place of slavery and bring them to a land of plenty.

[11 : 08] And that's the Passover, and that's the Exodus. So when Passover occurred, one thing you knew that was coming next, it's time to go. It's time to leave. And the people of Israel, the Israelites in Egypt, left the land of slavery, and they were slaves no longer. Now, 15 centuries pass, and it's Passover time, and Jesus knows that his time has now come. As you read through John's gospel time and again, Jesus tells us that his time has not yet come. It wasn't the right time, but now the right time has come.

His time for departure was at hand. Why? Because the time of sacrifice had also arrived. Now, this is the unique aspect of our Christian faith, is that the redemption, the redeemer, the one who pays the price, is God himself. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, has come to live and to die so that we could be set free. We could be set free from our sin.

We could be set free from the guilt and shame and the consequence of sin and from the judgment that inevitably will come from sin. And it's all in the timing. You see, it's Passover and it's Passion Week. This last week of Jesus's earthly ministry is so rich, so significant, so substantial, that here are those days that change the course of human history. And these are the days that can change the course of your individual life history. So the themes of Passover and Exodus, sacrifice, judgment, deliverance, departure, are the same themes that we see in Passover week. And if you want to follow the events, read from John chapter 12, read through to John 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and then into the events of the crucifixion and resurrection themselves, 18 to 21. And you'll see the unfolding story.

But John, the gospel writer, is giving us a preview. He's saying, here's the time. Here's what's going to happen. In fact, early in the gospel, John the Baptist, we might call this a spoiler alert.

Remember when John the Baptist in John chapter 1 and verse 29 said, behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Lamb. That imagery of sacrifice. Going right back to Passover. The Lamb that was slain. The slain Lamb. The blood shed. The safety and security at a cost. But Jesus was the Lamb.

[14 : 00] Jesus was the Lamb of God. Jesus would be slain. Jesus would be sacrificed. Jesus' blood would be shed so that his people would be secure and that they could leave a place of bondage and go into a place of freedom. So we look at the time, Passover time. We look at the time it's Passion Week. And Jesus says it's time for him to go. Where's he going? Well, in a few days he's going to the cross. A few days later he's raised from the dead. Not many weeks later he ascends to heaven. He's returning to the Father. He's come from the Father. He's going back to the Father. Now you might say, well this is a loss, isn't it? And the disciples were distressed when Jesus explained that he was going. They were confused.

They were upset. How could things be better if he leaves? Well, he said actually they will be better. Because he will send the Holy Spirit. God will send the Spirit. So that the people of God will be enlightened, enlivened, strengthened, invigorated. So Jesus is going to the cross. Jesus will be raised from the dead. Jesus will ascend to heaven. And we know that today Jesus is where? He's at the right hand of God. The right hand, that place of ultimate power, ultimate authority. He's there at the right hand of the majesty on high. And what's he doing? He's praying. He's interceding for us. He is bringing us before God. He's praying on our behalf to his Father. The Spirit poured out. The Son glorified.

And you and I preserved and presented before his throne of grace. So we notice the time. It's a time for death. And it's a time for departure. And it's Jesus who's going to die. And it's Jesus who is going to leave. But what about the theme? How can we explain what's going on here? Well, the theme is brought before us very simply. And again, if you have the opportunity to read, read this section of John's Gospel, John 13 to John 17. Because the theme can be summed up in one profound word. And that's a four-letter word called love. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. Or he loved them to the end. In the first 12 chapters of John's Gospel, this word love is used only six times. But in these next four chapters, this word love is used 31 times.

You see, Jesus is giving an extended explanation to his disciples. And time and time again, his explanation relies upon this word love. I have the privilege of conducting many weddings.

Thankfully, over my 20 plus years as a minister, I've had many more weddings to conduct than funerals. And at weddings, you've got this happy occasion, husband and man and woman, soon to be husband and wife. And you're trying as the minister to explain a little bit about what they are making, the commitments that they are making on that occasion. Inevitably, I find myself reading from the Bible, 1 Corinthians chapter 13, that great chapter on love, and John chapter 3 and verse 16, for God so loved the world.

[17 : 41] You see, the word love in the Bible is not kind of that kind of emotional, gooey, warm feeling, that fuzzy feeling that you have in your heart. It's not just that. Yes, there is a feeling that we have with love. But love is a word that speaks of commitment, sacrifice, self-giving. It's a love that speaks of a commitment to do all that is required for the object of that love, the object of that affection. So it's a word that's spoken. But this spoken word implies commitment, implies action, implies on the part of the one who loves, that that person will do everything that is necessary for the beloved to be secure, to be safe, to be fulfilled. Having loved his own who were in the world.

These last couple years, a lot of significant Christian voices have been silenced. Billy Graham, Ravi Zacharias, R.C. Sproul, J.I. Packer, these great speakers and writers and theologians, they have moved from this world to the world that is to come. They've come to experience for themselves the promise that they have been holding out before others, that those who die in Christ will rise in Christ. One of these great authors was a man called J.I. Packer. If you haven't read his book, Knowing God, it happened to be the first book that I read as a Christian. It's a short, well, it's a long book, but it's made up of short chapters. These were individual chapters in Christianity today and put together in a book. And Packer had this great skill of making very profound statements with very few words.

And on this subject of love, he said this. He said, God loves all people in some ways. And God loves some people in all ways. So what is it here? When we're talking about love, what kind of love is being spoken about in John chapter 13? Is it the love that God has for all people?

Or is it that special love that God has for some people? If you go back to John 3 16, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life. Clearly, that's the love that God has for everybody.

All people, all the nations, all the peoples, 7.6 billion by current count on this planet, all loved by God. The love that he has for all people.

[20 : 38] There are some things you can't watch on YouTube. So I like old sermons and I like to read old sermons and I was reading an old sermon that was preached 130, 140 years ago. It was preached by a man called C.H.

Spurgeon. He was a minister in London. He had a big congregation, 6,000 people every Sunday. And at this point in his career, he had been preaching for 31 years. And his text was John 3 16.

And in the opening paragraph, he said this. He said, I was very greatly surprised the other day in looking over the texts from which I have preached to find that I have no record of ever having spoken from this verse, John 3 16. This is all the more singular because I can truly say that it might be put in the forefront of all my volumes of discourses as the sole topic of my life's ministry.

It has been my one and only business to set forth the love of God to men in Christ Jesus. I heard lately of an aged minister of whom it was said, whatever his text, he never fails to set forth God as love and Christ as the atonement for sin. I wish that much the same may be said of me.

My heart's desire has been to sound forth as with a trumpet the good news that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

[22 : 07] That's the message of the gospel. That there is a love that God has for you, whoever you are. And that love is shown in the giving of his son. And the terms and conditions of the gospel couldn't be simpler.

God so loved that he gave. What do we do? We respond. We respond by trusting and believing that whosoever believes will not perish but have everlasting life. The terms and conditions are simple and the promise is straightforward. Not perish but have everlasting life.

But John 3 and John 13 are slightly different, aren't they? Because it's not so much the love that God has for the world, which is true. But Jesus now is directing this love towards those who are his own.

Having loved his own. What raises the question, who are his own? Who is Jesus speaking of here? Now you might think that as a Jewish person, Jesus is speaking of the Jewish people.

He's speaking of those for whom the Old Testament was written. The children of Israel, the Jewish people. And in John chapter 1, they're described in this way. In John 1.10, he was in the world, Jesus.

[23 : 28] And though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. Yet he came to that which was his own. He came to his own people. He came to the people who had all the Old Testament prophecy.

All the Old Testament predictions. And what you would think the next part of that verse would be, he came to his own and his own welcomed him. And his own received him. And his own rejoiced at his coming.

That's what you would think, wouldn't it? Because they knew. They'd been told. They were waiting. But the verse carries on this way. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

So this can't mean his own. This can't mean just the Jewish people, the children of Israel. It has to mean something different. Well, in the opening verses of John's Gospel, it goes on to explain.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. There's a formula there.

[24 : 34] If you're into maths, you can say that the formula is simple. That it's receive plus believe equals become. So if we're trying to understand who are his own, this formula really helps us, I think.

Because you are one of his own if you receive him. You are one of his own if you believe in his name. You are one of his own if you are now become a child of God.

Because if you're a child of God, if Jesus is a son of God, that means you're part of the family. That God is your father, Jesus is your elder brother, and every Christian is your brother or sister.

So the love that is spoken of in John 13 is not the love that God has for all, but that love that he has for some. Those who are his own.

So this is a love that he shows, and this is a love that he will demonstrate to the very end. He loved his own who are in the world. He now showed them the full extent of his love.

[25 : 44] Sacrifice. Self-giving. Looking at the needs of those who are the object of his love. We're weak. He's strong. We have sinned and fallen short.

He is perfect and without blemish and without spot. That's an interesting detail, too, about the Passover lamb. The lambs that were used for sacrifice had to be without blemish, without defect.

Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, he was without blemish. He was without defect. We have plenty of blemishes. We have plenty of defects. That's why we need the sacrifice of one without blemish or defect.

How does he demonstrate the full extent of his love? By what unfolds in the coming days. He was handed over, betrayed. He was arrested.

He was tried. He was condemned on two capital charges. One was treason, claimed to be king. The other was blasphemy. He claimed to be God. He was mistreated.

[26 : 47] He was abused. He was spat upon. He was beaten. He was taken to that place of crucifixion, had to carry his cross for at least a portion of the journey. There he was crucified with malefactors, with evil men.

And there the taunts continued. Not only the physical anguish, but now the taunts of the malefactors, the thief on the right and the left, the crowd, the religious people, the soldiers.

The full extent of his love is the life that he lived, perfect. The full extent of his love was the death that he died, sacrificial. The full extent of his love that he was raised triumphant from the dead, that he conquered sin, he conquered death, he conquered evil, and that he ascended on high and is now at the place that is higher than any other place.

The honor is greater than any other honor. That's the full extent of his love. The full extent that he has for his own. Because he loves them.

Because he looks upon them in mercy. Because they can't save themselves. The children of old, the Israelites of old, could not rescue themselves from Egypt. And we cannot rescue ourselves from sin, from guilt, or from shame.

[28 : 05] We've caused the problem. Only God can solve the problem. Reminds me of the hymn. It was written by a man called William Cooper.

He said, There is a fountain filled with blood. And one of the stanzas goes, Ever since by faith I saw the stream, thy flowing wounds supply. Redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die.

Redeeming love is the theme of this verse. Redeeming love is the theme of this gospel. And redeeming love is the theme of this Bible. It's a costly love. It's a personal love.

It's a powerful love. It's a sacrificial love. It's a self-giving love. It's a love that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has for you and for me. I want to go back to that first illustration that we had when Martin Luther King was speaking to those young people in that junior high school those many years ago.

And on the comments page, just by way of illustration, many of the students who were actually there posted their comments. And they said, My life was never the same after that day.

[29 : 17] I walked a bit taller. I felt a bit better. When I heard those words, my life was changed. Let me ask you this. When you hear these words, are these life-changing words for you?

Have you encountered this architect, Jesus? Is this the blueprint for your life? Redeeming love, sacrificial? Death. Substitutionary atonement.

His life in the place of your life. Because if he's the architect, and if this is the blueprint, your life is changed. Your life can never be the same again.

Because Jesus was talking about his death and his departure. Let me tell you the bad news. There's going to come a day when your death and your departure will come. And the Bible makes quite clear that that becomes a day of reckoning.

And either you stand before God alone and have to give an account, or the Bible tells us that you can have an advocate. You can have a spokesman.

[30 : 20] And that spokesman is none other than Jesus Christ, who shows the full extent of his love, who loves us to the very end. So what can we say by way of application?

If this is not the blueprint of your life, and if Jesus is not the architect of your life, this is what you need, and this is who you need. But if you are trusting in Jesus, if you are believing in him, the encouragement is to keep believing.

Keep trusting. Keep going. One of the voices that was silenced in recent years, R.C. Sproul, a great preacher and writer and teacher, he reflected upon this phrase called the perseverance of the saints.

He said, I think this little catchphrase is dangerously misleading. It suggests that perseverance is something that we do. Perhaps in and of ourselves. I believe that saints do persevere in faith, and that those who have been effectually called by God and have been reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit endure to the end.

However, they persevere not because they are so diligent in making use of the mercies of God. The only reason we can give why any of us continue on in the faith is because we have been preserved.

[31 : 39] So I prefer the term the preservation of the saints, because the process by which we are kept in a state of grace is something that is accomplished by God. My confidence in my preservation is not in my ability to persevere.

My confidence rests on the power of Christ to sustain me with his grace and by the power of his intercession. He is going to bring us safely home. Jesus is leaving, and Jesus wants to show us the full extent of his love so that where he goes, we go.

He's going home, we go home. J.I. Packer said this. He said, the Christian's motto should not be let go and let God, but trust God and get going. So if you're not yet a Christian, I want you to trust God, and I want you to get going on the Christian life, to believe, to trust, to follow, to serve, to speak, and to tell, and to testify.

Trust God and get going. But if you are a Christian here today, maybe I can adapt those words of Packer and say, trust God and keep going. Don't give up.

Don't give in. Don't turn back. Why? Because the love that Jesus has is a personal love, it's a powerful love, and it's a persistent love. He loves you in the world, and he will love you to the end.

[33 : 02] I want to close with the words that the speaker closed with on that day in 1967 to his, you might say, a very jubilant audience. He closed with these words.

He says, we must keep moving. We must keep going. If you can't fly, run. If you can't walk. If you can't run, walk.

If you can't walk, crawl. But by all means, keep moving. Maybe this morning you're a Christian and you're not flying. Maybe this morning you're a Christian and you're not running.

Maybe this morning you're a Christian and you have to be honest and say, I'm not even walking. I'm just barely crawling. Well, by all means, keep moving. Don't give up. Don't give in.

Trust God. Keep going. Why? Because the redeeming love of Jesus never lets you go. The redeeming love of Jesus never lets you down. He wants to show us the full extent of his love in this world and to the very end.

[34 : 03] So let me tell you this. When you rest in Jesus, you are resting in the sure promises of God that he will never let you go. Trust God.

Keep going. Whether you can fly. Whether you can run. Whether you can walk. Or whether simply you can crawl. By all means, keep moving. For principle.

Do nothing. Because the fil in verse, I don't get them. People. Because wisdom. Verse probe. Amen. Rose probe. Come with me. Come out.

Go against him. Go against him. Oh.■■■■ wish. God make people comfort. Don't give them up. Of course. Wait. Do nothing.