

Do You Understand?

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Preacher: Colin Dow

- [0 : 00] Please turn again with me this morning to John 13, verse 12. John 13, verse 12.
- Do you understand what I have done to you? Do you understand what I have done to you? Let us pray.
- Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your greater glory, our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
- Amen. We live in a world short of encouragement. During the darkest days of the pandemic, the Dow family consciously stopped watching the news.
- If it wasn't coronavirus, it was government scandal. And even when the fresh-faced weather presenters came on screen, their forecasts were gloomy.
- [1 : 11] I think if it hadn't been for Joe Wicks, we'd have all gone complete mad. And I know that Peter and Marian did Joe Wicks' hour-long session every morning to keep themselves fit.
- Well, hopefully we're looking forward to very much brighter days. But the stresses of the pandemic have left a legacy behind them.
- Pessimism, pessimism, anxiety, social phobias may take many years to deal with. I would honestly have to say that despite early positivity, the pandemic has also had a profound impact upon the Christian church.
- And as far as I can see, the majority of it negative. Numbers in virtually every church are significantly down.
- Ministers in my own denomination and other denominations are talking about it having had a sifting effect. Those who were not that committed in the first place have disappeared like snow off a dike.
- [2 : 22] Those who were committed are just as committed as they've always been. But they're also rather confused about what the future holds. Virtual church, Zoom church, pajama church, call it what you want to.
- It's a very mixed blessing indeed. Many are using it for the right reasons. To join in worship when otherwise they would not have been able to get here.
- Please do not forsake the prayer meeting. You have no excuse for not coming to the prayer meeting on a Wednesday evening. But many are using it for the wrong reason. To become consumers and not participants in worship.
- To use it as an excuse not to physically meet with other saints and contribute to the life of the church and the worship of God. So what does the future hold for us?
- Is it certain? Or is it uncertain? There are just so many questions which it's way too early to answer. And any answers which you have read on social media will most definitely be proved wrong.
- [3 : 32] My aim over the next few weeks is not to add to your social phobia. It is to fill you with the encouragement of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To lift your eyes from the gloomy news and the even gloomier weather.

From the trouble and the turmoil of an uncertain future both for you as individuals and as a church. To the only definite certainty that you or any of us will ever, ever have.

The glory of the love of Jesus Christ. Glory of the love of Jesus Christ.

We begin this morning in John 13. We're going to move through this over the next few weeks. This is an incredibly important passage. Bringing encouragement and comfort to you.

It's the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. Now these disciples are unsettled. One among them will betray Jesus to death. And as they will soon discover, Jesus will be leaving them.

[4 : 37] But even on this most traumatic evening, they experience the comfort of the gospel. Just as I need it every day and you need it every day also.

You need encouragement entirely as much as I do. And here we have it. The key is in verse 12 where Jesus asks them a question.

Do you understand what I've done to you? Are you reading Jesus today through this uncertain world's spectacles? Rather, read this uncertain world through Jesus' spectacles.

Understand what Jesus has done. Believe the gospel of his love and he will fill your heart with love and comfort. Let me suggest this morning that as we wrestle with this question, do you understand what I've done to you?

We can open it up in two ways. First, what he's done. And second, how we understand. It's really simple. As I say, my aim over the next few Sunday mornings is to fill you with the comfort of the gospel.

[5 : 47] Let's start today then together as we begin to understand what has Jesus done for you. First of all, what he has done.

The heart of the Christian gospel and the foundation of all our hope isn't found in what we have, can do, or will ever do for God.

It is only found in what he has done for us through Christ Jesus. Remember the words of our Kenyan friend, John Calvin. Kenyan John Calvin, not French John Calvin.

Religion is man's way to God, he said on those screens. Jesus Christ is God's way to man. Religion is man's way to God.

Jesus Christ is God's way to man. There is no comfort in religion. There is only comfort in Christ and in what he has done. The understanding of which brings hope and encouragement.

[6 : 52] And from these first few verses of John 13, we learn that Jesus has done three things for us. He has loved us. He has been betrayed for us.

He has washed us. First of all, he has loved us. He has loved us. There are few greater openings to any chapter in the Bible than that which we find here.

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to see the Father, having loved his own who are in the world, he now loved them to the end.

Behind the foot washing, behind the crucifixion, behind everything, lies this infinitely encouraging truth. Jesus loves his own.

For the life of me, I can't think of what it was about any of the disciples which drew the love of Jesus. He didn't love them because they deserved to be loved.

[7 : 59] He loved them for no other reason than that it's in his nature to love the unlovable. The whole of the mind and the heart of Jesus is filled with love for his own.

Though in view of the next day's suffering and crucifixion, he would have been justified in turning in upon himself in some kind of pity party, instead he reached out to his disciples in love.

He loved them to the end. That's his nature. His mind and heart is filled with love for you. He had loved these disciples from the beginning, for we read, having loved his own.

He loved them when he called them. He loved them during those three years of public ministry and private friendship. He loved them when they laughed.

And he loved them when they cried. He loved them when they triumphed. And he loved them when they failed. He'd always loved them, even when their faith in him had been as small as a mustard seed.

[9 : 04] He loved them. He loved his own who were in the world, in the world. He knew better than any of them what it meant to faithfully follow God in the face of a hostile world.

He knew they'd be hated and tempted and mocked and tormented. And he loved them. When he saw their helplessness and confusion, he knew exactly how devastated they would be when he left them.

He knew that they would run and hide. They'd be afraid and disheartened. He knew that, rather like us, after this pandemic, we'd be confused, anxious, socially phobic, afraid of other people.

They'd be very far from the bold evangelists and courageous Christians they had been earlier in Jesus' ministry. But he loved them in their weakness and their failure.

He loved them in their pessimism and their confusion. Now, perhaps this morning, perhaps over the months of this pandemic, you have taken your eyes off his love for you.

[10 : 18] Perhaps during this pandemic, with its social isolation and its uncertainty, you've turned in upon yourself in a pity party. Perhaps the someone you see in a mirror isn't someone you particularly love or even like anymore.

And then as you look outwards, you see a church with a very uncertain future. What? Are we half the number we were 18 months ago? Ah, but you've not looked back to see a Jesus who loved his own who were in the world.

And you've not looked upward to a Jesus who loves you still. And you've not looked forward to see a Jesus who holds out his hands ready to embrace you in his love. With the hammer of your mind, drive this into your heart.

For all that you may neither love nor even like yourself, Jesus loves you with all the intensity. He's always loved you. He doesn't love you.

He never has for what you can do for him or what you are do for him. He doesn't love you because you have it all together and you're able to stand tall when others are groveling on the ground.

[11 : 31] He doesn't love you because you're a success and not a failure. He loves you because it's in his nature to love you. And nothing you can ever say or nothing you can ever do will ever stop him loving his own.

He can't, he won't. Drive it into your heart today. Despite how you feel, he loves you.

He has, in the second instance, been betrayed for you. Betrayed for you. I wonder whether the language of his own, used in verse one, is used to draw a sharp distinction between those who were truly Jesus' disciples and Judas Iscariot.

The Judas of whom we read in verse two, during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot. So in this room, just imagine it, in this upper room, there's the Lord and there are 11 sincere disciples of Jesus and there's Judas who this very evening will betray him to the ruling authorities.

None of us are Jesus. None of us are the Lord. I'd like to think that the vast majority of us are the 11 sincere disciples of Jesus, albeit imperfect. But I'd like to think that none of us are where Judas was.

[13 : 05] But the point to this, the betrayal of Jesus opens the door to his sufferings and crucifixion. His betrayal by Judas is a prelude to the cross.

betrayal is the language of suffering. It's the language of emotional and spiritual and physical pain. When Jesus asks his disciples, do you understand what I've done to you?

He wants us to appreciate that his love for us took him not to the heights of comfort, but to the depths of pain. For love to be true love, you know this, it has to be costly.

The greater the love you have for someone, the more costly that love for them is. And the greatest of all lovers, Jesus, who loves his own, endured the greatest of costs.

His betrayal, his suffering, his death. That's how much it costs Jesus to love you. But it's a price he's more than willing to pay.

[14 : 13] It's more than worth it to Jesus. You want to know how much Jesus loves you? You spread your arms out as wide as you can and then realize that Jesus spread them out even wider on the cross.

And he received the nails into his hands. How far does Jesus have to go to prove to you that he loves you? He dies for you. Here's the comfort and encouragement for you in this.

If Jesus was willing to pay the ultimate cost for you, then he's proved willing to continue to supply all your daily needs. As the Apostle Paul puts it, he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not along with him freely give us all things?

Yes, that means daily grace for the anxious and daily strength for the weak. Grace for his church. Help for his people. And then thirdly, he has washed us or cleansed us.

Washed us or cleansed us. Like some great Old Testament prophet, Jesus gives a visual demonstration of his betrayal, suffering, and death. He demonstrates where his love for them will lead him.

[15 : 35] And so he washes their feet. He does that which in the culture of the day was the duty of the lowest slave and servant. Takes off those outer garments he was wearing.

He wraps a towel around his waist. He fills a basin with water. And he washes their feet and then dries them with the towel he has around his waist. He washes their feet as a sign that the effect of the cross will be the washing of their hearts.

A thousand years before this, King David prayed in Psalms 51, Cleanse me from my sins. Wash me and I shall be whiter than the snow. Create in me a clean heart, O God.

And now in John 13 we have by way of this dramatic image Jesus answering David's prayer. By washing their feet he has given them a sacramental sign that his betrayal and his sufferings and his death will lead to them being cleansed from their sins.

To washing them whiter than the snow. To creating within them a clean heart. It's not revealed to us in this passage but we know from other things that Jesus said and did in the gospels.

[16 : 52] He will take upon himself their dirt, their sin, their guilt. And by his death he will pay the penalty of their sin. He will clean them by himself becoming dirty as the apostle Paul will later say he who knew no sin became sin for us so that we made the righteousness of God in him.

Driven by his relentless love he washed them. He washed an impulsive Peter, a temperamental John, a pathetic James.

A bunch of unlovable nobodies. Cleansed them from their sin. Washed them whiter than the snow. Created within them clean hearts. Listen, we live in an uncertain world.

Get used to it. We have uncertain futures. Get used to it. But if you're a Christian today you can be sure of this. Your heart though it may be filled with social phobias and anxieties and pessimism is because of what Jesus has done for you on the cross.

It's white as the driven snow. He cleansed you of what you once were. He's washed you of all your sins. So tell me, can there be three greater grounds of hope than these?

[18 : 17] These things Jesus has done he wants us to understand? He loved us. He gave himself for us. He washed us. Yes, indeed, he's done more for us than we ever could have thought possible.

Locked away in our own narcissistic minds, we need to remember that our Christianity does not consist in what we have done for God or what we can do for God, but in what Christ has done for us.

What he's done and then secondly, more briefly, how we understand, how we understand, to understand what I've done. Now the worst advice you can ever give to someone who is trying to deal with anxiety or social phobias or pessimism is cheer up.

what that person will respond, do you really think I want to be anxious? Do you really think I want to be pessimistic?

Well, sure, one bit of positive advice I can give you is don't watch the news. Another bit of positive advice I can give you is get out of your own head by doing things that make you happy.

[19 : 38] But in the context of John 13, I want to suggest to you an altogether more gospel and fulfilling way of finding encouragement in these uncertain days. Let me suggest to you by way of response to these things that Jesus has done for us, loved us, given himself for us, cleansed us, we express our understanding of that in two ways.

First, we know and then we show. We know and then we show. Jesus says to them, do you understand what I've done to you?

Now, to be fair, in verse seven, Jesus confesses that it's only after his passion and death that his disciples will really understand. But that's when we live today, so that's fine for Jesus to ask us that question, do you understand what I've done to you?

One of the things about modern life is that we're all very busy doing things. My diary is filling up, oh, man alive, with frightening rapidity, even this week, in a way it wasn't 12 months ago.

So busy doing things, busy calendars, and even when we mark time out for relaxation, we're no very good at resting, are we?

[20 : 54] we spend our relaxation time doing other things, chasing after our children, working around our house, sorting out the garden, or if we should find ourselves with some spare moments in the day, we begin to feel guilty and think to ourselves, I should be doing something.

On one particular park bench in Princess Street Gardens in Edinburgh, go and find it for yourself. It's on the west side of Princess Street Gardens. There's a plaque with the words, tarry a while and enjoy the grand scene.

Tarry a while and enjoy the grand scene. For those of you for whom English is not your first language, it means sit on this bench for a few minutes, open your eyes and just enjoy looking at Edinburgh Castle.

Tarry a while. Tell me, when was the last time you tarried a while and enjoyed the grand scene of all that Jesus has done for you? Listen, you can blame me for this.

Let your grass grow one centimeter longer than you'd like it to be. You really don't have to get every bit of dust off every lampshade in every corner of your house.

[22 : 17] You really don't have to fill your diary for the future. today is Sunday. Let Monday's worries take care of themselves on Monday.

Stop. Tarry a while. Enjoy the grand scene of Jesus' love for you. Jesus' death for you. Jesus' cleansing of you.

Stop feeling guilty for appearing to do nothing. stop feeling guilty for sitting on your favorite armchair and thinking for a while about all Jesus has done for you.

Don't let the voices of anxiety and pessimism drown out those precious times when you're reflecting on how much Jesus loves you. The problem is, you know, we have got so stuck inside our own heads in the last 18 months that our thought processes have become like a broken record.

For those of you of a younger generation, you won't know what I'm talking about here. Time to change the record. Time to start thinking about all Jesus has done for you. Jesus is calling us not just to intellectually understand the logic of the cross.

[23 : 29] He's calling us to enjoy it. When I was in school, one of the first experiments our biology teacher got us to do was to chew a piece of bread.

He was teaching us about the salivary enzyme amylase and how it breaks down simple carbohydrates into sugar. You chew a piece of bread for long enough and because of your salivary enzyme amylase, it becomes entirely as sweet as sugar.

The problem with us in our busy world is we never chew the gospel of Jesus Christ long enough to make it sweet to our taste. We hear it, we accept it intellectually, we believe it, and then we go.

We don't chew it over in our minds because we're so busy doing other things or because we're worrying about pandemics or churches or jobs or kids, whatever. And Jesus says to us, slow down.

I've said it before, I'll say it again because the older I get, the more important I feel it is. God has given us one day out of seven, the Lord's Day, the Christian Sabbath, where it is our responsibility and delight to slow down, to sit down and chew over that gospel.

[24 : 54] It is no coincidence that Christian piety has decreased in proportion to the observance of the Christian Sabbath. It is no coincidence that Christian piety has decreased in proportion to the observance of the Christian Sabbath.

This is our one day of the week when guilt-free and duty-free, we can sit down on the park bench of the church's gospel and take time to chew over all that Jesus has done for us.

And not just with a view to understanding it better intellectually, but with a view to that gospel sinking down deep into our hearts and becoming sweet to our taste. That's comfort and that's encouragement.

The hope of glory in your mind and heart. No. Show. Show.

What is the future of our church in Glasgow City Free Church? As I say at present times it can feel rather uncertain. Some who weren't that committed in the first place have dropped off the scene altogether like snow off a dyke.

[26 : 07] Others have left for legitimate reasons. They've graduated. They've found jobs in other parts of the world. It's really easy to be pessimistic. Hopefully, spending time hammering the gospel down into our hearts will go some way to giving us hope for the future.

But there's one more aspect of this I want to draw your attention to. During the pandemic, it was really easy to become self-absorbed. But let me suggest that as Christians, now is not the time for self-protection or self-centeredness.

Now is not the time for self-centeredness. Consider Jesus. It was the night before his crucifixion. He didn't engage in self-analysis or narcissistic thought.

He got up and he wrapped a towel around his waist and he washed his disciples' feet. He served others. He expressed his love for his disciples. He did.

And in the same way, the best thing to do right now is not to withdraw into yourself into a narcissistic hell in your head. It is to get up. It is to look out and ask yourself, what can I do to serve Christ's people?

[27 : 22] What can I do to express Christ's love in me for his disciples? What can I do? If you know and have experienced the self-giving love of Christ in your heart, then back to the trend of the society in which we live and show it by giving it to others.

You know what I'm like. You all know me, right? I am the most tempted person here in this place to turn in upon myself. Phil Stogner will tell you just how I get, so turned in on myself.

When I'm tempted to turn in on myself, I have got to show the love of Jesus within me and the new heart he's given me and turn myself out to others.

What can I do to lift another Christian's gloom? What can I do to meet the need another Christian has for company? For reassurance?

For hope? For hope? You know, it cheered our hearts during the darkest days of the pandemic to see Captain Tom walking with his Zimmer frame, raising money for NHS charities.

[28 : 33] And it really, really cheered up Peter DeMarion and myself included to follow Joe Wicks' daily workouts. I know that the Lockington kids did it as well. Now, these men aren't professing Christians.

Yet their selflessness put us to shame because they were not doing these things for themselves, but for us. Let me encourage you by suggesting that one of the things that will encourage you most at this time is to stop looking inwards and start looking outwards and ask what you can do to help another Christian in this church.

What can I do? How can I express the gospel transformation the love of Christ has made in me? How can I show Christ's love to others?

How can I wash on other Christians' feet? How can I do to other Christians what Christ has done unto me? There's such encouragement here, is there not?

There's more than enough encouragement to see all of us through the darkest days. But it's not in us. It's lovely to be together. But it's not in us.

[29 : 43] No, not at all. All our hope on Christ is founded. It's all in Jesus and his gospel. Let us pray. Our Father in heaven, we find it so hard to believe that Jesus could love us.

Ah, we raise Peter up on a pedestal and we say about Peter, well, okay, he had his flaws, but he was the rock upon which you built your church.

And we raise up John on a pedestal and we say of him, well, he was the writer of 1st, 2nd, 3rd John, the gospel and revelation. Yes, he had his flaws, but he was worthy of your love.

And we say of ourselves, we're not worthy of your love. The truth is, Lord, that not one of us is worthy of your love. You don't love us because we deserve it.

You love us because it's in your nature to love the unlovable. Father, we pray that you would drive these truths down into our hearts. Slow us down, Lord.

[30 : 53] Help us to tarry a while on the church's park bench and just to enjoy the grand scene of Christ's salvation of us in his cross and resurrection.

And as a result of that, to have great confidence that he who loved us will not give up on us, but that he who gave his son up for us will freely give us along with him all things.

Yes, he will prosper his church again. And he will prosper us. In Christ's name we pray these things. Amen.

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