

Wouldn't our relationship with Jesus be better if he was still here

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[0 : 00] The reading is John 13 verses 21 to 35, which you can find on page 1085 of the Church Bibles.

That's John 13 starting at verse 21, page 1085 in the Church Bibles. After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit and testified, Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.

The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus. So Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking.

So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.

So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, What you are going to do, do quickly.

[1 : 10] Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the money bag, Jesus was telling him, Buy what we need for the feast, or that he should give something to the poor.

So after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out, and it was night. When he had gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will also glory him in himself and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, Where I am going, you cannot come.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Thanks, Maxine, for reading. While I start our time together with a prayer. Dear Lord, thank you for your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 27] Thank you that he has won the great victory over death for us. Father, please help us to love him more this morning. Amen. Could I just be turned down slightly in this?

Thank you. The question I want us to think about this morning is, Wouldn't our relationship with Jesus be better if he was still here?

Wouldn't our relationship with Jesus be better if he was still here? It seems on the face of it, I think, probably an obvious question to answer. Yes. Yes, it would be better for our relationship with Jesus if he was still here.

Obviously. We'd be able to see him face to face. We'd be able to see how he lives. Would Jesus watch Game of Thrones on Netflix? We could finally have the answer to that question that my friends love to debate.

I think the answer is no, but you can chat to me about that afterwards. We'd also be able to see kind of how he interacts with people. What's his prayer life like? What's his commitment to God's word like? We'd also, I think, wouldn't we be able to have those doubts that we have answered, those questions that we struggle with?

[3 : 33] Jesus, are you good? Jesus, are you for me? Jesus, did you really rise from the debt? We would be able to have those questions answered. But surely the most fundamental question we'd be able to ask is, Jesus, do you love me?

Even though the world, and it throws up lots of difficult questions, doesn't it, in terms of suffering, in terms of life being difficult, in terms of illness, we might be able to finally have the kind of categoric answer, Jesus, do you love me?

Even though the world seems hard. Surely it would be better for our relationship with Jesus if he was still here. Now, certainly the disciples would have been thinking that.

They would have been asking that question, Jesus, it must be better for you to remain. And as we've been seeing steadily over the last few weeks, this section is preparing Jesus' followers for his absence.

He is going away, he is going to the cross, and he is preparing them with these chapters for him leaving, leaving to die on the cross. And this section that we're in this morning, so we had 21 to 35 read, and as some of you will know, we covered 21 to 30 last week.

[4 : 40] We're going to be focusing in on 31 to 35. These verses are the start of Jesus' farewell narrative. They're the start of his speech to his beloved, to his chosen disciples.

The disciples then are going to come under such immense pressure and persecution once Jesus has gone. We can imagine why they might be desperate for him to stay, why they might be thinking, Jesus, it would be so much better for us if you remained here.

In fact, more than this, we might even be thinking for the disciples that it's counterintuitive or maybe even cruel that Jesus is leaving them to face this persecution by themselves.

Jesus is going away, yet we know from John 13, 1, that he is going to love them until the end. How can that be the case? How is him going away better for their relationship with him?

How can that be love? How can that be loving them until the end? Surely, wouldn't their relationship with the Lord Jesus be better? Wouldn't our relationship with the Lord Jesus be better if he was still here?

[5 : 54] Well, that brings me on to my first point. No, because Jesus makes us loved children. No, because Jesus makes us loved children.

Whilst last week we saw outrageously that the cross achieves victory over Satan, we're now this morning focusing, I suppose, on the other side of that same coin.

What does the cross achieve for the follower of Jesus? In other words, what does Jesus going away to die achieve for the disciples and achieve for you and me?

And that is the only point I want us to take away this morning. So if you're going to listen to anything I say this morning, please make it be this. What the cross achieves for those of us who put our trust in the Lord Jesus. Well, it achieves a family.

A wonderful, love-saturated family. I don't mean in the hippie 1960s sense, as we'll come on to see. Judas has ran away into the night, as we saw in verse 30, and it was night into the darkness.

[6 : 56] And now we get the shocking statement of verse 31 and 32. Have a look with me. When he, that is Judas, had gone out, Jesus said, now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and glorify him at once. Bizarrely, Judas going out to betray Jesus is the start of Jesus' glory, because it's the start of the process that will lead to Jesus' death on the cross.

The start of the process which will lead to Jesus being crowned king of the whole world. At the moment of removing Satan from his people's midst, Jesus' process of glory, has started.

But why is this, why is Jesus, other than the expulsion of Satan, how is this Jesus' glorification? Well, notice with me the outrageous, stunning aside of verse 33.

Little children. Little children. This is the first and only time that that phrase, little children, is used in the entire Gospel of John.

[8 : 09] And it is far more significant than we might initially realize. I want you to flick back with me to John 1 and verse 12. John 1, verse 12.

This is the heart of the prologue, the heart of John's introduction, as it were, or as Bruce described it to me after last service, John's executive summary. And right at the heart of this summary, we see chapter 1 and verse 12.

Chapter 1, verse 12. But to all who did receive him, that is Jesus, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.

In other words, Jesus intends, desires, came into the world to make children of God. Children who know and love him. At the center of what John wants for us as his readers, at the heart of his introduction, is that he wants you to accept Jesus and become God's children.

And so, shockingly, outrageously here, back in chapter 13, with Judas gone, the first children have now been finally achieved. Those of us who have been studying Deuteronomy 32 and Isaiah 1 in growth groups won't miss the significance of this.

[9 : 24] And well would it be worth looking out for children as we come on to Isaiah 1 this Tuesday. But how does Jesus achieve this new family? How is it achieved? How can Jesus now call the disciples little children?

Well, it's through his love. I want us to notice the central clause in the logic of these following verses and note that it is the love of Jesus for us.

Verse 33 again. Little children, and yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me. And just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, where I am going, you cannot come.

A new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you. You also are to love one another. Note that central clause in verse 34, just as I have loved you, which is flanked either side by the outworking, that you love one another.

It is through Christ's love that these children are achieved. But Christ's love, well, it's such just a vague, airy phrase, isn't it?

[10 : 31] Jesus loves you. You probably heard that in a million and one different ways, in a million and one different contexts. And every time, or most times, you probably thought, yeah, great, Jesus loves me. But what does that actually mean?

I think sadly, familiarity has often hardened our hearts to this. And so I want to spend the rest of our time in this point just simply breaking this down so that our hearts can be moved by the reality that Jesus loves us.

How has Jesus loved us? Well, to begin, I want us to think about where Jesus started, which is how John's gospel starts. Jesus was the word in the beginning. In other words, Jesus was a contemplator of the divine himself and God himself, perfect for all eternity, forever delighting in and knowing the Father.

And we see also from John's prologue that he made everything. He has power unthinkable, the ability to speak galaxies into existence with but a word. We, as fallible creatures, will be used to the fact that we have to grunt and sweat over all our endeavors, but not so with Christ.

He spoke and it was. And at the end of creation, he will roll this up like a garment when he is done. Christ, as far as John is concerned, doesn't just hold power.

[11 : 51] He is power. He is the logos, the thought and sustainer behind the universe itself. What a height our Lord Jesus Christ began from and to what depths he descended.

It is worth thinking on the perversity that the one who held stars in his palms had to engage in the acts of just base daily human living that we see in John's gospel.

The darling of heaven felt hunger as we see him eat with his friends. He felt tiredness. He was a helpless babe in a manger. He felt grief at death. He dropped to the dirt and wept.

He sweated drops of blood. And he felt, as we saw last week, the chilling vileness of betrayal. The same hands that formed stars were ultimately pierced by Roman nails because of the betrayal of a friend.

And whilst it might be horrendous enough to think that the eternal became temporal, that the divine took on willingly the day-to-day mundanity of human existence, but this is only the beginning of his descent.

[13 : 04] Because you see, the cross is where we really see the love of Christ, isn't it? Because Christ became not just a man, not just from God to man, but from God to man to slave, from God to man to a dead slave.

A slave to the consequences of sin so that we would not have to be. Yes, it should bring us to our knees as we realize that the creator was killed by his creatures.

In a sense, when we think about the cross, there is nothing more perverse, vile, or deserving of our hatred than to think that the Lord met with death, that humanity killed its creator.

There is the slave God seen most clearly. The punishment that should have followed for every man and woman at their slavery to sin poured out on the only man who never, ever deserved it.

Jesus has descended so very, very far from God of the universe to a pierced slave. And it is this great act of love that has made us his children.

[14 : 13] Well, how can that be? Well, I want us to consider now, we've thought about the descent, I want us to consider the achievement of the cross. And I want us to consider the great overwhelming sin of man.

Now, in Greek mythology, which I won't pretend to know anything about, I know there are some classes in the room, so I probably got this wrong. Please don't tell me afterwards. This is an illustration, so hopefully this will work for my purposes.

In Greek mythology, I've been told by Wikipedia that Atlas was one of the first Titans. These massive gods, very tall, who in their walls with one another would end up desecrating the whole world.

And it is from them, apparently, that we got the kind of gods that we now know with Greek mythology, the Olympians of Zeus and Hades. But Atlas, he continued with a unique role.

Atlas's role, as we know, because we get the word Atlas from it, very on the nose, his role was to hold up the skies. That was Atlas's job. So you can imagine that Atlas was used to going to the gym or whatever.

[15 : 12] He was a very strong chap. And his role was to hold up the skies forever. The obvious implication being because if he was to stop, well, the skies would crush us. But might I suggest that as we contemplate the cross and the weight of sin, we are contemplating a weight so devastating on the shoulders of our Lord that even the mythological atlas would buckle under it.

The sin of man, both past and present, stretching back to Abraham and forward unto the final trumpet, placed on one person's shoulders only, the shoulders of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And to make sure we do not miss the significance of this, friends, it was your sin and my sin that was placed on his shoulders also. Certainly the sin we know best is our own.

Certainly we know its great extent. And yet, despite the sheer weight of that sin, the sin we know so well, Christ bore it.

And he bore it unto infinitude. Indeed, the weight of sin is nothing, actually, in comparison to the torrent of grace that began at the cross.

[16 : 26] The weight of our sin is nothing in comparison to the magnitude of mercy. All of it paid for on the shoulders of our Lord. This is why Christ had to go.

No, this is why Christ had to leave, to go to the cross for his disciples, his children. Christ's absence to the cross, the greatest act of love in human history, well, it brought about our adoption, children of God.

And that brings me on to my second point. No, Jesus' absence does help our relationship with God because it makes us love children whose second point can perfectly keep the law, can perfectly keep the law.

Now, that might sound like quite a bizarre, strange diversion that we're going to the law when we've just been thinking about the cross. Why should we care about the law, Benji? Well, verse 34 is a twist on Leviticus 19.

Have a look with me. Verse 34. A new commandment I give to you that you love one another. Just as I loved you, you also are to love one another.

[17 : 42] Leviticus 19, well, it has been twisted slightly by the Lord Jesus Christ. In Leviticus 19, this great summary of the law, it is that you should love your neighbour as yourself.

Here, however, Jesus has twisted that and changed it from neighbour to one another, to love your family as yourself. In other words, Jesus has created a new law, a new commandment in the place of the old law, a new set of regulations.

And it's important to get clear on this. Law, for those of you who don't know or might be new to the Christian faith or looking in, they were these rules that God had set in place to protect God's people's relationship with him.

But the problem was God's people could never keep them. We know from the Old Testament that the law, whilst good and perfect, was never able to be followed. Sin was too much.

Man was unable to keep the commands of God. And we see, over and over in the Old Testament, this repetition of sin, judgment, mercy, sin, judgment, mercy, over and over and over again.

[18 : 49] Sin was the great barrier to God. Now, there is a famous kind of diagram. Some of you might even have it up in your living room wall, in which case I apologise for this illustration. And the diagram goes something like this.

And I know some people in the room quite like this diagram, so I apologise again in advance. The diagram goes like this. So you have a chasm in the middle, a chasm like a big pit. And that chasm is sin.

All right, sin. Okay, we're clear. And then on one side of the chasm, you have humanity standing, and they're looking over to the other side of the chasm, which is heaven, and God is there. And it's a useful illustration, because it demonstrates that man cannot get by themselves across this chasm.

They cannot go from one side to the other because of sin. Are you with me? Great. And the Lord Jesus, he comes, okay, on his cross, and the cross goes across the chasm.

And then the people can walk along the cross from one side to the other, and so have access to God. The only problem with that illustration is that it's wrong. It's wrong on one fundamental point, which is that the chasm is not sin.

[19 : 55] The chasm is not sin, because the divide between man and God is not sin. It is the fact that God hates sin. We did not walk out of the Garden of Eden because of our sin.

God kicked us out. God hates sin, and we'll judge sin. And so again and again, you see in the Old Testament, it doesn't matter how perfect the laws are, or how merciful God would be to his people, they would still again and again and again return to sin.

And God, because he is good and holy and pure and just, would again and again and again have to judge it. But that is no longer the case.

Because Jesus, by going away to die on the cross, has made us children, children with one command, love one another. Because children do not need to work or carry out rules to achieve their father's love.

They are loved because they are children, not because of performance. The law, which was always about performing actions to make sure God loved you, is completely fulfilled in Christ.

[21 : 08] Previously, the children of God Israel could never please God. They were so sinful, and God hated their sin. But now that is no longer the case, because the cross, once and for all, has made us true children of God.

All that is left for God's children is to love one another. That's the only rule. The disciples, as we said at the beginning to conclude, would have been terrified at the thought of Jesus going away.

Jesus has told them that their job is going to be to witness for him to the rest of the world, and he is going to ask them to do that in his absence. How are they going to remain faithful to him when Israel has failed so many times?

And how can they be faithful to the message of a crucified slave? Surely it would have been better for the disciples if Jesus was still here. But Jesus gave them such an outrageous, wonderful answer.

Jesus going away to die on the cross makes them the true children of God. They are children, brothers of Christ, and heirs of glory, and they will be forever.

[22 : 18] Now, we're going to think more in the coming weeks about what else Jesus' absence achieves for us. But for now, I want us to think on the primary image of these verses, which is loved children.

We are, because of the cross, because of Jesus leaving to go to his death, children of God. We are more loved than we can ever dare imagine. And I think that the image of children is a wonderful thing to help us wrap our heads around that.

Think for a moment with me what it means to be a child. Now, none of us here can choose our parents. Some of you might be thinking, that's a shame. But none of us here can choose our parents.

They will always be your parents. In other words, there is complete, inescapable permanence of that relationship. And so too now with God, because of the work of Christ on the cross.

God is your father, permanently, inescapably so, because you are his child. And some of you may be feeling this morning like God is distant, or that he's cruel, or that he's cold, or that he loves to test your faith.

[23 : 32] But can I say, isn't it outrageous that the first thing that Jesus wants to say to his new people of God, the first relationship he wants to introduce them to, is that God is your father.

God is your father, and he loves you. You are so very, very loved. Now, some of you will know that my family live in the Middle East, and I have the great privilege of getting to spend a lot of time there.

And I have quite a few Muslim friends who live there. And one of the things that we debate is the primary surah of Islam, teachings of Islam. And it goes like this.

God is not your father, and he has no son. God is not your father, and he has no son. And my only response to that is to weep for my Muslim friends.

To not know that you are loved beyond your wildest dreams, that you are precious to the one who made you, that you have security and meaning, and that you are adored, but instead to be told the opposite, that the God that you follow is cold and distant, and you can never know him, well, it is desperate, isn't it?

[24 : 40] And it is the antithesis of what we see here, that the first and primary relationship the Lord Jesus Christ wants you to know about the God who made you is that he loves you as his father.

And it's important for me, I think, at this stage to talk to those in the room who wouldn't call themselves a Christian. It's wonderful you're here, and it's wonderful that you can look in on the immense privilege that the Christian has. But can I say, these privileges are not yours if you do not place your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You were made for one thing only, to be loved as a child by the God who gave his son for you. But these will not be yours until you accept the need of Jesus' death on the cross for you.

Finally, I want us to think also on the intimacy of the relationship of being a child of God. the intimacy. Think of your children if you have them, or of friends if you don't.

And I want you to imagine that your child has come to you, they're hurt, they're struggling, they don't know the answer to whatever this problem is, and they're pleading with you, help me. There is no way you would turn to them and reject their plea.

[25 : 51] There is no way you would reject to help them. Well, how much more so with the God who loves you to the point of giving his own son to adopt you? It is an image of such intimacy, isn't it?

Of course our Father wants to hear from us, of course he wants to hear what you're struggling with, and of course he wants to love and help you. It is an image of such intimacy.

The law, wonderfully in Jesus, has been fulfilled, and we are left with only one and one command, which is to love one another. Why? Because each one of us who are in Christ are perfect children in the sight of God.

You can look around you and see your family, and it's not very British to look around, I can look around you, and see your family, all of them, perfect in the Lord Jesus Christ, brothers and sisters with him, and sons and daughters of the Father.

It's done. It's fulfilled. It's won. Christ loves us, and our Lord is our Father. Father, why don't I close us in prayer? Lord, thank you so much that you have loved us to the point of giving your Son so that we might call you Father.

[27 : 09] Please, Lord, would you help us to love one another as part of that family and to delight in the outrageous intimacy that that brings. Amen.

Amen. Amen.