

John 13:21-37

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[0:00] Let us pray as we stand together. Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts.

! By the power of your Holy Spirit, be pleasing and acceptable in your sight. O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen. You may be seated.

If you're new with us and you don't know me, my name is Jordan and I'm one of the ministers here. And we are in our second sermon series in the Gospel of John.

So in the fall we did three months in the first half of the Gospel and we called that Encounters with Jesus. Three months of encountering Jesus. And now we're in a second sermon series for three months.

In the second half of John, John chapters 13 to 17 in particular, called Formed by Jesus. We are joining Jesus in the upper room the night before he dies to be formed as disciples who abide in Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

[1:11] So it's the night before his death. And it's just after Jesus has washed his disciples' feet. And Jesus speaks to his disciples of the tenderest of all human subjects. He talks about betrayal and love.

Now one of the ways that you can read the Bible and understand it is to read it as a story of betrayal and love. Humanity's deep betrayal of God in the midst of God's even deeper love for humanity.

And so the two points that we're going to talk about tonight are the tragedy of betrayal and the glory of love. Betrayal is tragic. It's one of the most bitter of human experiences.

I don't know if you read the headlines in the magazine Christianity Today this week, but there was an article about how Philip Yancey, a long-time author and Christian speaker, after 55 years of marriage, it came out that he had an eight-year affair.

This is the person who wrote What's So Amazing About Grace and the Jesus I Never Knew. It bewilders and bites. Betrayal has a way of shocking us like few other things can.

[2:22] I mean, the cold shoulder of a neighbor can really hurt us. The hatred of an enemy can sting deeply, but the betrayal of a lover or a child or a friend, that's something that can cut to the heart and to the core in a way that few other things can.

And that's why John says that Jesus' spirit was deeply troubled in verse 21. Jesus was troubled in spirit. The word means shaken, rattled, unsettled, deeply disturbed.

And it's used of Jesus only a few times in the Gospels. We're told that Jesus was deeply disturbed when at his feet lay Mary weeping because her brother had died.

We're told that Jesus' spirit was deeply disturbed when he was in the Garden of Gethsemane, contemplating the suffering that was to come and saying, Father, please take this cup from me, yet not what I will, but what your will be done.

And here, Jesus' spirit is deeply disturbed at the table with Judas. And the details of the scene are striking. John is sitting on Jesus' right hand and Judas is sitting on Jesus' left hand.

- [3 : 25] And we're told that John was leaning back on Jesus. He was literally laying his head on Jesus' bosom or his chest. And that means that Jesus was likely leaning towards Judas. And so we have an intimate occasion, a sacred supper of intimate friends. And then in the middle of that intimate thing, Jesus drops the bomb. He makes the unexpected announcement that brings total confusion to the disciples. He says, truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. And no one's detected this. None of the disciples have expected it. I mean, they've been traveling with each other for three years. They probably know each other's sins and fears and failures pretty well by now. And yet all of them are surprised that evening and they're asking, who among us would possibly do such a thing to the Master? And then there are the ominous forces of evil lurking in the night. After Judas takes the morsel of bread from the hands of his Savior, Satan enters into him, we're told. And Judas immediately goes out into the night to do the deed that his heart had determined to do.
- [4 : 34] And add to this the fact that we are given almost no information about why Judas does it. We don't know his motives. And so the whole scene is a shock to the system. It's shrouded in mystery and cloaked with questions and devoid of answers. And Judas isn't the only one who turns his back on Jesus. We discover just a few short breaths later that Jesus speaks of Peter too. Peter, Peter will deny him. Betrayal and denial sit in the heart of Jesus' inner circle of disciples. And the question this raises is how could people so close to Jesus turn their back on him? And why had Judas become so disillusioned with Jesus? And why does Jesus tell his disciples now that all of this is going to happen? And why does John record this? So that the church in every age and every generation until Jesus comes again will know that this happened. I mean there's a lot of reasons we could conjecture but I'm just going to name a few.
- [5 : 43] I think John wants us to know first that Jesus knew it would happen. He wants us to know that Jesus was not caught off guard or surprised when it happened. Because Jesus knows what is in the human heart. We see this throughout the Gospel of John. Jesus can see the human heart. He knows what is in those whom he has called to be his disciples. Let me put that another way. Jesus knows the sin that is in our hearts before we even act and do it. And that means that my sin and your sin will never surprise Jesus. Grieve him? Yes, definitely. Trouble his spirit and disturb him deeply? Yes, definitely. But surprise him? No, never. Jesus will never discover something about you and me that will make him regret calling us to be his disciples. And Jesus will never discover something about you and me that will make him regret loving us and laying down his life for us. Because Jesus knew it would happen. And yet we're told that Jesus still washed Judas' feet and he still gave Judas the bread and wine of the new covenant.
- [6 : 50] Because that is who Jesus is. Jesus loves the unlovely. And so John wants us to know that Jesus knew this would happen. But second, John wants us to know that this can happen again. We don't know why Judas betrayed Jesus. And we don't know why Peter denied Jesus. For Judas, people venture a lot of guesses.

Some think it was greed that Judas was always more interested in gaining money than really following Jesus. Others suspect that it was envy that Judas kind of envied the power and influence that Jesus had over other people.

And some suspect that maybe it was just frustration and impatience. Judas thought that there were far more effective and efficient and exciting ways to bring the kingdom of God than what Jesus was doing.

See, we don't know for sure. But it does remind us of the fact that it is possible to come to Jesus with our own agendas. And when Jesus does not meet those agendas, then it's easy for us to become disillusioned with him.

[7:59] And for us to turn away from him. And for our hearts to wander. And so John wants us to know that Jesus knew it would happen before it did. And John wants us to know that it could happen again.

But John also wants us to know that when it happens, Jesus can still use it for his redemptive purposes in the world. It's an encouragement, a weird sort of encouragement. John's being very realistic.

He's saying it can happen. And it's incredibly painful when people turn their back on Jesus. But he's also saying don't be shocked, don't be dismayed, don't despair when it happens. Because Jesus' purposes for the world are not going to be undone.

Jesus' purpose to build his church is not going to be thwarted. And the way we see this is actually in verse 31. Notice how John writes this. He says, When he, Judas, had gone out.

So in other words, right as Judas is betraying Jesus. Jesus says, Now, at this moment, is the time when the Son of Man will be glorified. And God is glorified in him.

[9:02] In other words, God even uses the tragedy of Judas' sin to accomplish his purposes to glorify himself. In other words, The betrayal of Judas is not the defeat of Jesus.

But it actually sets in motion the movement in which Jesus is going to lay down his life for the sins of the world and seek to save the world. And so there's this great gospel irony that in the middle of humanity's deepest betrayal of Jesus, it becomes the moment when Jesus reveals his even deeper saving love for humanity.

And that leads us to our second point. It's that the tragedy of betrayal is matched only by the glory of love. It's outmatched, actually. See, in the Gospel of John, glory and love are deeply interconnected, interwoven.

And on the night before Jesus' death, glory and love are powerfully at work. More powerfully at work than human sin, and more powerfully at work than satanic evil, and more powerfully at work than political powers.

Jesus says, Now is the time to glorify his Father, and now is the time for the Father to glorify him. And the question is, how? How does this glorifying happen? Now, it's helpful to know that in John's Gospel, glory can have one of two meanings.

[10:25] It can mean honor on the one hand, or it can mean splendor on the other hand, and sometimes it can mean both honor and splendor together. So, now is the Son of Man honored, and God is honored in him.

That makes sense, right? But how? How does Jesus honor God? Here, the answer is by laying down his life. But that raises the question, how does laying down his life honor God?

And I think the answer is, because laying down his life honors God, because it reveals something about the splendor of God's character. Jesus' death honors God, because it reveals the splendor of God's character as self-giving love.

And hasn't John been preparing us for this all along? I mean, think of that famous verse, first verse I ever memorized in my life. I think I was four. John 3:16, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

John chapter 13, verse 1, Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. And fast forward a couple chapters to John chapter 15, verse 13, Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down their life for their friends.

[11:47] So it's as Jesus loves us by dying for us that he most glorifies God, because as he does this, he reveals that the heart of God is love. Which is precisely why in verse 35, Jesus says, This is how all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

You see, there's something of Jesus' glory, which is the revelation of the Father's glory, that is revealed when, as disciples of Jesus, we love one another.

Meaning that through our love, the world is meant to catch a glimpse of divine glory. And this is why I think Jesus commands his disciples to love one another just as he loved them.

He wants all people to see his glory. It's what Jesus, are you with me? Are we okay? Okay. I'll keep going.

Jesus calls this a new commandment in verse 34. And the question is, what's new about the new commandment? Because we get a lot of love commandments in the Bible, don't we? Like, love God.

[13:00] With all your heart, mind, soul, strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. Love your enemy as if they weren't your enemy.

Pray for them, even if they persecute you. And now here, love one another just as I have loved you. It's the only commandment that has the just as.

In the same way that Jesus has loved us, we are supposed to love with another. To the same extent that Jesus has loved us, we are meant to love one another. Now, how does this happen? Well, Lord, send your Holy Spirit.

But how do we do this? What does this look like? There's lots of things we could talk about, but I just want to take a look at three or four. We love one another by laying down our lives for one another.

This is what I quoted just a couple minutes ago in John chapter 15. This is my commandment that you love one another, and here's that word, just as I have loved you. And then he says, greater love has no one than this that he lays down his life for his friends.

[14:10] And I want to suggest that this turns our whole approach to the church on its head. because it pushes against consumer Christianity. It pushes against coming to the church because we just want the church to meet our needs and our preferences.

It pushes against asking primarily the question, what are others giving to me or what should others be giving to me? And transforms us to entering into the church asking how can I lay down my life for my brothers and sisters in the church whom Jesus has already laid down his life for?

It flips the whole thing on its head. Another way, we love one another, I think, by forgiving one another. This is Ephesians chapter 4, one of the most challenging and beautiful verses.

Ephesians chapter 4, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you along with all malice. And then Paul says, what should we be doing instead of these things?

And he says, be kind to one another. Tender-hearted, forgiving one another. And here's that word again, just as God in Christ forgave you. So in a world of sin and anger and where we're constantly hurting each other, one of the greatest expressions of love is going to be forgiveness.

[15:28] Another way to love one another is to seek the best for one another. This is the Philippians 2 stuff. It's like, don't do things out of selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others as more significant than yourselves.

And look out not only for your own interests, but for the interests of others. Love one another by seeking the best for one another. And fourth and finally, love one another by praying for one another.

On the evening in which Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death, he speaks about his love for them nine times. And I think it's no mistake that he ends that evening by spending a whole chapter praying for them.

And I think it's no mistake that at the very end of that prayer, the very last verse, the main theme is love. Intercessory prayer is a significant form of love in the church.

And the main theme of those prayers is that our friends in Christ would come to know Christ's love for them and in them every day, in every part of every day.

[16:38] We doing all right? Can you guys give me three more minutes? All right. So this is our second week of being formed by Jesus with his disciples in the upper room.

We've talked about betrayal and love, but I have just one more question I want to ask you. And that's, how do we deal with failure? How do you deal with failure?

How do we deal with those times when we've failed Jesus? And how do we live in the aftermath of our own betrayal of Jesus or in our own denial of him and our own failure to love as he has called us to love?

How do we deal with failure? And I think the answer is by going back to the beginning again and again, returning and resting in the one who washes feet. Never forget the fact that the whole upper room discourse begins with Jesus washing the feet of his dirt, the dirty feet of his disciples.

It is the only way to be close to Jesus is to let him wash you. It's the only way to be restored to Jesus and be transformed by Jesus is to let him wash you over and over and over again.

[17:43] And I take that to mean that when we fail to love Jesus and we fail to love one of the disciples that he loves, the answer is not to beat ourselves up or to pick myself up again and just try harder.

When I fail to love, the answer is I need to go back and rest in the fullness of Jesus' love again. because it's only by being loved that I will become loving.

Let me give another example. I take this to mean that when I fail to forgive or don't want to forgive someone, the answer is not to try harder to soften my heart towards somebody else or often my instinct to justify why they are not worthy of my forgiveness in the first place.

Rather, when I fail to forgive, I need to go rest in the power of Jesus' forgiveness of me again. And it's as I experience his great forgiveness of me that Jesus will give me the capacity that he will grow in me the heart that is able to forgive others.

When I fail to pray for others, the answer is not for me to beat myself up again and come up with 20 New Year's resolutions that I'm going to not do the next day. When I fail to pray, I need to go back to the one who is always praying for me and praying for all his other disciples.

[19:03] And I need to listen to how he's praying for them and I need to rest in the way that he's praying for me and I need to let him teach me how to join him in his prayers. So the gospel of Jesus is a story of deep betrayal but thankfully it is a story of an even deeper love and it's as we experience the deep and great love of Jesus for us that it fuels the fire of our love for him and it fuels the fire of our love for one another.

And as a wonderful woman I think from Westside Church or maybe it's called Center Church now as a wonderful woman said to me this last week our main job is to stay warm at the fire of Christ's love and everything else will flow out of that.

So brothers and sisters I speak these things to you in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.