

THE LOVE PRIORITY

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July 20, 2014

Sermon in a sentence: Let us love each other as Jesus instructed us to, and we will easily be identified as His disciples.

Scriptures: John 13:3-17; *John 13:34-35*; Romans 12:9; Romans 5:5; 1 Cor. 13

The synoptic gospel writers are quite similar in their reporting of the events leading up to their last Passover Seder with Jesus, and the institution of what we now refer to as the “Lord’s Supper”. They speak of:

- His kingly entrance into Jerusalem
- His authority to cleanse His holy house
- His power over nature and His ability to perform miracles
- His power to judge evildoers
- His ability to teach and His wisdom to confound His questioners
- End-time prophecies

On the other hand, while John does mention Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (John 12:12-19), the rest of the chapter prophesies and explains the purpose of His death (v. 27-50).

When we get to chapter 13, where we would logically expect to find his account of the inauguration of the breaking of the bread and drinking of the cup, he totally ignores it! Instead, he highlights an incident that none of the other writers even records: Jesus washing His disciples feet.

He then gives us Jesus' follow-up remarks to His action, speaking of the attitude we must have toward each other, and the willingness we must have to serve each other in whatever way necessary:

John 13:12-17 NASB ... **"Do you know what I have done to you? 13 "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. 16 "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. 17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."**

John further goes on to recount words of Jesus not recorded by any of the other gospel writers. From the latter portion of chapter 13 to the end of chapter 16, John relates Jesus' last lessons to His disciples:

- They were to show their love for Him and for each another (13:34-35; 15:12-17;)
- He is divine and one with the Father (14:7-11)
- After His departure, He would send His Holy Spirit to comfort and teach His people and to testify of Him (14:16-18, 23, 26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15)
- Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. We can do nothing, except through Him (15:1-11)

However we cannot forget that Jesus prefaced these last lessons with a tremendous act of grace, mercy and servitude, in washing the feet of His betrayer. Therefore when He spoke the "new commandment": "... love one another, even as I have loved you...." (13:34), they already had a very powerful and recent object lesson to illustrate the point.

It is absolutely delightful and fulfilling to show love to those who have been good and gracious to us, to those who have made an effort to be kind and considerate of us. But Jesus taught this lesson just after Judas had left to sell Him to the Pharisees, after Jesus had just acted like a slave to serve him.

So, why did John *not* take the time to describe the first Lord's Supper to us? Could it be that he was sending us a very important message?

John was the last of the evangelists to write his Gospel. He had lived through the best and worst times of the early church, from its glorious inception, through Jewish and Roman persecution, and through the destruction of Jerusalem. Others had written many things before him, but his message, as the last man standing, was this: "If we partake of Communion every day of the week and if we are the greatest in power and position in the Kingdom of God, but are unwilling to love and serve each other, we are not truly Jesus' disciples".

Love was the greatest need of the church in John's day and it is the greatest need of the church in our day!

Paul also wrote about this in his Communion discourse in 1 Cor. 11. The rich people would come early to the Lord's Supper, or "Love Feasts" as they were often referred to in that day. (This name seems quite ironic, based upon the way they acted.)

Instead of showing love to their poorer brethren by waiting for them to arrive from a long day's work, they would start eating as soon as they arrived, leaving little or nothing for the poor latecomers. They would eat and

drink to excess, shaming those who were not able to bring enough to even feed themselves.

Paul called this ‘eating and drinking in an unworthy manner’ (1 Cor. 11:27), where one brings ‘judgment to himself’, because he does not ‘judge the body rightly’ (v.29). (Here, he is actually referring to the church – the “Body of Christ”.)

In contrast, John reminded his readers of what Jesus had said: “... a slave is not greater than his master, nor is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him” (Jn. 13:16). “If I then, The Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (v.14).

We are well aware of the symbolic nature of Jesus’ act, (although it also met a practical need at the time). Most of us do not need our feet to be washed for cleanliness and comfort when we come to church, but we should always have our eyes and ears open to the real needs we see among our brethren. And when we see a need, and it is within our power to meet the need, we must act. Love takes priority over everything else.

And when we perform these acts of service to our brethren, it is our love that must be on full display. If we do the right thing with the wrong heart, the wrong attitude, and without love, our blessing evaporates. Or at best, we receive the praise of man. God’s blessing comes when love is our motivator and we do whatever we do for others as unto the Lord.

Sometimes we are even unable to do anything of a tangible, material nature. But we can laugh together, cry together, talk together, walk together, worship together, and pray together.

“Let love be without dissimulation” (Rom. 12:9a KJV), or as the NLT renders it: “Don’t just pretend to love others. Really love them.”

Closing prayer: “Dear Lord, I pray that “... the love of God [will be] poured out within [my heart] through the Holy Spirit who was given to [me]”” (Romans 5:5b NASB)