

+ John 13:1-15,34 + How Much Does Jesus Love You? + Maundy Thursday + 17 April 2014 +

What would you do if you knew that your life would be over in 24 hours? Would you try to get in a couple more adventures before the clock runs out? Would you try to escape reality with reckless abandon? Would you take the day off to spend time with your loved ones? Would you try to prepare them for your death or simply take the time to tell them how much you love them? Would you spend time with your Lord in his Word and prayer? Would you look for one more way to serve him in this life? Would you finally try to tell someone about their Savior? What would you do?

Tonight we find Jesus on a Thursday night 2,000 years ago. He only has 24 hours to live—and he knows it. Jesus and his disciples had gathered in a large upper room in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, recalling God's deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt, but this was no ordinary Passover feast. After all, Jesus had less than 24 hours to live.

As the all-knowing God, Jesus was fully aware of what was going on around him and what was going to happen to him. The Apostle John even breaks away from his narrative to give us a glimpse of what was going on in Jesus' mind. ***"Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father."*** Everything that was about to happen was all right before his eyes. In a matter of hours, Jesus was going to be betrayed by one of his own—Judas Iscariot. He was going to be arrested and cruelly judged by the religious leaders who should've recognized him as the Messiah. He was going to be ridiculed and beaten, condemned and hauled off to the court of the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate. He would be flogged, condemned again, and forced to carry a heavy wooden cross through the streets of Jerusalem. He would be nailed to the beams of that cross, lifted up and left to suffocate to death—all within the next 24 hours.

Jesus knew all that was coming. He knew what horrors awaited him in the next 24 hours, so what did he do? Did he try to escape reality? Did he resign himself to reality? Did he try to make the best of one last Passover feast with his dear disciples? John tells us what Jesus did. ***"Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love."*** What did Jesus do? He demonstrated the fullness of his love.

That was a pretty tall task considering how unlovable his disciples had always been. Like us, they often thought too highly of themselves, and their lack of action on this important night made that all too clear.

You see, in Jesus' day, horses and wagons were expensive, so people typically walked on dusty, rocky roads that went everywhere. Living in an arid country, everyone wore sandals. Unfortunately, all that walking kicked up a lot of dust on feet that were often dry and cracked. Therefore, a common act of hospitality in Jesus' day was to have a servant remove the sandals and wash the dirty, yucky, smelly feet of guests when they arrived.

It wasn't a task that anyone ever wanted, including the disciples. In the upper room, there was no house servant to carry out the task. So the disciples played a silent game of "Not it!" You might know the game—whichever says "Not it!" last is stuck with doing what no one else wants to do. With Jesus around, they didn't even want to say "Not it!" Not a single one had the humility to offer to help. Instead, they all acted as if nothing was wrong or out of place as ***"the evening meal was being served"***.

Now on several occasions, possibly even that very day, these same disciples had argued behind Jesus' back over who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Each time Jesus rebuked them for their selfish cravings. With that same elephant in the room, you would expect Jesus to rebuke them again. After all, he was less than 24 hours away from death, and they had it coming!

These disciples were just so unlovable with their selfishness, their misguided anger, their foolish claims, their proud hearts, and their sad habit of quickly doubting who Jesus was or what he could do. That very night they would all abandon him—running for the hills, hiding behind locked doors, and observing his suffering and death from a distance. Peter himself would publicly deny knowing Jesus three times that very night! Jesus even ***"knew who was going to betray him"***, that Judas Iscariot would sell out his Teacher for a handful of silver coins.

They were so unlovable, so undeserving of his friendship and concern, yet Jesus still ***"showed them the full extent of his love."*** He did it even though Jesus knew they would all abandon him and his own disciple would betray him. John gives us another glimpse of what was going on in Jesus' mind. ***"Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God..."***

Jesus was in control of everything. He knew what was going to happen, but he also knew that none of it, not even the worst suffering, would be outside of his control. He would return to the Father through death in less than 24 hours, but he was still in a position of power and authority over all things. Therefore he could still show his disciples the fullness of **“his love”**.

...And what a way he chose! **“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.”** Here the Lord of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things, the Lord of life and death grabs a towel and a basin of water, kneels down on the ground, and washes the filth off of each disciple’s feet. Imagine that! The Master chooses to become the slave. He chooses to love his unlovable disciples even though it means stooping down from his authority to serve them with a heart full of love.

As so often happened during Jesus’ ministry, Peter served as the mouthpiece for the disciples and the voice of their objections to Jesus’ loving service. Peter just couldn’t wrap his mind around the fact that his Lord and Teacher was washing his stinky, smelly feet, but how did the Lord respond? With love. **“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.”** It wasn’t just self-sacrificing love for Peter, but even for Judas. With that comment, Jesus gave Judas another opportunity to repent. Peter himself would later repent for publicly denying Jesus, yet Jesus still willingly showed his cleansing love for both of them.

How much does Jesus love you? As Jesus looked ahead to the final 24 hours of his life, he was thinking of you too. Yes, you, 2,000 years after his death! Jesus knew how unlovable you would be—how selfish, how foolish, how proud, how quick to doubt and deny. Jesus knew how often you would turn your back on him or even join his enemies against him. He knew how darkened with sin your heart would be, how corrupt with sin your mind would be, how you would object to the true teaching of his Word, how you would fail to let your light shine or imitate him with your life. Jesus knew how much you and I deserve the suffering and punishment and death he would face.

Yet he willingly showed you **“the full extent of his love”**. He chose to become a servant for you—coming down from his position of power and authority to be your slave. He chose to become your substitute—bearing the burden of wrath and condemnation and hell that you deserved though he did not. He chose to be your Savior not because you’re so lovable or because you’ve given him any reason whatsoever to save you, but because he loves you with a love that sought your best interest, a love that moved him to endure pain and suffering, ridicule and violence, injustice and cruelty and death. For you, Jesus **“showed...the full extent of his love.”**

Yet he does even more! That night and in the 24 hours after, Jesus gave himself for you, but even now Jesus gives himself to you. In his Holy Supper, Jesus gives you his own body and his own blood for your forgiveness, for the strengthening of your faith, and for your eternal life. In his Word, he gives you his peace and hope and joy, even beneath the unique cross that you bear

At the same time, **“the full extent”** of Christ’s love also shows itself in the willing, self-sacrificing love of his followers. Jesus told his disciples, **“I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you...A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”** It’s not romantic love. It’s not the love of friends. It’s not the love of family or even parents for children. It’s the unique kind of love that comes only from God himself. It’s self-sacrificing love that focuses solely on the best interest of the one who is loved. It’s not just emotion or sentiment or attraction, but a love by choice, a love that is put into action for the good of others, even if it’s undeserved. That was the love that Christ showed all of us in that upper room and in the 24 hours after he washed his disciples’ dirty feet. That’s the love that you and I imitate for family and friends and people we know and don’t know yet, as we willingly serve the Savior who loved us.

So how much does Jesus love you? See it in what he did with his last 24 hours. See his love in the Servant washing his disciples’ feet and then giving himself for your forgiveness. See it in the Lord who calls his followers to repent even as they betray and abandon and deny him. See it in the Christ who suffers at the hands of sinners like us. See it in the wide open arms of the crucified Savior who prays for his enemies, who promises paradise, and who finishes the battle for your salvation. See his love as he conquers death and dries your tears. See his love as you love like Christ, and then see the fullness of his love for you as he opens

heaven and welcomes you home with nail-pierced hands. My friends, tonight see the fullness of Christ's love for you! Amen.