

# The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

Let me begin perhaps somewhat humorously, but not without purpose, by sharing with you some interesting and famous (or infamous) “last words”:

***“This ‘telephone’ has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us.” – This was stated by a representative of Western Union in an internal memo dated 1876.***

***“The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?” – This was said to David Sarnoff as he sought businessmen to invest in the radio in the 1920’s.***

***“So we went to Atari and said, ‘Hey, we’ve got this amazing thing, even built with some of your parts, and what do you think about funding us? Or we’ll give it to you. We just want to do it. Pay our salary, we’ll come work for you.’ And they said, ‘No.’ So then we went to Hewlett-Packard, and they said, ‘Hey, we don’t need you. You haven’t got through college yet.’” – This was said to Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Computer Inc. and to Steve Wozniak, his associate when they attempted get Atari and HP interested in the first personal computer.***

As interesting as these statements are, they hardly constitute matters of life and death. As those who gather to worship and learn more of the living God, our interest might be better peaked by considering a few famous last words of some great people of faith. These truly are last words as they were all uttered near or at the deathbed:

- John Owen (1616-1683), the prince of the Puritan preachers and theologians, is said to have uttered these words as his last, *“I am going to Him whom my soul loves, or rather who has loved me with an everlasting love, which is the sole ground of all my consolations.”*
- William Carey (1761-1834), known as the father and found of modern missions said as his final words, *“When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey; speak about Dr. Carey’s Savior.”*
- John Bunyan (1628), the immortal dreamer and author of Pilgrim’s Progress uttered these final words, *“Weep not for me, but for yourselves. I go to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; Who will, no doubt, through the mediation of His*

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*blessed Son, receive me, though a sinner: when I hope we shall ere long meet to sing the new song, and remain everlastingly happy, world without end, Amen!”*

And let me share one more, one of my personal favorites among the great preachers of the past, George Whitefield (1714-1770) who offered up these final words in prayer, “*Lord Jesus, I am weary in Thy work, but not of Thy work. If I have not yet finished my course, let me go and speak for Thee once more in the fields, seal the truth, and come home to die.*”

Obviously there is something remarkable and inspirational in the last words of these great men of God. We might well be tempted to ask ourselves what might be the last words on our lips at the prospect of death – that great transition from this present life to the life to come. And like that which we have just heard, I imagine our prayer would be that the name of the Lord Jesus would be on our lips and a fruits of a life lived for His glory would be our testimony.

This morning however, I do not wish to look merely at the last words of humanity in general, but to have us consider the most important last words ever uttered – the last words of the Son of Man, our Lord Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ has been blessed with what are called the Gospels, the writings concerning the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. While not exhaustive, we have in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John everything necessary to develop a proper view of the person and work of Jesus Christ. And included in these gospel accounts are great and inspiring discourses – sermons; messages is you will – delivered by the greatest of preachers, Jesus Christ. Perhaps you may not think often of these discourses as sermons, but nonetheless you are familiar with them.

In Matthew 5-7 we have the “Sermon on the Mount” in which Jesus preaches on the manner of conduct and life of the believer. In Matthew 13 we have a number of “Parables” that Jesus delivered to expound and explain the essence of the gospel. In Matthew 24-25 we have the Olivet Discourse in which Jesus speaks forth on things to come. These and a number of other discourses are scattered throughout the gospel accounts.

But the longest, most detailed and most intimate of the discourses of Jesus however is found exclusively in the Gospel of John. We know it as the Upper Room discourse. It begins in John 13 with the finishing of the Passover meal and runs all the way through John 17 with the lofty high priestly prayer of Jesus. Nothing like this discourse if found anywhere else. This sermon, delivered to the disciples of Jesus on the eve before His crucifixion reveals to us the very heart of Jesus, indeed the intensity of His love for those who are called in John 13:1, “...His

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*own who were in the world.”* What we find in John 13-17 are the last words of Christ prior to His death. When we view these words in this manner, we find ourselves struck with what it was that was most important to Christ. Again, John 13:1 informs us clearly that Jesus knew His hour had come – His own death was imminent, but rather than a focus upon Himself, He avails Himself once more to the instruction and encouragement of His beloved chosen ones.

To fully appreciate this discourse, let us take a moment to put it in its context. First, let me remind you of the purpose of the Gospel of John. Turn with me to John 20:30-31 where we find this purpose expressly stated:

***30 Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.***

The Gospel of John was given to reveal the identity of Jesus as the Son of God and that those who receive Him as the Son of God may have eternal life. Turn back to John 1 and let us note verses 11-13;

***11 He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12 But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***

He came to “His own” but “His own did not receive Him” that is to say, He presented Himself to Israel as their expected Messiah and the Son of God, but by and large, He was not received as such. In order to prove the divinity of Jesus, John employs seven signs; 1) the turning of water in to wine (2:1-11); 2) the healing of the nobleman’s son (4:43-53); 3) the healing of the invalid (5:1-15); 4) the feeding of the five thousand (6:1-15); 5) walking on water (6:16-21); 6) healing the man born blind (9:1-41); and 7) the raising of Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44). Each of these “signs” were designed to reveal the truth that Jesus was both God and Savior. But in John 12 we find that Israel, that is Jesus’ own, rejected Him, revealing that they were not truly “His own.” In John 1-12, Jesus had been engaged in a public ministry revealing to all who He was, but He was rejected by those who should have been “His own” (John 12:37-38).

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**37 But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. 38 This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: "LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?"**

As we come to John 13 we find Jesus finished with His public ministry and now committed to those who were truly “His own” – His disciples, having separated Himself from the world and instructing the disciples of their positions and privileges as the children of God. It is interesting to note that in each of the seven signs employed by John in chapters 2-11, the sign was given and it was followed by some kind of teaching or explanation. Starting in John 13, we find Jesus giving the teaching and explanation of things followed by the death and then resurrection – the exact opposite form that had been used. I believe this was done to emphasize the importance, the greatness and the validity of all that Jesus had said.

Let me make one more comment before I proceed with the rest of this message in a most uncommon manner for us. It is my perception, having read through this discourse a number of times and through my studies, that this intimate teaching of Jesus did not take place entirely in the upper room. It most certainly began there, but if you note with me the end of John 14 and verse 31 where Jesus says, **“Get up, let us go from here.”** It is now late on the eve of Jesus betrayal, arrest and trial. I see Jesus and the disciples making their way through Jerusalem, where they pass the temple and see the ancient seal of Israel, the great golden vine and as they walk toward the garden of Gethsemane, just outside the walls of the city, Jesus speaks of Himself as the true vine. And it would not be uncommon for them, having passed out of the city walls, to see both vineyards as well as small fires of branches being burned as they make their way to the garden for prayer. And then, after teaching them of the promised Holy Spirit and the privilege of prayer, at the bottom of the Kidron valley that separates Mount Zion and the Mount of Olives, Jesus stops to pray the High Priestly prayer of John 17 at the conclusion of which He then proceeds to the garden as we are told in John 18:1.

Now then, for the remainder of our time, I wish to do something different. Let me remind you that **“faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ”** (Romans 10:17). Let me also remind you that the only time that the preacher of God is infallible is when he is reading the word of God. Additionally, we are told in 1 Timothy 3:13 to **“give attention to the public reading of Scripture...”** What I intend to do now is simply read the upper room discourse, in its entirety, allowing you to hear and dwell on it. Remember some of the background as I read it. You may follow along if you may find it more beneficial to simply listen. But let us now be blessed by the reading, or better yet, the hearing of the Word of God.

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## The Reading of John 13:1-17:26 [NASB Text – about 20 minutes]

So ends the reading of the Upper Room Discourse – the intimate sermon of Jesus – the famous last words of our Lord before His crucifixion. Let me close by asking you some questions that we need to contemplate regularly that flow out of this reading.

First, as we see Jesus humbly and sacrificially demonstrating love to the disciples by washing their feet in John 13 and more importantly by later laying down His life, how are you modeling this kind of love for the saints? (John 13:15 – modeling)

Second, as we heard in John 14 the questions of the disciples and the answers of Jesus to those questions, how are you encouraging others to ask questions concerning the person and work of Christ, that they might grow in the grace and knowledge of Him?

Third, in John 15 we find the analogy of the vine, who is Christ and the branches, those who are in union with Christ. The command is to abide, to dwell in and be connected to Him who is the sole source of life and peace. Are you abiding with Christ this day?

Fourth, in John 16 we are exposed to the blessed ministry of the Holy Spirit who not only comforts believers, but also glorifies the Son in everything He does. If the Spirit of God dwells in you, has this dwelling resulted in a desire to comfort other believers with the truth and to seek to glorify Christ in all things?

Finally, in John 17 we heard the content of the high priestly prayer of Jesus – a prayer in which Jesus specifically prays for us as well as His first disciples. And one of the great themes of the prayer was unity – our unity with the Father and the Son as well as our unity with one another to reveal to the world the truthfulness of Christ’s prayer. So then, what are you doing to be found in unity with God and in unity with His people that the world may know that the Father sent the Son?

This is what was important enough to Christ to share as His last words to His disciples. May these words then become more and more important enough to us that we may live accordingly to His glory. Amen.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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