

"He Loved Them Unto the Uttermost"**T. Austin-Sparks:**

We will read a few verses from the Gospel by John, chapter thirteen, verses one to twenty. You have had it announced that tomorrow night there will be a love feast, but I want to say that the true love feast is tonight. We all believe that the Lord's Table is the full expression of Divine love. All the hymns that we have been singing this evening were about God's love. There have been hymns gathered round the Lord's Table. That table has been speaking to us anew of the love of God in Christ Jesus. In this chapter which we have just read, we have the Lord setting forth His table for the first time. This was the first time that He gathered with His disciples around that particular table. Do you notice how the chapter begins? "Now before the feast of the passover, Jesus knowing that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the end - unto the uttermost" (ASV).

So, over that table, He wrote His love for His own. In effect He said, 'This table, at which we are now going to eat and drink, is the embodiment of My love for you. Having loved His own that were in the world, He loved them unto the uttermost.' And, then, all that follows in that chapter is an explanation of that love. If I tell you that there are seven things in those twenty verses which define His love, please do not be afraid that I am going to preach a long sermon on seven points. In a short time, I can just point out these seven features of that love of Christ.

"He loved them unto the uttermost." And I think in that statement, there is the most wonderful thing that ever came into this world. Jesus had had a lot of trouble with those men. They had often misunderstood Him. They had often disappointed Him. They were really a very poor lot of men. He knew their history during the past three years. But He also knew what was going to happen after this night. He said to Peter, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice" (Matt. 26:33b-35; ASV). He knew that Peter would deny Him three times, saying, "I know not the Man." He said about them all, 'All of you will be offended because of Me this night. You will all run away and leave Me, and I shall be alone, yet I am not alone, because the Father will be with Me.' He knew what a poor lot of men they were, but He loved them unto the uttermost.

That is the first thing about this love. It is not offended by our failures. He does not withdraw His love because we make mistakes. We may often disappoint Him, we may often fail Him, we may often grieve His heart, but He goes on loving us. He loves us unto the uttermost, right to the end. He is not offended by our failures. That is a very different kind of love from our love. This is God's love in Christ.

The second thing about this love is how condescending it is. You notice in verse three, the first statement in the chapter, "Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands." The Father had given all things into His hands. How great He is. Greater than all others. That could never be said of anyone else. God has given Him everything. But it did not make Him too proud to love these men. He was not superior to them, He came right down to them. Great as He is, He loved such men as these. With all His greatness, He came down to their level. How condescending is the love of God. It is great enough to come down to the smallest and to the weakest.

Sometimes we think of God's greatness in terms of power, in terms of the wonderful things He can do. When we think of men being great, we think of their greatness in terms of the big things they can do. The greatness of God is this, that while He has the whole universe to look after, all the big things of the nations, He can look after the smallest things. Sometimes we say, 'Oh, that is too small to ask the Lord for it. The Lord is so great, He cannot be bothered with our little things.' But, that is the greatness of God, to be able to do that. A really great man is one who can come to small things and make a lot of small things. The Father had given all things into His hands, and then He came to these men, and loved them unto the uttermost. How great is His love!

Point number three: Then look again at the chapter, and see that this love makes no distinction in classes of people. You heard it read this evening, "You call Me Lord, and you are right. I am your Lord. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet...." You see, He had taken the place of the servant that no one else would take. Just outside the door of every guest room, there was a basin and a pot of water and a towel. If it was a wealthy house, there was also a servant. And when the guests had sat down, the servant came, took off their sandals and washed their feet. But this was not a wealthy house. Jesus was poor. The disciples were poor. Now, can you see them going into that room? Perhaps Peter is leading the way, he usually did lead the way. Peter saw that basin and that water, he knew it was there, but he really was not seeing it. He walked past, and all the others followed. They all knew that that basin and that water and that towel were there, but no one was going to be the servant. They all went and sat down.

Jesus took the towel, poured the water into the basin, and went straight to Peter, the man so important in his own eyes, too important to be a servant. The Lord and Master was the servant. They were making distinctions

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between classes of people superior and inferior. Perhaps Peter said, 'Now, I am superior to this other man, let him do the job.' And perhaps they were all feeling superior. But Jesus knew nothing of that spirit. Love knows no distinction between classes of people. Love knows no distinction between nationalities. The Love of God in Christ Jesus looks upon us all just the same as needing His love. His love is above all earthly distinctions.

Point number four: You know, it is so easy to talk about love, to pretend to love, to use the language of love, to sing hymns about love, and it can all be sentimental; perhaps we all know people who have told us that they love us, but very often they are the very people who have hurt us most. Now, the love of Jesus was not sentimental, it was practical. He did not go in with His disciples and say, 'Brothers, I do love you very much.' He showed that He loved them by what He did for them. It was not sentimental love, it was practical love. And this is the love with which He loved them unto the uttermost.

We have got to point number five now. What was the meaning of this washing of their feet? Our dear brother, Watchman Nee, used to speak about the earth touch, he used to say, 'If you touch this earth, you touch evil, you touch death.' These men had walked along the dusty dirty roads. Their feet were literally covered in the dust of this earth. But in this symbolic act, Jesus was saying, 'You have to live in this world, but you must be kept clean from the world.' And this washing of their feet was His way of saying, 'Love, My love, will keep you free from the evil that is in this world.' The love of Christ is a cleansing love. It is not just words, but it helps us to live on a higher level of life.

Point number six: This love is full of spiritual instruction. He said to them, "What I do now, you do not understand, but you shall understand afterwards." This love is going to instruct us as to what God loves and what God does not love. Up to this point, these disciples loved the world. Their hearts were set upon a kingdom in this world. They wanted the chief places in the Kingdom. They wanted to be important people in Christ's Kingdom. And their idea was that He was going to set up a kingdom in which they would be important. It was the spirit of the world. They loved the world. See what the love of God did in their hearts! It took all love for this world out of their hearts. They went out into the world, and suffered from the world, because of His love in their hearts. They lost all interest in being important people in this world. After all it did not matter whether they were important people in the Church. They had no ambition to be the teachers and the preachers. They had no ambition to be the elders of the Church. The love of Christ had done away with all that kind of thing. They went out to suffer and to die for Him. To lay down their lives for Christ. It was a tremendous thing that His love did in them.

Now we come to point seven, which is not in this chapter, but do you notice that all this came just before Jesus began to speak to them about the Holy Spirit. Jesus is going to give them that wonderful teaching about the coming of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He shall guide you into all the truth. He shall not speak of Himself, He shall take the things which are Mine, and show them unto you." What did that mean? The Spirit Who was coming would be the Spirit of love. And the Holy Spirit would work in them to produce this same love for others as Christ had for them.

Dear friends, if we have the Holy Spirit, these things at least ought to be found in us. These things which characterize the love of Christ for His own ought to characterize us in love for others. That is why the Holy Spirit has come. So that as He loved us to the uttermost, so ought we to love one another. Forgive me, I have gone four minutes over my time. But, if only we learn this great lesson of His Love, it would be worth staying here all night!