

The Lasting Impression of Love
John 13:33-36

Introduction

When I was a Residence Hall Director at Northern Arizona University, I held an evangelistic Bible study. About six students attended. During the first meeting, I asked the group to go around and share their experiences with Christianity.

Yuan was a true international student. He was born in SE Asia, grew up in South America and then moved with his family to Italy. He said that when he thought of Christianity he thought of hypocrisy. You see, in South America, he was exposed to deep poverty and his first exposure to Christianity occurred on a visit to the Vatican in Rome.

He said, “When I saw the riches of the Vatican and contrasted that with the desperate poverty of much of the rest of the world - I rejected Christianity. How could a religion that has so much money, and allow so many people to suffer?” *Christianity left the impression of hypocrisy on Yuan’s life.*

Matt had a different story, growing up in middle class America, Matt’s family attended church when he was a child. Then tragedy struck. His younger sister was tragically killed. The response of the church was formed in the words of the minister to his mother, said in front of him: “Your daughter died because of sin in your life.” Matt said, “I have never been to church since that day.” *Christianity left the impression of judgmentalism on Matt’s life.*

I believe it was Mike, then, who shared an increasingly common story. He said, “I have stepped foot in a church in my life, my family did not go to church, I know very little about Christianity or the Bible – I don’t know what to think about it.” He was, if you will, a blank slate,

now in an evangelistic Bible study, coming into contact with Christianity – What impression would it leave on his life?

You see - Christianity is designed by God to make an impression upon those outside the faith. And unfortunately, I would guess that it is also your experience that far too often – the impression is negative hypocrisy, abuse, passing judgment, guilt, extremism and hatred.

And so we must ask - what impression does our lives leave on people? On our neighbors? co-workers? The checkout clerk at the store – a waitress? And also, “What type of impression do we desire our church to make in this community?”

We are going to see from our text today that Jesus was very interested in this question. *He taught his disciples that Christianity should leave the lasting impression of Love – the lasting impression of love.*

Please turn to John’s Gospel – chapter 13. John chapter 13 – We will be in verses 33-36. Because we are jumping into John’s gospel for just one week, let me provide the setting. Jesus has entered Jerusalem for the last time. He and the disciples have already shared the Last Supper and Jesus has washed their feet. Judas has been flushed out and had departed from the company. Jesus’ death is hours away and he only has limited time left to prepare his disciples for his departure. This is the last opportunity for teaching, instruction, comfort *before the dominos begin to fall leading to the cross.* So what does Jesus say? Look at the text:

God’s Perfect Timing

Verse 33 – “Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” Where is Jesus going that the disciples cannot come? Good question - look at verse 36 –Peter asks, “Lord where

are you going?” Jesus does not answer that but reiterates his point by saying, “Where I go, you cannot follow Me now, but you will follow later.”

We see that Jesus is preparing His disciples for His departure – That is his death and then His ascension into heaven. Jesus’ death for the sins of the world was – a burden he was carry alone and He will ascend alone – leaving the disciples behind. In other words, In verse 33 and 36, Jesus is *preparing his disciples for the future* – letting them know there will be a time of separation.

This is certainly understandable. It is what we do. Before Tammy and I traveled to Taiwan for 10 days over last Thanksgiving – we prepared our children for the separation. “Kid’s we are going to be gone for a while – We are going away. You can’t come with us – but don’t worry we will be back.” We showed the maps of the world and pictures of where we would be. That is what Jesus is doing – Telling his disciples that while they have enjoyed close association for three years, that is all about to end.

Why is this important? *Because it throws a bright light* on the verses in between. Look at verses 34 and 35. Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Wow! Talk about something out of left field – seemingly disparate thoughts. Non-lineal thinking. Jesus is talking future – I’m going. We will be separated, get ready for my death - and then – Love – Love one another. These verses seem so out of place that some critical scholars argue they are later additions, or a poor editing job by some early Christian scholar. But no – exactly the opposite – the placement is perfect. It is all a matter of timing.

As you have heard, Tammy, Elyce and Laurel were at the Children Desiring God conference two weeks ago – Thursday, Friday, Saturday. They were gone. Jim and John, I don't know about you – but while they were away – I have extra work to do here. This is my list. Tammy was saying – Craig while I am gone to a place that you can't come to – I have given you a job to do! These are my marching orders. Written down – spelled out.

In context this is exactly what is happening – Jesus is saying – while I am away – in heaven. Preparing a place for you. During our time of separation – here is your purpose, your task, your assignment, your duty, your defining mark, to love one another. “Here, Jesus says, I have left you a “to do” list – only one item – to love.

Three observations about love.

What does that love look like? Let's look in more detail at verses 34-35. I would like to make three simple observations.

First, notice the object of love – one another. We are to love one another. Look at the person next to you – behind you. That is the person you are called to love.

I listen to sports radio from time to time – One of the sports personalities on ESPN has the nickname, “The Little Ball of Hate.” And her callers are called the “haters.” I know there is hyperbole in that, but it is not hyperbole to say I want to be a pastor who is a “Little Ball of Love” – We are called to love one another. To enjoy true fellowship - community with one another. Caring for each other's needs, encouraging each other toward good deeds, being involved in each other's lives.

That leads to the second observation - the standard of love. Jesus said, that we are to love one another how? As Jesus loved us. This is what makes this a new command. It is not new in

the sense that it is the first time a command to love has been voiced in Scripture – but now the new standard is that of Jesus Himself. Do you see the connection to our second purpose of growing? Love each other – just as Christ has loved you. His love is our standard.

How did Jesus love? He loved sacrificially, He loved fully. He loved unconditionally. He loved by perfectly obeying His Father. He loved by spending time with His disciples. He loved by rebuking them. He loved by encouraging them. You see we have a high standard when it comes to loving.

Henry Nouwen put this way, “ The Christian leader of the future is the only who truly knows the heart of God as it has become flesh. Knowing God’s heart means consistently, radically and very concretely to announce and reveal that God is love and only love...very few people know that they are loved without any conditions or limits.” P. 38. Our standard of love is Christ Himself.

You may have heard this illustration, but it bears repeating. A boy with a rare blood type fell ill and he needed a blood transfusion. The only person available in the short time they had was his older brother, who was still only a child. The doctor explained that they would take his blood and through the tubes – transfer it to His brothers – so the brother would live. “Yes the boy said” – I am ready. Both boys were hooked up and the transfusion began. A few minutes the older child called the doctor over. He said, “I have a question.” “Yes said the doctor.” “When am I going to die?” asked the child. You see, the child misunderstood and believed that he was being asked to give his blood for his brother – all his blood and then he would die.

We are to love by the standard of Christ – that is a generous love, a sacrificial love – a love that goes above and beyond the call of duty. That is the love we have in our DNA, that we must demonstrate.

The third observation is the result of our love. The result is that our love – for one another will make a lasting impression upon a watching world. Our love is our calling card to the world. This is the connection between purpose three and purpose four – sharing our faith. There is an evangelistic thrust to our love. Love is attractive.

This is where the men in my evangelistic study were robbed – they were left with a false impression of Jesus’ ministry and essence of Christianity – yet this is common.

When it comes to our culture – rather showing love – we show anger, we shout – we condemn and pester – and the world is given an impression of Christianity that leaves it looking for something else.

In his book, “What is so amazing about Grace,” Philip Yancey related a personal interview he had with Bill Clinton when he was in office. Regarding his dealing with Christians, Clinton told Yancey, “I’ve been in politics long enough to expect criticism and hostility. But I was unprepared for the hatred I get from Christians. Why do Christians Hate so much?” Similarly, Andy Rooney of 60 minutes said, “I’ve decided I’m against abortion. I think it is murder. But I have a dilemma in that I much prefer the pro-choice to the pro-life people.”

Yancey said, “ I had caught a good whiff of the aroma given off by some Christians, and it was not a pleasant smell.” He asks, “Does the Christian’s concern for morality drown out our message of God’s love for sinners?”

You see, we have quite a nasty stain on our ecclesiastical garments – And the perfect stain remover is love. We must love one another – as Christ loved us – and that then will provide the right impression to a watching world. Love. My prayer is that Lake Cities Community Church might be a beacon of love to our world – that our love for one another might be evident

to the managers at this theatre – and to the Lake Cities area and through our missionaries, throughout the world.

Application

I have a few points of application for us to consider as we begin to close. First, I have a book for you that I want you to read. If I can have the users – I should have enough for one per family – If we run out I will bring more next week. This is a classic book by Francis Shaeffer called *The Mark of the Christian*. I want you to read this book – put it on your nightstand – in your bathroom – It is short and further cements this purpose into the life of our church.

Second, in the fall – we are going to start a small group ministry – called Community Life. To love one another, we must know one another – you can't love at arm's distance. This will be a challenge for us – these groups will be different from what you may have been used to in the past – at Trinity Fellowship, or elsewhere. They will meet weekly. The purpose of these groups is not Bible study – not worship – not to study theology, though there will be some time for that. The purpose of these groups is to facilitate loving relationships. To connect people – to create opportunities to care, to love to minister to one another. To know and to be known by others. I want everyone involved in a Community Life group. If we are to fulfill the purpose of having loving relationships, we must guard against the ability to be a part of this church and to be disconnected. Some of you will be approached about being leaders of a small group. Pray about this and your involvement. Prepare your heart now for a major initiative that will start in about four months.

Third – I want us to put love into practice. To express love to one another. A couple practical ways – I have two thank you cards – to express our love to others. One is for the

nursery workers at Trinity – They watched our kids at different events for a year or more as we prepared to launch this church. As we start our nursery for the first time today – how fitting to stop and express love to them. The second is for the staff at the Rowlett Bowl-a-Rama. What a wonderful group to work with. Let's express Christian love and thanks to them as well.

It is perfect timing for us to express love – while we are separated from Christ. To express love to one another – with the standard of Christ – impacting the world.

Faith...hope...love? The greatest of these is love.