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WE NEED YOUR CREDENTIALS

John 13:18-38

We have some dedicated fishermen in our church like Brad Colbert and John Duewel. Those guys love to fish. I am not one of them. I blame it on my dad. He was not big on fishing either and only rarely took Jerry and me fishing. However, a number of years ago I had quite a surprise in regard to fishing. I received a large envelope in the mail. The material inside informed me that I was now a member of the North American Fishing Club. I was totally caught off guard because I had never even heard of this club, and certainly had never applied for membership. Yet the enclosed letter said, “We are a roundtable of the nation’s best and most dedicated fishermen. From what we know about you, you are our kind of fisherman.” Apparently their kind of fishermen are fishermen who don’t fish. The membership came with a window sticker and a badge I could wear. It also had a statement of a code of conduct that I was expected to sign. It said, “I promise to maintain the club’s high standards of ethics...I will conduct myself in a courteous and mature fashion while wearing or displaying the Club’s emblem.”

I suppose that meant I could be rude or immature if I wasn’t displaying the club’s emblem. Laurie and I got a good laugh out of the whole thing. To this day I have no idea where it came from and we have never heard from them since. For all I know I could still be a member in good standing of the North American Fishing Club. But that experience made wonder what Jesus would require of us if we were wearing the emblem of his club. John 13:18-38 tells us.

JESUS PREDICTED BETRAYAL

In verse 17 Jesus said that his disciples would be blessed by obeying his command to serve. But one of them was not going to do that. Jesus told his men that one of them was going to betray him. He quoted Psalm 41:9 where David spoke of a friend who had turned against him. “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.” It pictures an animal like a horse or donkey that one has trusted suddenly kicking his owner. That’s what Judas was going to do.

Jesus warned them about this according to verse 19, “so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He.” In other words, he wanted them to know when it happened that Judas’ betrayal was no surprise to him. Not one of the disciples expected this. They couldn’t imagine that one of them would be a traitor. They

surely couldn't believe that Judas would do such a thing. They all trusted him so much he was the treasurer of the group. So Judas' sellout caught them totally by surprise. It was like an FBI agent being found to be spying for a hostile nation.

Jesus didn't know what Judas was about to do because he saw some telltale signs no one else saw or because he had a network of informants inside the power group in Israel that warned him about what was happening. Jesus knew because he had a divine hotline. He had insider information that only God possessed. John always remembered Jesus' revelation that night because he was totally shocked by the betrayal, but also because he was amazed that Jesus knew all about it beforehand.

In verse 20 Jesus says something that might seem a little hard to fit into the context, but there is a reason. "Whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me, and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." We scratch our heads a little on this one because we are missing a piece of information. In his commentary on John George Beasley Murray notes that in that ancient culture there was a common proverb that was well known. It said, "One who is sent is as he who sent him." Jesus was alluding to that familiar proverb. What he says here is essentially a form of it and it meant that Jesus, as his prediction of the betrayal would show, indeed was sent from God the Father and therefore had that same divine authority. Therefore accepting him was the same as accepting God the Father. It also meant that as Jesus was sending the disciples as his representatives they also could speak with his authority. That was quite an empowering statement.

The fact that Jesus was going to be betrayed and would then experience the horror that would follow was not a minor thing. Verse 21 tells us he was "troubled in spirit." There is no way for us to comprehend what Jesus underwent that following night and day. The horror of it is more than the human mind can grasp. While Jesus was divine he was also fully human. He knew how awful it was going to be. Most of us have known that awful experience of having something terrible looming over us the next day and being unable to sleep. Had Jesus not been arrested I think it's a safe bet that he would not have been able to sleep that night.

What followed was the disbelief of the disciples that any of them could do anything like Jesus described and then Jesus identifying for Peter and John that it was Judas who would do the deed. John tells us Satan "entered into" Judas. I believe that was his way of saying that Judas was being controlled by Satan's ideas. He gave into his lies and temptation, so in effect Satan was controlling him. The rest of the group assumed when Judas left that since he had the money he was going to go out and buy some food for them.

JESUS GAVE A NEW COMMAND

After Judas left Jesus told them again that he was at the climax of his ministry, that he would be glorified and then leave them. He followed that up by telling them he was giving them a new command. The new command was that they should love one another. He said by this people would know that they were his disciples.

How is this a new command? All the way back in Leviticus God had commanded his people to love one another. Leviticus 19:18 told them to “love your neighbor as yourself.” That verse was given many hundreds of years earlier so how could Jesus say that to love each other was a new command?

The new part was to love each other *as Jesus had loved them*. Remember he had just washed his disciples feet as a picture of how he had humbled himself to serve them with his whole life. Jesus was telling them that the standard by which they were to measure their love, the target they were so supposed to aim at, was him.

In Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had talked about love. He had reminded them that they had been taught to love one another. But they understood that to mean what humans everywhere mean, which is that we love people who love us back. We love people who are like us and are nice to us. Jesus upped the ante considerably when he said, “But I tell you to love your enemies. Love those who persecute you.” His standard for love was to be perfect in love as God is perfect. Jesus lived out that perfect love by giving his life for people who were hostile to him. The command is to now follow his example in loving like that.

Why is this command so important? Jesus said loving each other is so important that it is the identifying mark of real followers of Jesus. He gave the world the right to look at those who claim to believe in Jesus and ask whether they really do, and the litmus test is love. In the Broadway musical *The Music Man* the central character calls himself Professor Harold Hill, a graduate of the Gary Conservatory of Music. The truth is he is the farthest thing from a professor, he is a flim flam man, a con artist. He goes to small Midwestern towns in the early 20th century trying to sell the gullible townsfolk band uniforms and equipment. He claims to be a music professor who will teach the kids to play instruments and will form a boy’s band. This, he says, will protect them from the evil represented by a pool hall in their town. Of course he is just going to collect money from them and skip town. At one point the men of the school board, prompted by a skeptical mayor who happens to own the pool hall, say to him, “Just a minute, Professor. We need your credentials.” They demand some evidence that he did graduate from the Gary

Conservatory of Music as he claims and is in fact a music professor. My point is that the official credential of real believers in Jesus is love and the world has the right to demand to see our credentials. That's our badge.

The fact is that the world does judge Christians. And they somehow know that love is the mark of reality. All the religious activity in the world will not convince them. In fact we can have the most powerful apologetic arguments for the faith that one could ever hope for and find they don't make a dent on many unbelievers. What will impact them powerfully is love. They cannot deny its reality. Somehow they know that if God is in someone that person will truly love.

I think Jesus' statement about the importance of love at some point hit the apostle Paul like a tornado. He had been a Pharisee who never did anything wrong, at least by his culture's standards. He was the epitome of a goody goody. He had never touched any unclean food. He'd never had any baby back ribs or bacon with his eggs, never was even tempted by shrimp scampi. He was the most scrupulous Sabbath keeper on the planet. But he also hated some people and treated them horribly. Then he was confronted with Jesus and his new instruction. Even love people who are your enemies. Love everyone like God loves, for that is the one true test of whether God is really at work in your life. That tornado utterly demolished all of Paul's religious good works and his pride.

He got it. He came to understand the crucial importance of love. He put it this way in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all my possessions to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing." Imagine someone who gave away all his furniture to the people of Bridge of Hope, then cashed out his retirement fund, sold his house and his car, emptied his bank account and gave all of the money to Samaritan's Purse. Wouldn't you be impressed with that person? I would. I would be astounded by him. Paul said if he did all of that but didn't love, he is nothing. If he could do miracles that caused your eyes to bug out and your jaw to drop, but didn't have love, he is a big fat zero. Imagine a dynamic pastor who is a riveting preacher and inspiring leader. He leads literally thousands of people to faith in Jesus and builds a megachurch as big as a medium sized city. He writes best selling books and speaks all over the country. If he does it without love he is nothing. To God he is annoying as a car alarm run amok.

I was thinking of one of those commercials AT&T has where a man is sitting at a table talking to little kids. In this one he asks them about the biggest number they can think of. One kid shouts “infinity.” Then another kid tops that with “infinity plus infinity.” Finally a little girl comes up with “infinity times infinity.” I want you to think about the largest number you can envision. We’re going to do some math with it. We all know that there are a couple of numbers that have some unusual multiplicative properties. One of them is 1. Multiply any number by 1 and you get the same number. 10 times 1 is 10, 100 times 1 is 100, 1 million times 1 is 1 million. Zero is the other unusual number. Multiply any number by 0 and you get 0. 10 times 0 is 0, 100 times 0 is 0, 1 million times 0 is 0. Let that largest number you can imagine represent the most religious, the most sacrificial and kind thing you can ever conceive of. If you do that thing without love it is like multiplying it by 0. What is it worth? It is worth 0!

Why is love such a big deal to God? Start with the fact that 1 John 4:8 says, “Whoever does not love does not know God because God is love.” Love is behind everything God is and does. He never does anything from any motive other than love. That is why God is good. If God ever even for an instant did anything for any reason other than love he would become evil. This is why he makes a big deal about love in us. Anything we do even for a brief moment that comes from anything other than love, is evil. Evil, by definition is destructive. Therefore love is so important because it is the one thing that keeps evil out. Remove love from any human action or interaction and evil will be at work. Someone, actually everyone involved, will be harmed in some way.

Not only does love have a powerful role in good versus evil, but it is the essence of health and healing. We all know this. Lack of love is what produces so much distortion, dysfunction and pain in people’s lives. And you can give them success, money, fame, power, good looks, possessions, and none of it will make up for lack of love. Love is what fills the need of the human heart. Psychologist Karl Meninger said, “Love is the medicine for the sickness of the world.” In their book, *Successful Psychotherapy: A Caring, Loving Relationship*, psychologists C. H. Patterson and Suzanne Hidore make some startling statements. They show how psychotherapy in our society today is in total chaos. They conclude that therapists should focus on one simple, profound idea – that the essence of all successful psychotherapy is love. Love is what heals. It is the only thing that can heal a human heart.

Love heals. In his book, *Strong In The Broken Places*, Leonard Sweet quotes something from the memoir of writer Mary Ann Bird. Mary Ann was born with

several birth defects. She had a cleft palate, a disfigured face and deafness in one ear. As you can imagine she suffered terribly from the cruelty of other children as they made fun of her. She was convinced that no one outside of her own family could or would ever love her. One year in school she had Miss Leonard as her teacher. Miss Leonard was the most popular teacher. Everyone wanted her attention. They wanted to be her favorite. Miss Leonard, however, had to deliver a rudimentary hearing test to all her students. This was terrible for Mary Ann because of her disability. The way the test was performed was that each student would be called to the teacher's desk. They would cover one ear and the teacher would whisper something. She might say, "the sky is blue" or "you have new shoes." If the student could correctly repeat the phrase he or she passed the test. Mary Ann's turn came and with trepidation she approached the desk and covered her bad ear. Miss Leonard didn't whisper anything like "the sky is blue." She said, "I wish you were my little girl." According to Mary Ann that act of love, those simple words, utterly changed her life.

How does Jesus love? His love is active. In the context Jesus acted to serve the disciples by washing their feet. That was a picture of his whole life, for he acted on his own volition to come to this world and give himself for us. Without even being asked he acted in an unimaginably costly way to meet our deepest needs.

It is the character of God to "bless" people, to give them good. Genesis 1:26-27 says that God created human beings in his image. Then in verse 28 it says, "God blessed them." That is his character. He acts out of his love to bless and bring good to people. In Genesis 9:1 it says after the flood as things were starting over God blessed Noah and his sons. Then in Genesis 12:1-3 God begins his plan to rescue the human race through a particular people group. He started with a man named Abram. Listen to his call of Abram in verses 2-3. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

God blessed Abram, but it didn't stop there. His goal was to bless the whole world through him. God acted to bless. That's what love does. It acts, it speaks in such a way as to bless, to bring good to people. Now he blesses us so we can bless. He loves us so we can love others. Typically we are constantly on the quest to accumulate blessings. We want to get as much good for ourselves as we possibly can. That is not what love does. Love seeks to bless others. John Ortberg says "God's plan is to give you a blessing so you can *be* a blessing." He loves us so we can love others.

Jesus loved by making the supreme sacrifice of all time. Our love will more typically be manifested in much more mundane ways. It will be in thinking of how we can make a spouse feel loved and cared for instead of how our spouse ought to care for us. It means seeing the needs of others, beginning with a spouse instead of being preoccupied with whatever we are doing. It is not demanding our way. It is thinking how we can say something to someone that will affirm them or bless them. It is in making sure people feel included as much as we can. It may mean something as simple as being sensitive to a new person at church, reaching out to make them feel welcome.

Do you try to look for ways to bless people? I mentioned a couple of weeks ago that at the suggestion of Grace Turner when we had to fly back east on Christmas Day we bought a couple of boxes of See's candy to give to the flight attendants. When Grace mentioned this I thought, "What a great idea. Why didn't I think of that?" When we boarded we said, "We know you have to work on this holiday so we want to give you this and say Merry Christmas." We were amazed at the reaction we got. They were so grateful you would have thought we'd given them a new car or something. It was a small act of love.

I find doing little things for Laurie make a big difference. One of the common events in our home is that when we go upstairs to go to bed at night Laurie forgets whatever book she is reading and leaves it downstairs. It usually takes me a shorter time to get ready for bed than it does for her. She works hard at keeping herself looking terrific, a practice I appreciate, it is an act of love for me, while there's not much I can do on that front. It is what it is. So I am usually in bed reading when she crawls into bed, and that's when she normally realizes her book is downstairs. Often I will volunteer to get out of bed, go downstairs and retrieve the book. It is a small thing, but it says to her that she is loved.

His love is for the "as is." All of us desperately need to be loved. Just think of how many songs you know that have "love" in the title. "We Found Love," "My Love," "Crazy In Love," "If You Had My Love," "The Power Of Love," "All For Love," "Can't Help Falling In Love," "I Will Always Love You," "I'd Do Anything For Love." Why is that? It's because we all long for love. But there is a particular way we long to be loved. We are used to the fact that in this world if you're going to get anything for the most part it has to be earned. We are used to trying to make ourselves appear attractive enough and desirable enough to get someone to love us. We are clear that we must perform. If we don't we won't have any friends and even our family may not want to be around us. But performing is exhausting and it

leaves us insecure because if we don't look good enough, act good enough, love the other well enough we might lose their love. Wouldn't it be great to be able to stop earning and performing and be loved just as we are?

When you have to buy a car, if you buy a new one you have some expectations. You expect the new car to be in perfect condition. The paint job should be pristine with no nicks or dings, the interior should be spotless and new. The engine should run perfectly and all the electronics should work with no bugs at all. But what about when you are buying a used car and the sticker on the window says "As is"? You know that this vehicle is not going to be perfect. It is going to have some, shall we call it "character"? There will likely be some nicks and scratches. The engine might have a few little issues and the electronics may or may not give you what you need from them. You accept the car even with its defects.

Which of those is closer to the way Jesus loves us? Clearly we come in the "As is" condition. He sees all our defects, yet he loves us anyway. He doesn't love us because of who we are and what we do. He loves us despite our obvious flaws. We cannot earn his love. If we want to go that route it is demanding beyond our imagination and we will fail miserably. Yet God loves us just as we are.

In Paul's magnificent description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 in verse 7 Paul said that love "always protects." The Greek word he used is *stego*. It had a fairly wide range of meanings. It was used of a ship fighting its way through a storm at sea being battered by the wind and pounding swells. It was used of a roof of a building being beaten down on by the rain. It can mean "protect" but it can also mean to "bear" the way the ship bears the pounding waves and the roof bears the driving rain. Many translations such as the New American Standard, King James, English Standard and others translate it "bears all things."

So the idea is love will be loyal to a person, will continue to stay with him or her and bless him or her despite the faults. Love will bear it despite the storm and the waves and will do all it can to protect that person, not be quick to find fault.

Have you noticed how Jesus related to Simon Peter in this story? In verse 37 Peter proclaims undying loyalty, faith and love for Jesus. He says, "I will lay down my life for you." In verse 38 Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows you will disown me three times!" Jesus knew that Peter was going to fail. He knew it all along. Do you know that his name wasn't originally Simon Peter? It was just Simon. Then he got a nickname. Have you ever had a nickname? Our son-in-law, Michael, has a call sign that's kind of a nickname. His call sign is Red Five. It's

from *Star Wars*. They call him Red Five because his call sign used to be Porkins. When he went to his new squadron there was already a Porkins so he became Red Five. Jesus gave Simon a nickname. He called him Peter. Do you know what Peter means? It means rock. Simon the rock. What Jesus had in mind wasn't a little rock you can pick up in your hand and throw through somebody's window accidentally. We're talking a boulder, an immovable beast that can only be relocated using a huge crane. This is the kind of rock you might use as the massive cornerstone of an enormous building. Uh, Simon is that kind of rock? Really? Seems to me when the pressure was on he folded like a piece of paper in a rain storm. How rock-like is that? Not at all. Yet Jesus named him the Rock. Note in this context he didn't say, "Oh, Peter, you're such a blowhard. You're all talk. You're going to crumble like a year old cookie tonight and I've had about all of you I can take. I need somebody I can count on." No, he told Peter he was going to crash, but he continued to love him. He pictured him as the rock and nothing was going to change that. That's how he loved. He loved Peter with all of his foibles.

Dr. E. V. Hill was a dynamic African American pastor up in Los Angeles who died about 10 years ago. He used to tell a story of his wife's love that was like that of Jesus. Early on he decided he wanted to buy a gas station as an investment. His wife wanted no part of it. She strongly believed it was a bad idea and urged him not to do it. He bought the gas station. You can guess what happened. The station failed and he lost all their money. He felt terrible and apologized profusely to his wife, but she just said, "Well, you don't smoke so you don't spend our money on cigarettes and you don't drink so you don't spend our money on alcohol. So I figure you've saved us the money that you lost on the gas station. We'll just move forward." That was a very gracious response. However, not long after that Dr. Hill came home at the end of the day he was surprised to find that his wife had set up a candlelight dinner. He figured she was in the mood for a romantic evening. He was wrong. They had no money to pay their electric bill and so the electricity had been turned off. As you can imagine he was humiliated and ashamed. His wife simply said to him, "I know you are working hard to provide for us. Don't worry about it. We'll just eat by candlelight." She was loving her "as is" husband.

How we long to be loved like that. It is so powerful. Before we went to Mississippi I bought a "cold gear" shirt to wear because we knew it would be cold there. I'm your basic average sized guy so medium shirts usually fit me. I bought a medium, but when I put it on at home to make sure I was surprised. The shirt was way too small so it was stretched to the max across my chest. As soon as Laurie saw it she started laughing. She was laughing because on the front of the shirt there was a sticker that said, "Fitted, not tight." She thought it was hilarious. That could make

you a little self-conscious. But I just laughed with her because I know she loves me. She loves me as is. She loves me with all my many foibles, and that makes it safe to be with her in every situation, safe to have her laughing at me. When Jesus gave a new command he meant that we are to love “as is” people the way he loves them.

APPLICATION

How are we supposed to love like the way Jesus did? It is not natural. It is divine, supernatural. Left to our own devices we do what is natural, and that is to take care of ourselves. So what can we do to help us love like Jesus loved?

REMEMBER HOW HE LOVES US

Start with remembering how Jesus loves us without limit. We cannot give to others what we do not have. There are a couple of men in this church who have great ideas for new businesses that I will believe will make money. All they need to get them going is capital. They need money. I would love to invest in their opportunities. I would like to do that because I want to help them and because I think it would be a good chance to get a great return on investment. But I'm not going to do it. It's not that I don't want to help, it's that I can't give them what I don't have. I don't have the money. And we cannot invest love we do not have in other people. In order to love them, we must be confident in God's unconditional, unlimited love for us that is infinite in all dimensions. That love is the example for us to follow. It is the love that should inspire us and show us the way.

Furthermore as we remember how God loves us when we don't deserve it, when our flaws have earned rejection and condemnation not love, it can help us to love others who also have flaws. When I was in high school I once was on a baseball team with a guy who was a friend, but he was a really annoying teammate. He wasn't all that good, but it was important to his image of himself to insist that he was. Every time he failed or made a mistake he had some excuse. It wasn't his fault somehow. But the worst part was his habit of getting on a teammate who made a mistake. He would criticize them for it like he was coming from on high. It would have been less than appealing if he had been the best player who almost never messed up. But we all had the reaction of, "dude, maybe you ought to look in the mirror." My point is when we see how much grace we've been given in God's love, we're going to love that same way.

REMEMBER WHY WE'RE HERE

Jesus is sending us now, just like he sent the guys in that room. He was talking about us. We're sent here by Jesus, and we're sent to do what he did, which is to

love like he loved. No matter what else I do, if I don't love like Jesus loved I am failing. This is God's will for you. In Galatians 5:6 Paul wrote, "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." What if Tom Brady playing in the AFC championship game today is mostly concerned about how good he looks in his spiffy uniform. Suppose he doesn't really care if he throws passes that are accurate. He just wants to make sure he doesn't get tackled and get his uniform all dirty and muddy. If people come near him trying to hit him he just throws the ball aimlessly down field so he won't get tackled. Should he do that he is failing, because that's not what he's there to do. To succeed he has to be clear on what his job as a quarterback is and do what is required to accomplish that mission. At some point that will mean standing in the pocket and stepping into a throw right in the face of a blitzing 245 pound quarterback intent on blowing him up. It means he will get blasted, but if that's what it takes, so be it. No matter what I may accomplish if I don't love people, every single person, I am multiplying everything I do by zero. And what I accomplish is nothing!

Because love is healing and healthy, if you commit yourself to love others you will always bring healing and health to them. Furthermore, choosing to love others will bring health to your own soul as well. You will find yourself doing what you really want to do, what you wish you would do.

ASK GOD TO SUPPLY

Since this is what God commands and wants, do you think if you ask him he will give you what you need to love? 1 John 5:14-15 says if we ask anything according to his will he will hear us. God has an infinite well of love to draw from. Ask and you will receive.