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Message: Go Low

Transcribed Message
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John 13:2-11

Well, I think that you would agree with me that the last words that someone speaks before death are certainly of great importance and of great value. Most of the time, they are a reflection of perhaps that person's perspective and view of life and maybe even of death. Gustav Mahler, the composer, said one word: Mozart. Joseph Wright, who was a linguist, didn't want to do more than that. He worked a lot on the dictionary and his last word supposedly was dictionary. Stephen Jobs, the co-founder of Apple, it was in 2011 when he died and he repeated three times, oh wow, oh wow, oh wow. Kind of set the internet ablaze for a while trying to figure out just exactly what was going on in his mind at that time. Winston Churchill supposedly said, I'm bored with it all. And Groucho Marx said: this is no way to live.

When we think about last words, I can't imagine that there are any words that would be in that category that would be of more importance, that would be of greater significance or more to be treasured than the last words of our Lord as we find that recorded for us in the Gospel of John. So, we turn again to the Gospel of John this morning and these chapters 13 through 17, they are sometimes referred to as the Farewell Discourse. Maybe more often, they're called the Upper Room Discourse, but they give to us Jesus's final instruction, his encouragement, his words to his disciples on the night before he would be crucified.

It's been suggested that if you thought of the Gospel of John as being the temple, so you think of the Gospel of John, the book of the Gospel of John as being the temple, you would consider perhaps that the first 12 chapters that we've looked at, kind of the outer court, right, that open to all to come and be a part of that. And then when you get to chapter 13, 14, 15, and 16, it's like you enter into the holy place. And then when you get to chapter 17, it's like you enter into the holy of holies. That's kind of what we have to look forward to. We're really stepping into a section of God's word in this fourth gospel that are very, very special. Some of the deepest truths in the Christian life are spoken here by our Lord. Many of the teachings and

doctrines that you see later in the epistles, their birth right here, this is their beginning point. And so we have much to look forward to as Jesus, in a sense, just puts forward the essence of Christian living.

So, this morning, this is what we want to do. We want to kind of look back at where we've been since we're coming again to the Gospel of John, and then we'll introduce this amazing section called the Upper Room Discourse, looking at only one verse, but we will quicken our pace, I trust, in the future. Here's our big idea. One who is a child of God by faith in Christ is the object of God's special and enduring love.

Now, here's what John does. The other gospel writers, when they come to this part of the Passion Week and the life of our Lord, they kind of just flow right through the events. John literally comes to this part of the story of the Passion Week, and it's like he just keeps pumping the brakes and saying, slow down, slow down, think about this. Stop and contemplate what it is that you're reading and hearing and seeing. And so I just give us that sense as we come to this section of just how special it is, how weighty it is, how important it is in the life of our Lord and in our lives.

So, a review quickly of chapters one through 12, and then we'll look ahead to 13 to 21. Let's start there. Remember, John's gospel is written as an apologetic. We saw that the very first Sunday that we introduced the study. Chapter 20 and verse 31, John says that. These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing you might have life in his name. So, he just tells us right at the end of his gospel why he has written it, and he's literally written it as an apologetic to convince people that Jesus is the Christ.

There are 36 recorded miracles that Jesus did in all the gospels. If you just take all the gospels and just add up all the miracles that Jesus did, there are 36 total. John is incredibly selective. He picks seven miracles out of those that are recorded. Five of them are unique to him, but he talks about only seven. If you add the resurrection, it would, of course, be the eighth one. But the point is this. He is very selective because he calls these not miracles. What does he call them? He calls them signs. These are written that you might believe. Each of these signs has one goal in mind.

And that goal then, secondly, is John's gospel makes the gospel as clear and simple and plain as it can possibly be. It literally is an evangelistic tract. That's why oftentimes when we're talking to someone who's a seeker and they're interested in spiritual things, it's not uncommon that we have them either begin reading the gospel of John or we may walk with them through it. Why? Because John is writing this to bring about this transformation and to bring about this hope that we have in Christ. Of course, we know that what he does in making this presentation, the simplicity of it is that this is often called the gospel of belief. It's called the gospel of belief because how many times do you think John uses the word believe? Oh, about 98, right? 98 times in this gospel, John uses the word believe to help people understand what it is they need to do to have their sins forgiven and to have eternal life.

Now, here's what I always find so interesting and ironic and on some level kind of sad that we think we can improve on the language of the Bible. We think we can improve on the language that the Holy Spirit has given in John's gospel, which is written as an apologetic. It's written as an evangelistic tract. John tells us what you need to do is you need to believe. You need to trust. You need to have faith. All of those are synonyms. Even the word repent, if you will, is kind of a synonym of those words because even as you think of repentance, you're turning away from trusting yourself, right? And you're turning to believe and trust in Christ.

I think we especially fall into this with children. I've said this so many times that you'll be glad that when I don't say it anymore. But why do we take the simplicity of the gospel and then say to our children what you need to do is you need to ask Jesus into your heart? There just isn't any biblical basis for presenting the gospel to our children to say to them, ask Jesus into your heart. My fear is that we have a lot of young people growing up, a lot of adults that think asking Jesus into your heart was the means of salvation. Now, if they understand the gospel, okay. But when you say to a child, ask Jesus into your heart, you're not grappling with the issues of sin. You're not grappling with the issues of trust and faith and believe. It just seems to me that John gives us some insight here as to how it is that we should do this.

Thirdly, John's gospel records the rejection of Jesus at the end of chapter 12, so that's where we left off. The book of signs has ended. John has given us seven signs. Every one of them was designed to point people to the fact that this is the Son of God, that Jesus is who he

claims to be. Then you have that sad statement in chapter 12, right, and look at verse 36, where all of this is culminating: When Jesus had said these things, he departed and hid himself from them. Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him. That concludes the opening chapters, this first major section.

Let's just look quickly at the outline again to kind of orient ourselves to where we are, where we're going. As you look at that outline, the prologue obviously begins with the whole underlying truth of the incarnation. Verses one through 18 of John's gospel, they stand out in terms of what it is that John is going to try to do in this gospel. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him. So, he launches into this beautiful prologue.

Here's the thing. You keep running into these truths all the way through the gospel, so every time John puts forward the idea that Jesus is the Son of God, he's coming back to these opening 18 verses. When he talks about Jesus being the light, he's coming back to these opening prologue verses. When he talks about Jesus being the light, in him was the life, which is the light of men, right? That's from the prologue. All that comes back to us as we work through the gospel.

Secondly, as we just indicated, the opening 12 verses are about the ministry of Jesus to the nation. They saw all these climactic signs, all this teaching, and their response is largely negative. It's largely that of unbelief. And then as we move into this section, we shift to his ministry, no longer to the nation, but now to the disciples in chapters 13 through 17. And then we get into the passion, the death, and the resurrection in 18 through verse 31 of 20. Then you end with the epilogue, and we have this incredible closing chapter in the 21st chapter, which is the restoration of Peter. It's just a beautiful, beautiful summation of the life and ministry of our Lord as he restores Peter to this place of service and ministry.

So, let's jump in and look this morning at the whole discourse in one verse, right? The whole discourse in one verse. This is like the banner. Verse one is going to be like the banner that's just going to fly over all these chapters for the coming studies that we have together. Let's begin and read verse one. Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the

world, he loved them to the end. Let's look at this verse. Let's ask four questions and see if we can answer these four questions. Very simple, very straightforward.

The first one is simply when. When. You know, if you've been with us in our study of John's Gospel, you know that John likes transition words. He especially likes words that speak of time, and so that's what we have here. He's going to introduce to us, first of all, the fact that Jesus knew the time. Jesus knew the time. Back in chapter 12, verse one, six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. See how this time unfolds now? Just a week before these events that are before us this morning, Jesus is in Bethany. Now he is ready to spend this time with his disciples. It's, in effect, Thursday evening.

When the Passion Week unfolds, you have the triumphal entry. Monday the cursing of the fig tree. Tuesday he's in Bethany. So, this just unfolds. Thursday now, it's what we often call Maundy Thursday. Maundy most likely meaning command, and the command that Jesus is going to give is love one another. So, it's now Maundy Thursday. Tomorrow is Good Friday. That's where we are in terms of the chronology, the time and the sequence here. It gives us an understanding. Jesus is gathered with his disciples in the upper room. They're going to do a meal together. He's going to wash their feet, and then he's going to introduce them to what we refer to as the Lord's Supper and communion. So as a part of the Passover, he's going to move them from the Old Testament Passover into the New Covenant truth of the bread and the cup, which Lord willing, we'll celebrate next Sunday.

But here's the thing. John doesn't give any detail. John gives way more detail about this last night than any of the other Gospels: more than Matthew, more than Mark, more than Luke. But what John doesn't include is anything at all about the institution of communion and about the Lord's Supper. He doesn't mention the bread. He doesn't mention the cup, and we're like, that's interesting, John. Why do you think John of all the Gospels wouldn't say anything about that particular part of this evening? And it's likely because Matthew's already been written, and Matthew does that. Mark has already been written, and he does that. Luke has already been written, and he does that. So most likely, the Holy Spirit said, okay, we got Matthew, Mark, and Luke. They've already told us all of this detail.

John does not do that, but what John does is he tells us in chapters 13 through 17, we have this compressed time period of less than 24 hours. Jesus knows the hour. Now, the hour, obviously, is not 60 minutes. The hour is looking forward to the cross and to all that the Father has intended for the Son. That is all a part of the Father's will for His life. If you go back, remember the very first sign that Jesus did, changing the water to wine? Mary comes to Him, and what does she say? She says, Jesus, they've run out of wine. You need to do something about this, and what does Jesus say? He basically says, Mom, this isn't my problem. My hour has not yet come. But then, of course, He performs the miracle, but His hour had not yet come. He wasn't ready to be thrust into this public presentation. It wasn't time yet.

The same thing happens in the seventh chapter, and verse 20, and the eighth chapter, and verse 30. There we read that the religious leaders are stirring up the people against Him, and they want to arrest Him, but John says they couldn't. Why couldn't they? Because His hour had not yet come. His hour had not yet come. Then, if you look over to chapter 17 and verse one, when Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour has come. So, when we ask, what time is it? Well, Jesus, He knew the time. He knew the time was not a matter of chronology, but it was a matter of the cross, and all that awaited Him there. So, they're gathered around dinner time. By one o'clock Friday morning, He will be standing before Annas, the high priest, and these sham trials will begin. That's how close we are to these events.

Now, the other thing that Jesus knew, He not only knew the time, but He knew the purpose, right? Jesus knew all that was coming. Again, now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father. Notice the use of the possessive pronoun His. When He knew His hour had come, which is, again, another reminder of who it is that Jesus is. It's the mystery of the God-man, isn't it? He knows, He knows. It doesn't tell us how He came to know that this was His hour, but His hour has come. John's point is simply this. What's coming is not a surprise. What's coming is not something that's unexpected. It does not catch Jesus off guard. These are not circumstances that are just unfolding unbeknownst to Him.

Sadly, liberal theology, those who do not understand who Jesus is and all that He has done, oftentimes look at His death, and the storyline that they write is, here's a good man who had a message of love and peace, and things just went badly at the end. Everything went haywire, and He had no idea. No, not at all. A thousand times no. He is the sovereign Lord. He's the one who in the 10th chapter in verse 17 says that He has come to lay down His life for the sheep. Nobody takes my life, Jesus says. I lay it down of my own accord, and that's exactly what John is underscoring here. He came willingly. He came purposefully. So, when we answer the question when, well, the answer is when the hour has come, and Jesus knows the time, and Jesus knows the purpose.

The second question is who. Who? Having loved His own. So now again, what do we have? We have a second possessive pronoun. He has loved His own. Here's the amazing reality of this. Jesus knows the eminence of His death, and He's turning His attention to His disciples. He's turning His attention to others, and who is in view? It is those who are His own. Who are His own? Well, it can't be everybody, can it? John wouldn't use a possessive pronoun and say it is His own if He wanted to communicate that it's everybody, that everybody is going to be included in this. No, it's not everybody. It's God's love for His own.

Now, we know John 3:16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. We know John, the author of the gospel, is going to come to the end of Revelation, which he also wrote, right? And in verse 17, he's going to give this beautiful and wonderful invitation to everybody. He's going to say, come. Come those of you that are thirsty. Come those of you that are hungry. Come those of you that want this thirst quenched. Come. Come and receive. So, we understand that aspect of it, don't we?

But here the reference is to a particular love. It is a special love, and it is a distinguishing love. One of the one another commands of the New Testament is that we love each other, right? So, it shouldn't be unusual for us in the appropriate time and place to say to each other, I love you. That's what the body of Christ does. We're a family, as we said last week, right? So, we love each other. But when I say to you, I love you, and when I say to Bonnie, I love you, or when I say to my children, I love you, or to my grandchildren, I love you, there is a difference in

the way that is to be understood. There is a distinguishing, special, particular love, isn't there, when we speak to each other as spouses or when we speak to each other as parents and children. That's understood. Jesus is telling us here that there is a distinguishing, particular, special love that he has for those who are his own. He tells us who those are when he says, as I just mentioned in John 10, his sheep hear his voice and they know him. That isn't everybody. It is those whom he has set this special love upon. When Paul says in Ephesians 5, 25, that Christ loved the church and gave himself for the church, he's talking about that love. He's talking about that special, distinguishing, particular love that Jesus has for his own.

This is the point that I want you to see this morning. If you belong to Christ, if you've put your trust in him for salvation, you are a part of this possessive pronoun. You are his, right? You belong to him. And it is this truth that you are loved by an infinite God, and you are loved with an infinite love that can never be lost. That's what Jesus would want us to understand. It's the very prayer that Paul prayed. Sometimes when we read Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3, he says, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, the length, the height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with the fullness of God. Paul prays in Ephesians 3 that we would know the unknowable, that we would understand a little bit more of the height, and breadth, and width, and depth of the love of God for us. See, I think that's the value of what John does here. He wants us to stop. He wants us to contemplate. He wants us to think about what does this mean to be loved by Christ in this way? Because as we said at the beginning, it is a special love with which you and I as God's children are loved.

And then he adds this, right? Those who are in the world. So, it is these that are His own, and they're in the world. Now, why would he say they're in the world? What is the point? Where else would they be? Where else could they be? If they're in heaven, they're not in this context any longer, are they? No, these are in the world. And I think the point that is being underscored is simply that. They're still in the world. They're still here. He's going to talk about the world, and I'll make that reference in just a moment, but in the rest of these chapters, He's going to talk about this often. But being in the world simply means this. They're not yet

glorified. They're still undergoing sanctification, right? There's still a work in progress going on. And for some of us, that work is more challenging. No, that's not true. It's the same for all of us, isn't it? We're here. We're in the world. We're not yet glorified. We're being sanctified.

But what would come through in this regard is simply this. God loves you in your weakness. God loves you in your immaturity. God loves you in your selfishness. God loves you in your brokenness. God loves you in the midst of your addiction. God loves you in whatever circumstance you find yourself. That's what He's saying. He loves them. They are in the world.

Now, we'll talk about this again, Lord willing, next Sunday too. But in Luke's gospel, He literally tells us that on their way to the upper room, the disciples are arguing among themselves as to who's the greatest. That's the setting in their mind about this gathering point. So, I think that just simply underscores He loves us in our weakness. He loves us even in our failings and in our sinfulness.

I just offer two observations. It's not in your outline but just think of it in this way. It speaks to the importance of understanding that we're in the world, but we're not of the world. It speaks to the importance of not being captured by the world. Jesus makes that distinction. We are in the world, but we're not of the world. We're in the world, but we're not loving the world. If we're loving the world, we're not the called out ones that He intends for us to be. If we're not mindful of the fact that we are in this world, but not of it.

Now, the other thing that I would see is this. And just note the use of these two different words. The word "world" in chapters 1 through 12 is used in those chapters 34 times. So, in 12 chapters, the word "world" appears 34 times. In these five chapters at the end here, it appears 40 times, which is going to, again, underscore Jesus' heart and His concern for us. He understands that we are in this world, and this world, as Paul says in Romans 12, is desperately trying to press us into its mold. That's why John will say in his epistle, love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. The love of the world is contrary to the love of God, isn't it, and all the things that He has for us.

Then look at the other word, the word "love". In chapters 1 through 12, the word "love" is used 12 times. Now, in these five, it's used 34 times. So, you get the sense that this word "love" is a dominant theme in the teaching of our Lord in these closing chapters.

The third question is how. How did He love them? He loved them to the end. We know what time it is. It is this hour has come. We know who is in view. It is those whom God has set this particular distinguishing special love upon, those who are His own, those who He has known before the foundation of the world, as Paul says.

And then how He loved them to the end. We can understand this in a couple of ways. We can understand it in a temporal sense of time, right? In this temporal sense of time, He loved them to the end, which could be seen as He loved them to the end of His life, all the way to the cross. He loved them. That's demonstrated all through these chapters, isn't it? He loved them to the end of their lives, which would be their physical death. He loves them to the end of all time, forever. I mean, that's what Paul says, right? When Paul says in Romans, who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? No. In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else at all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. All of that would be true in terms of the temporal, wouldn't it?

But there is also, I think, this point. There is this sense of degree. The sense of degree that to the extent of, in other words. So, when we ask, how does He love us? Well, He loves us to the end, and He loves us to the farthest extent possible. Now the idea is He loves us completely. He loves us thoroughly. He loves us perfectly. He loves us without limit. This is what Spurgeon said: He will love His people to the utmost end of their unloveliness. Their sinfulness cannot travel so far, but what His love will travel beyond it. Their unbelief even shall not be extended to so great a length, but where His faithfulness shall be wider still and broader than their unfaithfulness. If our sins be mountains, His love shall be like Noah's flood.

Jesus defines it in chapter 15 and verse 13 when He says, greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. What an amazing love this is. It just causes me to stop and ask, do you really believe God loves you like that? Right now as you're sitting here this morning or watching from home, do you really believe that God loves you in the way that has been described in these verses? This love that is limitless, this love that is without end,

this love that comes to us wherever we are this morning, whatever our circumstance might be. Jesus, Dr. Boice once said, has done something for all men. He's done something for all men. He's done all things for some. That's us who are in Christ. As Paul said, He's given us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. I think this is the reality. I don't think this side of heaven, I don't know that we'll ever fully comprehend and understand how much God loves us, how much Jesus loves us. It's a wonderful, amazing truth that Paul says, I want them to understand more fully what is literally unknowable.

I remember from the earliest times when our children were born, Bonnie rocking them and singing to them, Jesus loves me this I know. We learn that from the youngest age, don't we? For the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. They are weak, but He is strong.

Why is the last question then, right? Why? Why does Jesus love us in this way? This is, again, the banner over all these chapters. This amazing, special, particular love. And the answer, first of all, is there is no reason, right? There is no reason in us. There is no reason in us. Paul says that I know that in my flesh there dwelled no good thing, right? Just as there was nothing in these disciples that were sitting in the room with Jesus, so there is nothing in us. They would forsake Him. They would deny Him. They would leave Him at a moment's notice. There's nothing in us.

But secondly, the only explanation is grace, isn't it? The only explanation is grace. This undeserved, unmerited favor that God extends to us. One who is a child by faith in Christ is the object of God's special, enduring love. Think about that and contemplate that and meditate on that this week. No one loves you the way Christ does. No one loves you the way Christ loved. No one is more devoted to you than the Lord Jesus Christ. No one is more sympathetic to you in whatever your circumstance might be this morning. No one is more interested in your heart, what's going on in your life, than your Savior Jesus Christ.

So, what do we take away? Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all, right? God calls us to a greater love. He calls us to a greater obedience, and He calls us to a greater joy. And there's a progression there, isn't there? The greater that love, the greater that obedience, the greater that joy. He'll speak of that in the chapters to come.

It all begins with the gospel. It all begins with understanding that I've sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that I can't earn my way to heaven no matter how hard I try, but God has done something for me. In fact, He's done everything that needs to be done in the sending of His Son Jesus. That's why He came to this earth. That's why He lived a perfect life. That's why He died a terrible death, to provide and make it possible for me to experience this incredible love, this grace, this forgiveness. That's extended to you this morning as well. If you've never put your trust, if you've never put your faith, if you've never believed that Jesus alone in what He did is enough, we invite you to do that right now.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for the life of our Lord. Thank you for this amazing love that is described for us here, and that we step into and experience every day, Father. Lord, I pray that as your children we will, in fact, grow in this love. I pray that we will grow in this obedience, and we will experience this greater joy that you intend for us. And I ask this morning, if there is anyone here who has never put their faith and trust in Jesus as their Savior, that Holy Spirit of God, you would open their hearts and give them understanding that what Jesus did is all that needs to be done. We thank you in Christ's name, amen.