

Reading: John 13:31-38

Theme: Absence and Presence!

We looked at this passage last week and considered the 1st of 4 areas - **The Glory of the Son of Man and God** in v31-32. We saw glory present in all the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus and noted how the Son of man was glorified in His suffering, that God was glorified in the Son and the Son would be glorified in God. We going to move on and see 2 other areas:

2. The Physical Absence of Christ. (v33)

Jesus mentioned His glorification and knew the cost to Himself, but also, He knew the effect His death and suffering would have on the disciples. He is concerned to prepare them for such. In a few hours His daily contact and meeting with them would end and - to their minds - end forever. Jesus addresses them very tenderly here. “My children” (NIV); “little children” (KJV). This is the only place in the Gospels this word is used. A good translation of this word of tenderness and affection is “*my dear little children*”. It is used a limited number of times in NT - Paul in Galatians 4:19; then 7 times by John in his first letter (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4 & 5:21).

In using this term, Jesus is showing their weakness and immaturity; also using it He expresses His deep love and concern for them - they are very, very dear to Him. He is having to prepare them for His imminent departure. His death would cause them fear, confusion and panic. Even the thought, after His resurrection, of Him returning to heaven and leaving them would alarm them, so at this point these are gentle words of preparation.

Jesus tells them He will be with them only a little while longer. They would look for Him, seek Him - His physical bodily presence. Jesus already spoken on 2 occasions to the Jews in this way (7:33-34; 8:21) and on those occasions it was a solemn warning - they would seek Him, but be unable to find Him and so not go where He was i.e. heaven. Yet to these disciples, Jesus says they would seek, look for, long for His visible presence, but He would not be there and so they would miss His visible, tangible comforts and consolations. Even saying - "*Oh we wish Jesus was here with us...*"

We are to note Jesus does not say to the disciples they would not find Him. He would be made known to His people after His death, resurrection and ascension through the Comforter - the Holy Spirit, through whom Jesus would be near them by the work and ministry of the Paraclete - the One who gets alongside to help.

Although we will touch on this more in later chapters, we can truly thank God that Jesus' physical presence is not now on earth - else it would be, by being physical, limited to one geographical place at a time. He has returned to the great glory and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus is present fully wherever God's people are, in whatever part of the world or situation they are in – good or bad. He is with us as individuals, couples and families.

What does Jesus mean when He says "*Where I am going, you cannot come*"? It looks like Jesus said the same thing to the Jews (7:33-34; 8:21), but in those references He was referring to them being excluded from heaven because they were not trusting Him and would die in their sin. Did He mean that here

as He spoke to His own disciples? Obviously not! What then does He mean?

It may be that He was wanting to draw out a question for them and Peter obliges (v36) and Jesus expands on this statement and Jesus expands on this statement in v33 and some say Jesus was saying *“One day you will follow me and be with me in heaven”*. We’ll see more on Jesus statement to Peter when we come to v36. Yes, that reasoning is right and, in a sense, an adequate suggestion, but I feel it does not go far enough at this point.

Here was the Lord Jesus, He was speaking of His death and sufferings as glory, of all the glory that would attend it and be intrinsic to it; the glory He would have of the Father. The Lord Jesus was going to accomplish salvation, redemption in all its fullness and He, and He alone, could **only do such**. Even God the Father and the Holy Spirit have to leave and forsake this being-glorified-One. He would accomplish salvation alone and no creature, no angel, no mortal man, no disciple - as precious and as loved as they were, could go there with Him. Here He tenderly tells them that they could not go with Him there in His glorification.

Yes, we can share in His glory, the fruit of all He alone accomplished; but that is another subject. It’s enough to say that when we are born-again, saved by God’s grace by trusting Jesus as our own Saviour, all that Christ is and has accomplished is ours **now** - see Ephesians 1 & 2. We have gloriously rich privileges and blessings **now** and not at some future date, but we are **now** possessors of spiritual treasures untold! Sadly, we live as paupers and not royalty – failing to enjoy, delight in all our Father has given us **now** in Christ Jesus.

Here in v33 the Lord Jesus speaks of His physical absence. Although the disciples would no longer be able to rejoice in His physical, visible presence for much longer, they would still be able to delight and enjoy something precious - the physical visible presence of one another. This brings us to:

3. The Physical Presence of Christ's People. (v34-35)

At this present time the Lord Jesus is in heaven, but we, who are His people - all who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ - we have a time of separation from Him while we live here on earth. Yet all who are Christ's here on earth, will one day be with Him, to see His glory and enjoy heaven's perfection for ever in His presence. Yet our Lord is concerned that we who are His people here on earth, demonstrate His love to each other until that time.

This is the commanded duty of every Christian to every other believer especially, but it is a duty which is a privilege, which is pleasant and is to become more so and add to our own happiness. This is not for one Christian to demand, but not give! It is to be given freely. To demand it, expect it in an arrogant way is wrong. To criticise other Christians for their failure in this delightful duty, is to magnify our own failure in it - as we would have a critical, unloving attitude and self-centred attitude. Yes, we all fail, but a loving heart will realise this and make loving and God generous allowances.

This is a big area to consider and all we will do is briefly touch on some of its characteristics as we see them here. Jesus is going away, the disciples will not be with Him, so part of His loving and tender care for His people in the world is this new commandment. It is a commandment which is so simple that a

toddler could learn it and yet it is so profound, that the most mature believer will be embarrassed at how little they understand of or fulfil it!

Why is it called a new commandment? The OT said we had to love our neighbour as ourselves, so, to love others was no new novel thing! I feel it is a new commandment because here the Lord Jesus links it, ties it, intertwines it into His love and example - for we are to love one another **as He has loved us**. Here it has this freshness, this unseen beauty put upon it and so it is “new”.

This is to be an all-inclusive love to and for all who are Christ’s people. It is a mutual love *“love one another”*. It is not you give and I take! It is give-and-take. This is not love in word alone, or a love that stands off and only tells off; it is the love the Saviour had for you and me, which moved Him to do and show this love by being here among sinners and laying down His life for us. It is His love we are to know, show and work out to others.

The love we are to copy is His love to us. If and when we feel we will not, or cannot do or say something to or for someone, we are to question *“Would the Lord Jesus have done or said such?”* If we took time to do that, we would probably find many of our harsh words would have no place on His lips, neither would our wrong thoughts or our cold shoulders and actions - as they would all be seen as out of place.

1 Corinthians 13 is a commentary on this love and we could change the word love, or the older rendering of charity and put in the name of Jesus and would not lose the sense of it. I wonder how it reads if we put our own name in 1 Corinthians 13? You

see it is not just a case of coldly doing or saying the right thing, but of our hearts being involved. We can say or do much, but if we do not love in this way, then we are useless. We so often imagine people's words and motives are wrong and if we get the chance, we will let them know, but "*love thinks no evil*" (1 Corinthians 13:5 NKJV), "*keeps no record of wrongs*" (reads NIV) and it does not plan or plot evil, revenge or sin. This love should affect not only our inner life, but also our outward life.

Yes, this true love of Jesus may indeed cause us to rebuke a sister or brother in Christ, because and only because we care for and love them. We are not to use love to cover wounded pride, anger, or a sense of revenge or one-up-man-ship - feeling we can lay into someone to sort them out. If discipline is needed, the church officers and the local church should be involved, but this is after private, loving exhortation - done after honest and private heart searching.

This command, example is before us, so what reasons do we have to stop us being obedient to our Saviour? Such disobedience is harmful to us, harms the local body of Christ and hurts the Saviour. He was willing to do all He did for us, but we stubbornly refuse to be reconciled to one another, to care, to do good. We all know that not one of us is perfect and I hope that no one is thinking that I am speaking of... or taking pot-shots at anyone personally. I want you to believe me, that I speak to myself first of all in this matter, to my own heart and its deceptive excuses and reasonings. Pray for grace that I may lead God's people by a clear example in this matter and pray for the same to be worked out in us all.

We are to also understand the area of loving one another as Christ loved us is intrinsically bound up with our Christian witness and how people think of the Lord Jesus Christ - He, Himself, says so in v35. This new commandment and its outworking demonstrates the love that exists between the Father and Son, the Son and His people. This means that our loving one another as Christ loves us, marks us with the sign of **His** ownership. It is interesting that John repeats and amplifies this in his first letter (3:11ff; 4:7ff especially v20).

As Jesus is distinguished by this love - loving us to the utmost, to the end, so we His followers, are to be characterised and distinguished by such love, so that all people will know we are His disciples. It is possible for us to have all the orthodoxy, all the learning we like, but if we do not have this principle of obedience to this new commandment, it is a lot of hot air and humbug!

Without such love being shown, people will not see Christ in the Christian. They may very well see self-discipline, morality, religion, a good life, but not Christ radiating, shining brightly through a changed life on fire out of love for their Saviour. We are to be mini-Christ, to show Him in our lives by this holy love for one another as believers. We are to be models of Christ by this I do not mean plastic imitations, but those who model our lives, attitudes, actions and love on Him.

One of the early church historians by the name of Tertullian (200 A.D.) wrote *“But it is mainly the deeds of love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us: ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they love one another,’ for they themselves are animated by*

mutual hatred; 'how they are ready even to die for one another, for they themselves will rather be put to death'” (Apology 39)

We need to be honest with ourselves and our churches. Such love is not ours to boast of in churches, nor as individuals within our churches. We are not to fool ourselves - there are many Christians who cannot be bothered to get together for prayer, preaching or for fellowship. In many churches, barriers exist, grievances, tensions, polarised opinions occur and add to the barriers. How we as individuals, as churches need to repent, to seek God’s help and favour to live and love as our Lord Jesus would have us do so!

If such things exist in our church or churches, are we ready to do so? We are to be prepared to say from this time on “*Let us live and love as God’s called people in harmony, unity and service with and alongside our brothers and sisters.*” As we are separated from one another physically by the lockdown and however long it lasts, then pray that when we get together it will be a new start, old grievances and troubles would be forgotten and let go of and we do not cling onto them. Then we are to press on in God’s ways of love.

I pray that would be the case with our own lives from this day onward. May we walk obediently to our Lord’s new commandment and know His help to genuinely show and work these things out in our lives to all we encounter and are in fellowship within our church and churches.