



## Sermon outline

# “Love one another as I have loved you” John 13:31-38

The following sermon outline can be used at a Suffering Church Sunday service or meeting. It can be read out as it stands, though you may want to add some illustrations of your own. Alternatively it can be used as a framework for your own ideas and applications. Some helpful commentaries are recommended on page 20.

“Tears of joy made them unable to speak, because their situation was very bad and they felt that the Lord had answered their prayer. They thanked you and prayed for you.”

This is how suffering Christians in Burma responded when they received a supply of rice, through a grant from Barnabas Fund. They had been persecuted for their faith in Christ. They had been so neglected by their government after a devastating cyclone that they found themselves in desperate need. But now, through the love of their Christian family, their joy was renewed and their need supplied.

When Christians suffer for their faith, the love shown to them by Christian brothers and sisters is immensely important. Just knowing that members of their Christian family care about them helps to encourage and strengthen them in their trials.

Younis is a Pakistani Christian whose home was destroyed in last year’s devastating floods. It had taken him over 25 years to build, because he is so poor. When Barnabas Fund provided a new house, he rejoiced and said, “The Lord brought us brothers and sisters from far to help us in our time of need. We are full of joy and very thankful.”

Another Pakistani Christian flood victim, Lal, commented that he was happy that the new house he had received from Barnabas had come from “his own people”.

Of course, the encouragement of knowing they have not been forgotten is only one part of the picture. The practical help can transform their lives now and bring hope for the future. In the love they receive from other Christians, they experience the love of God in Christ.

Again and again the Bible calls Christians to love one another, to care for those who belong to the family of believers. Jesus



Christian children sit amid the devastation caused by the cyclone in Burma

explicitly commands us to love one another in John 13:34 and 15:12. Yet we do not always make this love a high priority. Perhaps we do not realise how important it is. Perhaps we are not sure how to do it. Perhaps we think we do not have the ability to do it. Sometimes it even seems we find it easier to love non-Christians than our fellow believers.

This passage from John's Gospel is part of Jesus' farewell teaching to His first disciples, and it includes His command to them and to us to love one another. It shows us why we are to love, whom we are to love, and how we are to love.

### Why must we love?

(John 13:31-32)

After Judas has gone out to betray Him, Jesus declares that the time has come for Him to suffer and die. When He is lifted up on the cross out of love for others, He will give glory to God by showing His love to the world. So God will then give glory to Him in turn, by raising Him up to heaven.

So, for Jesus, the way to glory was the way of suffering, as He laid down His life in love. And as it was for Jesus, so it is for us. We must express that love in the costly service of His people – including those who suffer for their faith. In this way we show God's love to the world, and God will raise us up to be with Jesus in our turn.

### How should we love?

(John 13:34-35)

Jesus gives His disciples a new command: they are to love one another just as He has loved them. God's people are told to love one another in the Old Testament, but Jesus restates this command in two new ways. First, the love that He commands is based and modelled on His love for His disciples. It is a response to that love and it reflects that love.

Secondly, the love that Jesus commands belongs to the new age of salvation that He has begun. When His disciples keep this command, everyone will know that they really are followers of Jesus (verse 35). Their love for one another shows to the world how Christ has transformed their lives. It proves the reality of their Christian discipleship.

An early Christian writer noted how the pagans of his day used to say of the Christians, "Look how they love one another and how they are



Younis, a Pakistani Christian pictured here with his family, rejoiced to receive help from other Christians after his house was destroyed by floods

ready to die for each other." People of other religions are impressed to see Christians loving one another; it is a bad witness if we are not seen to care for our own people. John tells us elsewhere to love not just with words or speech but with actions and in truth (1 John 3:18).

So our love for one another as Christians must be practical and visible, modelled on Jesus' care for us. Our persecuted brother or sister in another country has been loved by Jesus; so we should share our love with them. And He has loved them by meeting their greatest need, for salvation; so we should try to meet their lesser needs, for hope and aid to relieve their hardships. This is how we express our allegiance to Him; this is how we show to the world His power to change our lives.

### How can we love?

(John 13:33, 36-38)

Jesus tells His disciples that He is with them for only a little while longer. They will look for Him, but for now they cannot come where He is going. At this stage in the story they cannot follow Him in His death or into His glory. They cannot yet make a proper response to Him; they cannot yet love each other enough. But Jesus does not say that they will *never* find or follow Him.

Peter's exchange with Jesus follows from this statement. Peter wants to know where the Lord is going, and asks why he cannot follow Him now; he claims that he will lay down his life for Him. But Jesus suggests that Peter is not yet ready to walk His path: for now he is just not capable of dying for Jesus or entering His glory; for now he just cannot offer that kind of love to his Lord. In fact, He is about to do the exact opposite, by denying Him three times before the cock crows.

But later, says Jesus, Peter *will* follow Him to the place where He is going. After Jesus has been crucified and lifted up to heaven, Peter *will* be able to offer that love, and to lay down his life for his Lord. Jesus' death and His entry into glory begin a new age, when His disciples will be empowered by the Spirit, and then they can walk His path of love and self-sacrifice.

As Christians today, we live in this new age. We are now able to fulfil Christ's command to love one another, to give of ourselves to help other Christians in need; and we are now able to follow Him to glory. We can do this because of His death and exalting to heaven, and in the power of the Spirit whom He has given us. Until He had died and ascended, the Holy Spirit could not come with His power (John 16:7).

### Conclusion

So love for other Christians matters because it is the path to glory for us, as it was for Jesus. It involves caring for one another after His example. And it is possible – because He has died and gone into heaven to enable us to follow His example.

Christians in many parts of the world are suffering poverty and discrimination, harassment and persecution, because of their faith in Jesus. We can relieve their pain and even transform their lives by our prayers and gifts and encouragement. And as we have seen, the Gospel commands us to care for them, and it gives us the best of reasons to do so. What then is our proper response?

It must be to love them – to "love one another", as Jesus has loved us and as He commands us.