

Knowing I AM: Gospel of John
“The Power of Cross-shaped Love”
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John 13.1-17



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[Slide 1: “Knowing I AM”] We’re in the middle of a sermon series called “**Knowing I AM**” that explores the New Testament book called the Gospel of John. For the past three weeks of this series, Pastor Kevin has been guiding us through John chapter 12. **[Slide 2: Review #1]** Three weeks ago, he taught from the beginning of John 12 when Mary, Lazarus’s sister, anointed Jesus’s feet with expensive oil. Jesus said she was **preparing him for his burial**, foreshadowing his death by crucifixion. **[Slide 3: Review #2]** Then, two weeks ago, Pastor Kevin taught on Jesus’s “Triumphal Entry” into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. He talked about how Jesus uniquely fulfilled two very different prophetic teachings about the character of the Messiah, who was the long-awaited Liberating King of Israel. In Jesus is united both teachings: the first, that the Messiah would be a **Conqueror, defeating Israel’s enemies**; and the second, that the Messiah would be a **suffering Servant**. To everyone at the time, these two visions of what the Messiah would be like were mutually exclusive. But, in John, we can see them united in Jesus—the **Servant King who Conquers through Suffering**. **[Slide 4: Review #3]** Then, last week, Pastor Kevin taught on how the Cross of Jesus is **glorious** because it “**drives out**” the “**prince of this world**,” who is Satan. Pastor Kevin provided us with some critical foundations of the biblical **warfare worldview**: **[Slide 5: Foundation #1]** 1) **Control of the world’s system was given over to Satan because of sin**; **[Slide 6: Foundation #2]** 2) **Jesus defeated Satan on the Cross**; and **[Slide 7: Foundation #3]** 3) **We live in the overlapping of the ages**—the time between the **Present Age** and the **Age to Come**. **[Slide 8: Overlapping Ages]** We live in-between the first appearing of Jesus the second appearing of Jesus. Satan is already **defeated in principle**, but **not yet completely destroyed**: like the period during WWII between **D-Day**, the victory of the decisive battle in the war, and **VE-Day** when the war was officially over.

[Slide 9: Marching Orders #1] He concluded with some powerful marching orders. First, we must recognize that **we are soldiers in a spiritual battle**. Because of Jesus’s Cross, Satan is defeated, and we are able to defeat Satan in our lives. **[Slide 10: Marching Orders #2]** Second, that battle begins by **taking back the territory between our ears: our minds**.

This week, we begin chapter 13, a **hinge** on which the Gospel of John turns. It’s the finish line of Jesus’s training of the disciples, and the commencement of his **slow but determined** march toward the Cross. And it’s the disciples’ commencement too. Jesus, our **Commander-in-Chief**, has one last **training exercise** for his disciples. This is **Jesus’s Boot Camp**, and he’s training his disciples to be **warriors** that **kick the Devil’s butt**. He reveals to them what the power of cross-shaped love looks like. **[Slide 11: Sermon Title]** So, I’ve entitled this message “**The Power of Cross-shaped Love**”.

Let's read this week's text. **[Slide 12: John 13.1]**

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

We have to pause here, because John has just **packed meaning** into this one verse. To us, it might seem that John casually mentions Passover. But this is no insignificant reference at all. Passover is the celebration and commemoration of the **defining event** of Israel's history as a people. It's the celebration and commemoration of God **choosing a man to act on God's behalf to liberate Israel from captivity to an oppressive, evil empire**. Passover specifically refers to the night when Israelites, and even some Egyptians, were **saved from the Destroyer** because their dwelling places were **marked by the blood of a sacrificial lamb**. *Can you see how important this is?*

In Jesus's day, the Jewish people awaited another man, chosen by God, to liberate them from captivity once again. Only this time, from a different oppressive, evil empire: Rome. The disciples are there in that Upper Room that night because they believe Jesus is that Liberator. But even though he's told them over and over, they have no idea that the **Liberator** is the **Lamb who will be slain**.

Jesus's hour has come, John says, when he will “leave this world and go to the Father.” But not before being betrayed by his friends, going through *excruciating* agony on the Cross, descend into Hades, rising from the dead, revealing himself to his disciples, and then ascending to heaven. John packs a lot into those two tiny phrases: “leave this world” and “go to the Father.” But John wants us to know that all this is about to take place.

So, what does Jesus do with one of his last moments with his disciples? He teaches them the power of cross-shaped love. This last phrase in verse one has a double meaning: Jesus not only loved them “to the end,” meaning that he loved them to his dying breath (literally). It can also mean that he loved them to the “utmost.” Jesus loved them with an **unsurpassable, unconditional love** that is so powerful, he is even willing to **lay down his life for them**. In two chapters, Jesus is going to say: “*Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*” That is what Jesus demonstrates this night.

[Slide 13: John 13.2-5]

2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

These four verses are **astounding!** There’s so much that could be said about them, but we’d be here all day. So, I’m only going to highlight **two ways** Jesus here demonstrates the **power of cross-shaped love**.

And these two ways that Jesus demonstrates are **weapons in our spiritual arsenal**. **[Slide 14: 2 Cor. 10.3-5]** In a letter to one of the first Christian churches, the apostle Paul writes,

3 For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. 4 The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. 5 We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

This is what Pastor Kevin was talking about when he told us the first battleground in our spiritual war against Satan is to take back the territory between our ears: **our minds**. We don’t fight with the weapons of the world; our warfare is completely unlike the world’s warfare. Our weapons have **divine power—the power of cross-shaped love!** We’re called to take every thought captive and make them obedient to Christ.

The first way Jesus demonstrates the power of cross-shaped love—which becomes a weapon in our spiritual arsenal—is **Servanthood**. **[Slide 15: Weapon #1]**

A part of my story that I didn’t tell you earlier is a six-month period when I was 16. After I’d dropped out of High School, I was admitted to a boot camp for at-risk Chicago teens. It was a residential, GED program operated by the National Guard, and housed on an abandoned Air Force base. I was still gang-involved at this point in my life, along with 99% of the other teenagers in the program. But the instructors at this school were special forces from every branch of the military. One of my instructors was an Airborne Ranger (a paratrooper) who was also a sniper. Most of my instructors were war veterans and very intimidating men. They were **disciplined, war-hardened, and uncompromising**—none more than this particular instructor Sergeant Welch. Sergeant Welch’s eyes were red and his voice boomed. He barked orders like thunder and he marched like an earthquake.

The summer before I entered boot camp I found out my girlfriend and I were expecting a baby girl. In my 16 year old hubris I was excited about becoming a father, even though, growing up without a father myself, I was complete naive of the responsibility it would entail.

Towards the end of this six-month crucible (hundreds of hours of running in formation and other physical training. Hundreds of hours of marching in formation and studying for the GED), I got a phone call late in the evening. It was a rare thing for a cadet to be called away from our dorms in the evening to accept a call from the outside. We normally weren’t allowed phone calls, except on special occasions or in cases of

emergency. So, since this wasn't a special occasion, I was pretty sure it was bad news, but I had no idea what kind.

The next several agonizing minutes felt like hours, as my girlfriend told me the story of how she'd lost the baby to a miscarriage through sobs and gasping. I broke down and sobbed too. And as the call ended, all I remember is Sergeant Welch's powerful embrace and him holding me while I cried for a very long time.

Of all the things I learned from the instructors in that boot camp, I learned the most profound lesson that night: **vulnerability is not weakness, it's power. Self-giving love is more powerful than judgment, more powerful than coercion, more powerful than violence!**

Messiah Jesus, our **Commander-in-Chief**, knew that the Father had put **all things under his power**, and the very next thing he does is wash his disciples' **stinky, dirty feet!** *What would you do if you knew “all things were under your power”?* I know that one of the **last things** I'd be tempted to do is **wash stinky, dirty feet!** But that's precisely what Jesus did!

Servanthood is a weapon of spiritual warfare because it **exposes, confronts, and destroys the lie that power is gained by coercion and domination.**

Satan's scheme is to deceive us into believing that power is gained by manipulation, threats, coercion, violence, and ultimately death. But Jesus's servanthood here demonstrates that **self-giving, cross-shaped love is more powerful than any of them!**

In serving one another we adopt the **posture** of the **Servant King who Conquered through Suffering**. In so doing, we **share in Jesus's victory**.

*Why is it that John is so intent on describing Jesus's striptease in detail?
Why is it so important that he took off his outer garment and put on a servant's towel?*

The reason is that John is pointing to the Incarnation: the **in-flesh-ment** of Jesus. John 1.1 says, *“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”* and John 1.14 says, *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

In stepping into our world, Jesus **took off the garments of heaven, put on the garments of a human servant, and served us by giving away his life. That is how he reveals his glory!**

[Slide 16: Phil. 2.5-8] **5** *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: **6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; **7** rather, he made himself nothing by taking*

*the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

[Slide 17: Phil. 2.9-11] ***9** Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, **10** that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

This is the pattern of the Christian life, exemplified by Jesus. We share in Jesus’s humility, look not to our own interests but to the interests of the others, and we serve one another as Jesus humbly served us.

So, the first way Jesus demonstrated the power of cross-shaped love was through servanthood. Servanthood is the first weapon in our spiritual arsenal to fight against Satan, who is defeated already in principal by Jesus on the Cross.

The second way Jesus demonstrated the power of cross-shaped love—and therefore, the second weapon in our spiritual arsenal—is **mercy**. **[Slide 18: Weapon #2]**

A detail in verse 2 that I normally skip over without a second thought slapped me in the face as I prepared for this message. Not only did Jesus know that the Father had put all things under his power, he also knew that Judas had already been prompted by Satan to betray him. Verse 2 tells us the Devil had already prompted Judas to betray Jesus, and verse 10 tells us Jesus already knew who his betrayer would be!

That means: **Among those feet whom Jesus washed that evening were Judas’s**, his betrayer: a man whom Jesus had **chosen** to be one of his twelve disciples, representing the reconstituted twelve tribes of Isreal, a **ruler** in the Kingdom of God Jesus was establishing. Jesus shared his life with Judas throughout his entire Messianic career. Judas had seen the healings, the exorcisms, Judas had even seen Jesus raise Lazarus from the dead! And now Judas was going to hand Jesus over to those who want to kill him.

But Jesus’s cross-shaped love is more powerful than Judas’s betrayal. Jesus showed Judas **mercy** and powerfully demonstrates how to fight the Devil and win.

If you really want to give the Devil a black-eye... Love your enemies!

Because **enmity is the Devil's ammunition**. If you **refuse to succumb to enmity, you disarm the Devil and he doesn't have a shot at you!**

Nothing **disarms** and **humiliates** the powers of darkness like refusing to fall in line with the way of the world: **retaliation, vengeance, violence**. When you choose mercy instead of wrath, you choose the way of Jesus, you strip Satan of his power. You

demonstrate that the power of cross-shaped love is more powerful than anything he can throw at you.

[Slide 19: Schindler’s List] There’s a profound scene in the movie *Schindler’s List* about the power of mercy. During WWII, Oscar Schindler was a wealthy German businessman who used his wealth to free several hundred Jewish people who would have certainly been killed. In this scene, Schindler is talking with a high-ranking and sociopathic Nazi officer who, for fun, likes to shoot Jewish men and women in the concentration camp he supervises with his sniper rifle from his apartment high above the camp. In the scene, Schindler is explaining to the Nazi officer that his power to take life arbitrarily is not true power. **True power**, Schindler explains, **is when you have every justification by the world’s standards to retaliate, seek revenge, use violence, and instead you show mercy.** Schindler says that’s the power Emperors demonstrated when they pardoned someone who was clearly guilty.

James 2.13 says, “*Mercy triumphs over judgment.*”

That is what Jesus showed Judas on the night he would betray him: **true power—the power of cross-shaped love in the form of mercy.**

Mercy is a weapon of spiritual warfare because it **exposes** and **confronts** our **idolatrous desire to be the judge, jury, and executioner of others.** We want to be judge instead of letting God be the Judge. We want to hold the power of judgment over others. And this judgment creates division. **Satan wants to divide and conquer; his tactics are deception and division. But the way of Jesus is truth and unity.**

[Slide 20: Weapons #1 & 2] So the first way Jesus demonstrated the power of cross-shaped love was **servanthood**, and the second way Jesus demonstrated the power of cross-shaped love was **mercy**. If I concluded the message here, there’s the potential for some critical misunderstands.

[Slide 21: Our Own Strength] We might be tempted to go out from here trying to fight a spiritual battle against the forces of darkness **in your own strength.** That can cause two very bad effects.

[Slide 22: Self-loathing] First, it could lead to discouragement if we fail to perfectly serve others and show others mercy. We could get the mistaken idea that in order to have a relationship with Jesus, we have to have to be able to perform perfectly, and that if we fail, our relationship with Jesus is ruined. That’s one potentially bad effect. This I’m calling **self-loathing.**

Many people who have come from religious backgrounds either currently suffer from this or have suffered from this in the past. This leads some to reject the religious tradition they were a part of because it’s too heavy a burden to bear. Unfortunately, some of these folks, because of this experience, go on to reject all religious traditions as a result. **Self-loathing can keep us separated from God.**

So, the first pitfall of fighting a spiritual battle in your own strength is self-loathing. The second potentially pitfall is its equal and opposite cousin: **self-righteousness**. [Slide 23: Self-righteousness]

This happens when people think they are successful at serving others and showing others mercy, to the point where they begin to judge others who struggle or fail. **Even following the Way of Jesus—if we are doing it in our strength—can become a source of pride and self-righteous judgment and cease to be the Way of Jesus at all! So, self-righteousness can keep us separate from God too.**

So, that brings us to the rest of this passage, and why the rest of the passage is so critical.

[Slide 24: John 13.6-11]

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?”

7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.”

8 “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”

Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”

9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!”

10 Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.

[Slide 25: John 13.12-17]

12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. “Do you understand what I have done for you?” he asked them. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

[Slide 26: Weapon #3] The first two weapons in our spiritual arsenal were Servanthood and Mercy. The third and most important weapon is nothing we can do in our own strength, it’s nothing we can give ourselves: **it’s a new identity that Jesus gives us by his grace.**

The “washing” that Jesus is talking about here is cleansing from or forgiveness of sin. We can’t cleanse ourselves, nor earn forgiveness. Jesus cleanses us by his grace alone.

[Slide 27: Grace alone] One poet put it this way:

*Great God, in Christ you call our name,
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,
but by your gracious love alone,
We strain to glimpse your mercy-seat
and find you kneeling at our feet*

Another author put it this way: “We can only truly speak of following Jesus on the way of the Cross if we have first stood back and watched in awe and gratitude as he walks it alone on our behalf.”

[Slide 28: New Identity] It’s this cleansed, forgiven, new identity that empowers us to serve others sacrificially and show mercy even to our enemies. It’s our **baptismal identity** that unites us in Christ as **One Family of God** across human divisions of **race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, gender, generation, and geography.**

If any person is made new in Christ, that’s proof that God’s New Creation has burst forth in the midst of the the old. God’s future has come crashing into the present!

This is what gives us hope in the midst of trial, joy in the midst of suffering. This is the power source of our cross-shaped love.

We don’t serve others sacrificially and show others mercy so that we can be cleansed of our sins and adopted into God’s family. No! We have been adopted into God’s family, cleansed of our sins by grace. Therefore, we **“have a part” with Jesus**, as he said to Peter. We share in a faith relationship with Jesus by his grace. And it is out of **joy, gratitude**, and our **new identity** that we are **privileged to follow Jesus’s example of servanthood and mercy.**

Let me illustrate my point this way: It’s not everyday that I’m threatened with physical violence. But a few months back, I had a co-worker who reached that point with me. In front of several of our other co-workers, he got directly in my face and threatened me. What amazed me was this: My first thought in the moment wasn’t “What would Jesus do?” or even “What should a Christian do?” My first thought must have been from God’s Spirit, because I immediately thought, **“I’m not that dude anymore.”** I’m not the Old T.C.; I’m the New T.C. The New T. C. is cleansed from sin, adopted into the family of God, knows the ways of the Master, and is a new creation in Christ.

My ability to show that co-worker mercy in the moment, didn’t come from self-discipline (although that’s not a bad thing); it came from a **new identity in Christ.** And that was the spiritual weapon that empowered mercy.

[Slide 29: Baptism] So, here’s where I want to make a shameless plug for baptism:

If you’ve heard the Good News that God’s Kingdom, God’s Reign, has broken into this world through the Person of Messiah Jesus of Nazareth—through his Incarnation, his life, his ministry, his healings, his exorcisms, his atoning death on the Cross, his Resurrection, and his Ascension—and you’ve placed your faith in him, **you should be baptized!**

Next Sunday, Feb. 1st, before the Super Bowl party in the Church Offices, I’ll be teaching on the meaning and purpose of baptism. The following Sunday, Feb. 8th, New City will be performing baptisms here during the worship gathering. If you’d like to be baptized, come talk to Pastor Kevin or me.

I’m going to ask Pastor Josh to lead us in a response song. As we sing this song together, I invite you to reflect on the weapons of our warfare that have divine power: Servanthood, Mercy, and a New Identity in Christ.

[Slide 30: Benediction] Closing Benediction from Ephesians 3.14-21:

*May the Father from whom God’s whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name,
strengthen you with power through the Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.
May you, being rooted and established in love,
have power, together with all the saints,
to grasp how wide and how long and how high and how deep is the love of Christ,
and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.*

*To the God who is able to do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine,
according to God’s power at work within us, to God be the glory in the Church and in
Messiah Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!
Amen*