

John 13:31-35 – A New Commandment

Intro

- Goodbyes can be bittersweet, especially if you know that the person leaving is going on to do great things, but you are not going to see them again for a long time.
 - o E.g., children going off to college, soldiers being deployed, missionaries going to the field (I remember “see you in four years!”).
 - o We get to listen in on what Jesus says to his disciples in his final hours before the crucifixion (which will be shortly followed by the resurrection & ascension).
 - We get to listen in because it applies to us as well.
 - Even though we have never seen Jesus face to face like these 11 faithful disciples, we too love him and look forward to seeing him again (1 Peter 1:8).
 - The Holy Spirit has John record these words for us to keep in mind while we wait for him to return or take us to be with him.
- Where we are in the story.
 - o A few weeks ago, we saw Jesus’ public teaching ministry come to a close as he was rejected by the majority of the Jewish nation.
 - o Last week we saw Judas Iscariot slink off into the night to fetch the people who will arrest and kill Jesus.
 - o Now, Jesus is left with only those who truly believe in him.

(31-33) God’s Glory

- (31-32) It is the time for God to be glorified.
 - o After all those times that we were told Jesus escaped those who wanted to kill him because it was not yet his hour, his hour has arrived.
 - o The religious leaders’ murder plot is about to succeed with the help of Judas the traitor, an outraged mob, & the permission of corrupt Roman authorities.
 - But in his sovereignty God will use their evil acts to display his glory and bring about the greatest good.
 - And this is not God making the best of a bleak situation – this is the rescue mission playing out exactly as foretold.
- Slight rabbit trail: While not the main point that Jesus is making, seeing the sovereign will of God at work is a good reminder for us when we are tempted to live in a state of outrage, discouragement, or fear because of evil things happening in the world.
 - o God’s sovereignty is not an excuse to sit back and do nothing when we have opportunities to do good and be a positive influence...we are the body of Christ.
 - o But knowing God is always good & is accomplishing his will is a comfort when we see evil occurring and there’s little or nothing that we can do about it (Psalm 37:1-9)

- In the crucifixion and resurrection, we see the true glory, greatness, majesty, beauty, and wisdom of God.
 - God the Father and God the Son work together in perfect unity (God the Holy Spirit will enter the picture in a chapter or so).
 - The Son glorifies the Father by accomplishing his will...by carrying out this costly rescue that takes us from being God's enemies to God's children.
 - The Father glorifies the son as the Savior of the world, soon to reassume the glory that he had since before the universe existed.
 - The title that Jesus uses for himself, *Son of Man*, is connected with the authority to rule over all creation (Daniel 7:13-14)
 - The crucifixion and resurrection show God's glory because they are the ultimate demonstration of his self-sacrificing love and grace.
 - God's unapproachable holiness was clear to any who caught a glimpse of him in the Old Testament.
 - His justice, his steadfast love, and his mercy were evident in his relationship with his people Israel.
 - Now, at the cross the depths of that holiness & love are fully displayed: justice and mercy meet
 - Justice mean that sin, defiance of Almighty God, cannot be winked at and go unpunished.
 - In his mercy, God himself, in the person of God the Son willingly receives the punishment on our behalf.
 - The God of the universe shows self-sacrificing love so that his enemies can become his dear children...what is more glorious and beautiful than that?

- (33) Jesus explains that his glorification means that he will be leaving them for a while.
 - First through death (gone for only three days), and then through his ascension to heaven (gone for nearly 2,000 years at this point).
 - The disciples' inability to follow at this time is very different from that of the Jewish leaders Jesus had said this to previously (see 8:21).
 - Those people were told that because of their refusal to accept him, they would die in their sins rather than going where Jesus is going (to the Father).
 - For the disciples, it's more of, "You can't come with me yet. We have to be separated for a while."
 - This thread of the conversation will be picked up again next week, but first Jesus gives them the command by which they/we are to live until he returns.

(34) Jesus' Command

- The commandment to love others is not new – Jesus has already taught that loving your neighbor as yourself is the second greatest commandment.

- The greatest commandment is to love God with all that you are, & together these 2 commandments sum up the intent of the teachings of the OT (Matthew 22:37-40).
- Jesus once answered the defensive question of “who is my neighbor” by telling the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37).
 - *My neighbor* clearly includes anyone I encounter...especially if they need my help, and even if they are my enemy.
 - In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus even specifically commands us “Love your enemies.” (Matthew 5:43-48).
- This new commandment is a little more specific.
 - The new commandment does not negate the general “love your neighbor and that includes everyone, even your enemies.”
 - But, right now Jesus wants them to focus on a specific relationship.
- Jesus’ followers are supposed to love each other.
 - You would think this is an obvious implication of loving others in general, but Jesus feels the need to emphasize it (as do other Spirit-inspired writers of Scripture).
 - Maybe because it can be easier to show love to someone we don’t know much about than someone we know well and spend time with.
 - Kind of like how close family can be the ones who hurt or frustrate us the most and with whom we may feel most free to say/do things we shouldn’t.
 - We are brothers and sisters in Christ – that is one of the most common ways that fellow believers are spoken of and addressed in the New Testament.
 - Ephesians 4:4-6 – We share what is most important in life (both this life and the life to come).
 - 1 Corinthians 12:13 – We have all been placed into the body of Christ & indwelt by his Holy Spirit regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status.
 - Philippians 2:1-2 – The spiritual blessings that we receive from God should draw us together in love and unity.
- These things that draw us together should be far more important to us than the things where we differ.
 - Politics – within the twelve, you had extreme opposites on the political spectrum:
 - Matthew the tax collector – willing collaborator with the occupying Roman government and often using shady practices to enrich themselves.
 - Simon the zealot – zealots were passionately, patriotically opposed to the occupying Roman government, often advocating violence against them.
 - These men were both faithful followers of Jesus – we must not make political allegiances a test of faith & fellowship, treating “people on my side” with more charity and grace than others.

- Ethnicity – the early church came to understand that a person’s ethnic background made no difference in their standing before God.
 - Peter, prompted by multiple visions, led the way in this (Acts 10:28).
 - When peer pressure led Peter & others to start treating Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians as inferiors, Paul (a Jew) firmly corrected him (Galatians 2:11-13).
 - We cannot get caught up in the rhetoric that makes sweeping negative judgments & unloving accusations about people (many of whom are our brothers & sisters in Christ) based on their ethnicity or country of origin.
 - Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world, and we must not allow the divisive things of this world to cause us to treat other members of his kingdom in an unloving manner.
- Jesus’ new command not only focused in on loving fellow believers, but also tells us the manner in which we are to love our brothers & sisters: as he loved us.
- The love that caused him to lay aside his divine privilege and heavenly glory and become a human being.
 - The love that caused him to seek followers among those whose sins were so obvious that they were social outcasts.
 - The love that caused him to act as the lowest possible servant toward his followers (even Judas who he knew to be a false follower).
 - The love that caused him to die an agonizing death so that our sins can be forgiven.
- Christlike love:
- Willingly doing something (or refraining from doing something) for someone else’s benefit...
 - ...especially if it costs me something (time, money, effort, self-denial, etc.)...
 - ...and causes me to treat them as more important than myself.
 - Mark 10:42-45 – Jesus’ love was all about serving and self-sacrifice, and he expects the same of his followers.
 - Philippians 2:3-5 – If we claim to be his followers, we must value the interests of others just as he did.
 - 1 John 3:16-18 – This love is shown by concrete actions: looking out for the interests of a brother or sister at personal cost.
 - How do we respond to the needs of a brother or sister?
 - Do we help them as we are able or do we always have some excuse for not helping?
 - Usually excuses are some form of “It’s inconvenient” or “they don’t deserve it,” but neither of these are good excuses if we want to love like Jesus.
 - He laid down his life for us when we were his enemies, and that humble, self-sacrificing love is the standard he has set for us.
- 1 John 3:14-15 – This love of our brother is not optional.

- If we love our brothers & sisters in this way, it gives us assurance that we do indeed belong to Jesus. Our saving faith is producing godly character.
- A person who does not have love like this needs to examine themselves to see if they are even truly saved.
- A complete absence of care for the good of others is a very bad sign.
 - There is a recent push to reject compassion, sympathy, empathy (feeling for others in their suffering and grief) as made up, as weakness that leaves you open to manipulation, as a character flaw to be ridiculed.
 - What an insult to our loving, compassionate God...
 - Who describes his relationship with Israel as “in all their distress, he too was distressed.”
 - Who wept at the tomb of Lazarus.
 - Who told the parable of the Good Samaritan in which the hero has pity on the man who should be his mortal enemy.
 - Who commands us to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” and then to be moved by that to loving action.
- God equates persistent hatred with unrepentant, unforgiven murder that sends a person to hell (cf. Matthew 5:21-24, 6:14-15, 18:24-35).
 - If you are the kind of person who cultivates a mental list of grievances and grudges against others you might not actually understand repentance & forgiveness and have never truly sought and received forgiveness from God.
 - Maybe you know how to say the right words about trusting Jesus to forgive you, but your life may be showing that it's just words.

(35) The World's Recognition

- It is when we act with willing, humble, self-sacrificing love toward our brothers and sisters that we are recognizable as followers of Jesus.
 - A church that has all their doctrine right and stands firmly for the truth but is lacking love is pointless, and a huge turnoff to nonbelievers (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).
 - A church where people forsake love and instead complain, gossip, & sabotage the ministries of others because that's not how *they* would have done it will die (Galatians 5:14-15).
- But good deeds motivated by true love show the glory of God as we reflect his character, becoming recognizable as followers of Jesus, the light of the world (Matthew 5:14-16).
 - Being recognizable as Jesus' followers by our love will not always mean being treated well (Jesus will talk about this in chapter 15)...
 - ...but it will show that criticism of our faith is foolish: that there is something about truly following Jesus that renders evil accusations ridiculous (1 Peter 2:15-17).
 - Let's make sure that we are truly following Jesus by loving one another, not just wrapping his name around us while looking nothing like him.

Applications:

- Trust Jesus
 - To save you and transform your life because he loves you and gave himself for you.
 - To use all things for his glory and your good.
 - Don't live in anger, discouragement, and fear when the world is dark.
 - Remember Psalm 37 – Do not fret because of those who are evil.

- Love one another as Jesus loves us:
 - Willingly – without a “you owe me” or “you don't deserve this” attitude.
 - Sacrificially – willing to use what we have (time, possessions, talents) for the benefit of others even when it cuts into our leisure/comfort/plans.
 - Humbly – Remembering that, like Jesus, we are here to serve others, not to be served by them.