

What It's All About

John 13:31–35

Studies in John #31

WE return to the Upper Room Discourse in chapters 13–17. It's Passover. In Egypt, every family sacrificed a lamb and painted their doorposts with its blood so that the Lord's judgment would pass over. Here in Jerusalem, one Lamb will be sacrificed for the world. Jesus is preparing his disciples for this since his "hour" has come (v. 1). He's demonstrated his love for his disciples by washing their feet contrary to all cultural conventions and expectations; he's done this to signify the washing away of their sins by his cross. But with the exit of Judas at night in verse 30 (cf. v. 31), this meal now takes on an even more intimate feel. "Freed from his painful company, our Lord opens His heart to His little flock [of *believing* disciples] more fully than He had ever done before," J.C. Ryle once said of this story.¹ Here, with his believing disciples, Jesus anticipates three great themes that will permeate the rest of his ensuing Discourse. These theme summarize WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT—not only the Discourse, but the very Gospel of our Lord.

I WILL BE GLORIFIED (VV. 31–32)

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT is Jesus' saying I WILL BE GLORIFIED: "**Now is the Son of Man glorified**" (v. 31; ἐδοξάσθη). In the other Gospels Jesus speaks about his sufferings and his glories, his cross and resurrection, ascension, and

session at the right hand of God. But I want to remind that here in John's Gospel we have to let Jesus' words sink deeply into our souls. Look at the irony here.

We saw many moons ago that the **Son of Man** is an image from Daniel 7. The Ancient of Days, God the Father, is approached by this glorious figure called "the Son of Man," who's then given a glorious kingdom on earth. Jesus spoke of his being this Son of Man who came from heaven back in 3:13: "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." He's called the "Son of God" to focus our minds and hearts on his pre-existent glory in relation to the Father while he's called "Son of Man" to focus our minds and hearts on his mandate to be the incarnate Messiah. One writer called this title "the self-designation that is associated with the absolutely transcendent character of Jesus' messiahship."² How is he **glorified** now that he's descended? The cross! So Jesus is telling his closest disciples, "Despite what you are going to see with your eyes and what you are going to feel in your hearts, know that what is happening is my glory!"

Jesus continues saying that if he is **glorified** then **God is glorified** (ἐδοξάσθη) **in him** (v. 31). And if **God is glorified** (ἐδοξάσθη) **in him** then **God will also glorify him in himself** [the Father], and **glorify him at**

once (v. 32). What’s interesting here is that these three uses of “glorify” are a particular verb form (aorist passive) that translates a particular form (niph'al of *nikbad*) of the Hebrew verb for God’s glorification³ in texts like Isaiah 49:3: “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” Illustration: children, when I was a kid tvs were a big box that you plugged into the wall. On the back there were two screws that you loosened and attached an antenna to. Some channels came in clear but others were fuzzy on the screen. The mom or dad would say, “Fix the antenna.” Two metal poles stuck up from your tv and you have to extend them or retract them, move them here and there to try and catch the signal. Sometimes we read passages that seem a little fuzzy so we need to put our theological antennae up. There are two big theological questions you should be thinking of when you read verses 31–32.

First, *how is the Father glorified in the cross? The cross glorifies the Father’s wisdom* in devising and executing a plan in which he is both just in punishing sin and justifier of sinners. *The cross glorifies the Father’s faithfulness* in keeping his most ancient of promises that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent’s head. *The cross glorifies the Father’s holiness* as own perfect nature requires satisfaction by a perfect Mediator so that we can have fellowship with him. *The cross glorifies the Father’s love* in providing such a Mediator who is also co-eternal God for sinners like us.

Second, *how is the Son glorified in the cross? **The cross glorifies the Son's compassion.** He died for us! He suffered in our place! He allowed himself to be counted sin for sinners. He was cursed that we might be blessed! **The cross glorifies the Son's patience.** With a mere word he could have summoned his Father's angels to set him free just like with a mere word he healed the nobleman's son; but he didn't; instead, he willingly submitted to the horrors and unknown agonies as no mind can conceive on the cross. **The cross glorifies the Son's power** as he bore the weight of the world's sin; as he vanquished Satan.⁴*

What's the Upper Room Discourse all about? Jesus' being glorified.

I WILL DEPART (V. 33)

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT is Jesus' saying I WILL DEPART. **Application:** Tell me the rest of this sentence: "Saying goodbye is..." Keep it PG people! "Saying goodbye is *hard to do.*" Now fill in this blank: "Saying goodbye is hard to do because...*it's emotional.*" We've all been there.

Jesus is about to say goodbye to his disciples so we'd expect his final teaching that's preparing them for it to be emotional. Look at how he addresses them: "**Little children.**" He could've called them **children** (τέκνα), a word used three other times in John (John 1:12; John 8:39; John 11:52), but

he uses a word only used here in John's Gospel: **little children** (ΤΕΚΝΙΑ).

Incidentally, John uses it seven times in 1 John. This is the diminutive form of children and it gives the feeling of deep emotion and love in this context.

Saying goodbye is hard to do because it's emotional in view of to *whom* you're saying goodbye to. It's also emotional because of *what* you're saying: **“yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me.”** Illustration: Children, imagine a time when mom or dad left for a trip and you were crying, even screaming, clinging on, saying, “Don't leave!” And then after you ran outside looking around, trying to find your mom or dad. Jesus is leaving this world for the glory of God's presence. Like sad **little children** they **will seek** to find Jesus; but he tells them: **“and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come’”** (v. 33; cf. 7:33–36;8:22).

What' the Upper Room Discourse all about? Jesus' departure.

YOU MUST LOVE (VV. 34–35)

WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT is Jesus' saying YOU MUST LOVE. “I will be glorified on the cross soon and then I will depart and re-enter the eternal glory I had before my incarnation; because of that you must respond appropriately.”

What's more appropriate than love? As we sing:

I love thee because thou hast first loved me
and purchased my pardon on Calvary's tree...

But Jesus surprises us here. It's not him we are to love—although we are: **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another”** (v. 34). Application: As you meditate on this command, think of what one writer said about it: “simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice.”⁵

But this isn't actually a **new commandment**, is it? If you know your Old Testament, Leviticus 19:18 says, “love your neighbor as yourself.” In fact, John knew Jesus didn't mean **new** as we're thinking because he says multiple times in 1 John that this is “not a new command” (2:7, 8). So why say this? The command to love is rooted in a newly revealed standard: Jesus' love. Remember the love of God in John's Gospel: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (3:16). And here in 13:1: “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...” Now that love that sent Jesus as the Son of Man, with which he'd loved his own by exemplifying it in foot washing, is now going to be demonstrated most dramatically in laying down his life for his friends on the cross. What makes this command **new**? Jesus! His love is the standard of our love! He loved his disciples including his enemy Judas.

Does this make sense? The command to us that we love one another is **new** in the sense of takes on new or full meaning in light of the work of Christ.

Turn over with me to Romans 5:6–8:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God’s love for us sinners is shown in the cross. If he can love sinners, we certainly can love the saints, amen? Let me exhort you “to think and to speak in the most favorable way about those who outwardly profess their faith and better their lives.” Let me exhort you “in no way...to pride [y]ourselves as better than [any other], as though [you] had distinguished [y]ourselves from them” (Canons of Dort, 3/4.15). I was asked recently by someone who found out about our church what’s the one thing I love about OURC? I told him: “Genuine love.” After 18 years, brothers and sisters, your love for each other, your accepting and welcoming each other is what I’m most proud of. And like Jesus told his first disciples, he still tells us why our love among one another here is so important: **“by this [love] all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”** (v. 35).

What’s the Upper Room Discourse all about? Our love for one another because Jesus loves us. Let’s pray...

Notes

¹ Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John 13:1–21:25*, 40.

² Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John*, 473.

³ See the summary discussion in Carson, *John*, 482.

⁴ Adapted from Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John 13:1–21:25*, 40–41.

⁵ Carson, *John*, 484.