

C. **Announcing His Departure** (13:31-41)

The balance of the Upper Room episode consists of an extended discourse in which Jesus provided His disciples with His final instruction before His arrest and crucifixion. This discourse is uniquely important for several reasons:

- First, being directed toward the inner circle of His chosen apostles, it is the most intimate and personal of Jesus' teaching recorded in the Scripture.
- The discourse also has a singular intensity and urgency as it anticipated and prepared the apostles for Jesus' impending death and what would follow.
- As well, it both expanded and focused Jesus' communication to those men. These were His final words of instruction, exhortation and encouragement before His death and He had much to say to them in only a few hours. Thus this discourse is uniquely rich and dense. So also it has various unique emphases, including the coming and work of the Holy Spirit and the apostolic role in advancing Jesus' ministration in the world.

Because the discourse is a compact, dense and unified whole, it is difficult to partition into distinct segments. This difficulty is reflected in the widely divergent outlines and exegetical approaches found in the various commentaries. At the same time, there is a flow and development within the discourse which gives it a general structure and therefore a suitable framework for treating it in smaller sections. The first of those sections lays the foundation for what follows by highlighting Jesus' *impending departure in death* (13:31-38). This is the appropriate starting point given the discourse's subject matter and purpose.

1. Jesus began by emphasizing to His apostles the fundamental truth that the events which would bring about His departure from this world were the means of His *glorification* (13:31-32; cf. 7:39, 12:16, 23-28). His incarnation and ministration had manifested Yahweh's glory in the world (1:14-18, 2:11, 11:1-4, 40), but that glory – shared eternally by Father and Son – would not attain its consummate fullness until the Messiah, the Son of Man, was raised from the dead and seated at the right hand of power. The betrayer's departure served that end, and thus was itself part of Jesus' glorification.

In His person and work the Son manifested the glory of the Father who'd begotten Him as His Messiah-King. The Son's glory was the glory of the One who sent Him, and the glory of that sending One – Israel's covenant God – was to reach its zenith in the glorification of His Messiah in the triumph of His death and resurrection. For, in that eternally-purposed outcome, God's ineffable wisdom, goodness, love, faithfulness and mercy were to attain their greatest expression and consummate fruition. This is important to note, for many want to treat Jesus' statements about shared and reciprocal glory as Him asserting His deity. But He didn't speak these things to His disciples to persuade them of His divinity, but to give them insight into the events about to unfold. When the shock, horror and despair of the next day descended upon them, they needed to understand that this dark night of degradation and apparent defeat was actually the triumph of Israel's God and His messianic Son and so their mutual glorification.

Here it's worthwhile to briefly consider the biblical concept of *glory* in order to gain greater appreciation of Jesus' statements. For, while the terminology is familiar to virtually all Christians, the meaning and significance frequently are not.

- The Hebrew word group carries the basic connotation of *weightiness*. It can refer to physical or metaphorical heaviness, with the latter encompassing both *negative* (dullness, severity, hardness, etc.) and *positive* (greatness, grandeur, worth, honor, distinction, etc.) significations (cf. 1 Samuel 4:18; 2 Samuel 14:26 with Genesis 18:20, 48:10; Exodus 4:10, 5:9, 7:14, 20:12; Numbers 22:15; 1 Chronicles 29:28).

This word group has only a positive sense when used of God, connoting His "weightiness" in terms of His unique worth, holiness, magnificence, power, etc. God is *glorious* because He is "holy other": transcendent and ineffable in His person, purposes, ways and works. So, importantly, creaturely things are also characterized by "glory" when they are the product of, participate in, or reflect and express the divine glory (cf. Psalm 8:3-9, 19:1; Isaiah 6:1-3, 60:1-14; etc.).

- The New Testament terminology has a different fundamental connotation, namely that of *splendor* or *brilliance*, and so is often connected with the ideas of *light* and *day* (cf. Luke 2:32; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Revelation 21:22-26).

In spite of this difference, there is significant crossover. In particular, in the Old Testament glory is *revealed* and *rises* and *shines* such that men can behold it. From this vantage point, God's glory was epitomized in His *Shekinah* – His luminescent "glory cloud" which visibly indicated His presence in relation to His sanctuary (cf. Exodus 40:34-38; Psalm 26:8, 63:1-2). *Most significantly in terms of Jesus' words here, the radiant, visible glory of Israel's God was to be fully realized and revealed in connection with the messianic person (Son of Man) and His work* (cf. Isaiah 4:1-6, 40:1-5, 49:1-7, 59:15-60:3; Ezekiel 43:1-44:3; also Luke 2:1-14; Matthew 17:1-5; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6).

Jesus embodied and manifested Yahweh's glory as both His true sanctuary and its fulfilled *Shekinah* (1:14ff). But the glorification of Israel's God in Him was to obtain its consummate realization in His death and resurrection. For, by that work, He would build Yahweh's everlasting sanctuary and enlarge His glory in it by imparting that glory to men by His Spirit; the glory that shone in Jesus' face was to be reproduced in the face of men who share in His life and likeness. In that way Yahweh would fulfill His eternal purpose to fill the whole earth with His presence, making it His sanctuary and the place of His worship and glory (cf. Zechariah 14:9-11; Romans 8:12-25; Revelation 21-22).

2. Jesus' glorification depended upon His death and its outcome, but this glory would mean great *anguish* for His disciples. For He would be leaving them – initially in death (13:33) and then later by His ascension (14:1-2). His beloved apostles needed to know that everything was about to change; He was going away and they couldn't follow. But they were not to despair: He was going to remedy the separation of death by His resurrection, and then the separation of His ascension by sending His Spirit. Loss and sorrow awaited them, but their anguish was quickly going to give way to joy (14:18-19, 16:16-22).

3. The disciples were soon to be confronted with a paradigm shift they could never have expected and, like little children (ref. v. 33), would struggle to comprehend. Not only would the dynamics of their relationship with their Lord undergo a radical alteration, they themselves were to be profoundly changed. *The events of the coming days would bring about a fundamental existential change and not merely a change of circumstance.* And their relationship with Jesus would be at the heart of that change. For they were going to know Him and commune with Him in a new and profoundly different way: not by way of physical proximity and interaction, but by sharing in His life and mind by the renewing and transforming work of His indwelling Spirit (cf. 14:18-20 with 15:1-5 and 17:1-24).

Thus Jesus' departure was going to impose on His disciples a *new commandment*: the charge to love one another (13:34). Many have wrestled with Jesus' meaning, for the obligation of love was not new; indeed, love was the very essence of Israel's covenant responsibility, something Jesus and His countrymen well understood (ref. Matthew 22:35-40). Thus some believe the Lord was calling for a *deeper* ("as I have loved you") or *wider sphere* of love (cf. Matthew 5:43ff). Others argue that the commandment concerns a new *kind* of love, but this assumes that love has more than one essential nature, which it clearly does not since God is love. The surrounding context points in a different direction: *This obligation of love was new in the sense that it pertains to and operates within the new existential framework Jesus was about to inaugurate in Himself.*

- God is love and therefore love – as it is true in Him – must define any and every relationship He undertakes. So love was the core, all-encompassing ethic of His covenant relationship with Israel (cf. Exodus 20:1-6; Deuteronomy 6:4-9 with Matthew 22:35-40 and Romans 13:8-10). Israel was Yahweh's covenant son, and a son is *of* his father, meaning that he embodies and expresses his father's nature, character, mind and will. Israel's sonship was fundamental to the covenant, but also *critical* to it because it was the key to the nation fulfilling its calling under the covenant, namely mediating the knowledge of God to all the earth's families. By God's design, His estranged world would come to know Him by observing His son living before them authentically and faithfully; to see the son would be to see the Father. But Israel's covenant Father is the God who is love, so that authentic sonship – and truthful witness – demanded of Israel a life of love.
- But the covenant son failed in its obligation because it shared the same human alienation – and lovelessness – as the rest of mankind. Israel was "son of God" by calling and covenant prescription, but not in reality; the son didn't share in the life of the Father and so was incapable of manifesting Him to the world. Only a life of love lived before men would manifest to them the God who is love.

Thus when Jesus spoke of a new commandment of love, He was indirectly telling His apostles that they were to be the marrow of His Father's restored "Israel" (the Abrahamic covenant house) which would fulfill the covenant obligation to bring His blessing to all people. By "*having love*" for one another – which speaks to character and not merely behavior, they would testify both to the living God and His purpose in sending His Son (13:35, cf. 17:20ff). But they first needed to discern this love and be made capable of it.

Sharing the world's alienation, the sons of Israel could neither live out their obligation of love nor truly comprehend what love is, and so it was with Jesus' disciples. From the days of the Exodus Israel had witnessed Yahweh's love in His covenant faithfulness (the Hebrew noun *hesed* often rendered lovingkindness has the fundamental connotation of covenant faithfulness), and now, in the fullness of the times, Jesus had shown the intimate, personal quality of the divine love by His interaction with His disciples. And so, when He declared to them that they were to love one another *as He'd loved them* (v. 34), they had a concrete sense of what He was requiring. And yet, they were going to witness a greater – indeed the greatest – display of love the next day, and it was that work of love which was to be the supreme paradigm for them (cf. 15:12-13). *Jesus' departure in death was going to fully illumine His commandment, but the apostles' ability to discern and comply with it awaited His later departure in ascension and return in His Spirit* (14:12).

4. Even those within Jesus' closest circle of disciples were not yet able to truly comprehend, embrace or live into His commandment, a fact which John highlighted by Peter's response: When Jesus appended the obligation of love to His announcement of His departure, the thing that captured Peter's attention was the startling truth that their Messiah was leaving them and they would not be able to go with Him (cf. 13:36-37 with v. 33). Jesus' new commandment flew right past him; Peter's only concern at that moment was where his Lord was going and his own interest in accompanying Him.

Thus Peter questioned Jesus, not about this obligation of love, but where He was going. Jesus responded, in turn, not by answering Peter's question, but by reiterating what He'd already stated: Where He was going, He was going *alone*. But He also expanded on that by assuring Peter that he would follow later. To that Peter exclaimed that he didn't want to join Him later; he wanted to stay by Jesus' side no matter where He was. Indeed, he was committed to following Him even if that meant following Him into death (13:37). In itself this response seems to suggest that Peter knew Jesus was talking about His own impending death, but his previous question argues against this. For if he understood that "going away" meant going to His death, why would Peter have asked Jesus where He was going? It seems, then, that Peter spoke of laying down his life, not because he knew what lay ahead, but to stress the extent and resolve of his commitment to his Lord.

Peter may have believed what he was asserting, but Jesus knew better (13:38): Not only would he not accompany Him to His death, he would abandon Him as soon as the threat of death began to present itself. Peter was adamant, but so was Jesus: So far from laying down his life in solidarity with Him, before that very night passed Peter was going to deny that he even *knew* Him. And not merely once, but three times; Peter would indeed prove resolute – not in his commitment to his Lord, but in his denial of Him (cf. Luke 22:34-44). The pointed contrast between Peter's confident insistence and his subsequent actions is only sharpened by Matthew and Mark's accounts, for they indicate that Jesus repeated His warning after they'd left the supper and were making their way toward Gethsemane. Twice Peter heard the same words from Jesus' lips, but even this wasn't enough to dislodge his confidence; he remained resolute that, even if all of the other ten apostles fell away, *he* would never forsake his Lord (cf. Matthew 26:30-35; Mark 14:26-31). How quickly everything would change, including Peter's sense of himself.