

July 19, 2015
Sunday Morning Service
Series: John
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from John 13:31-38.

1. Why did Jesus wait until Judas had left before giving the “new commandment”?
2. What is the new commandment, and how does it work?
3. Why is the new commandment so important?
4. Why did Peter vow he would lay down his life for Jesus?
5. Did Peter lay down his life for Jesus?
6. Contrast what you are willing to sacrifice for Jesus with what you already sacrifice for Him.

A NEW COMMAND THAT’S HARD TO KEEP John 13:31-38

During the war between the states, Lincoln supposedly said that he could find all kinds of men who were willing to shed their last drop of blood for the war. He said the real problem was finding someone who was willing to shed the first drop of blood.

The great theologian, Mary Poppins, taught my generation about the danger of pie crust promises. She told us that promises like that were easily made and easily broken. When it comes to promises of love, we are often guilty of easily made, easily broken.

Jesus was driven to bring glory to the Father even though it meant His suffering and death. The Father’s glory was most important to Him because He loved the Father. Then Jesus turned to His followers and said, “You love each other like that.” Of course, a great starting place in that practice is for the disciples to love Jesus like that. Peter said that he did. He boldly claimed that he loved Jesus so much that he would die for him. I don’t doubt that he was sincere. But Jesus helped Peter and us to see how easy it is to have good intentions but lack the strength and courage to see them through. Peter needed to learn that we can keep our Lord’s commands only as we depend wholly on Jesus to strengthen us.

“Love Each Other” Seems Easy to Do (vv.31-35).

Jesus’ conversation with the disciples at this point in the last hours before His crucifixion reveal that God’s glory is the important thing (vv.31-32). There is a reason why He taught about divine glory in the context of this instruction. Though it is difficult for human wisdom to process, it is true that the Father glorified the Son in the crucifixion. John recorded that *When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified” (v.31a).*

Everything was moving quickly now in God’s plan. God the Son was on the cusp of serious suffering but knew that God the Father loved Him. This love was working out in the context of real people engaged in actions that the loving Father had already set in motion. Judas’ departure to betray Jesus was a significant signpost along that journey to the cross. It was similar to the significant event of the Greeks coming to see Jesus. That arrival signaled that the end had drawn near. John identified it as such when he wrote, *Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. **And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:20-23).***

In that “sign post” setting, as well as the one in the text before us, Jesus used the important title *the Son of Man*. This is Jesus’ favorite titles for Himself. It left no room for doubt in Jewish minds about who He was. People who were familiar with the Old Testament

knew that this title was used multiple times to refer to the prophet in Ezekiel. But they also knew that in Daniel, the title referred to one special, unique person in God's plan. Daniel confessed, *I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).*

In that text, the Ancient of Days is God who chooses one person titled the Son of Man for glory and dominion, the ruler of the eternal kingdom. That was a portent of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Jesus often used the title Son of Man to describe himself. Ironically, when Jesus used the term, it was almost always in connection with sorrow, suffering, and death as opposed to reigning supremely forever. The willing suffering and dying won the right for Him to rule and reign.

This is the stumbling block to human wisdom. How could God ever bring glory to His beloved Son by letting wicked men kill Him in such a shameful way? To human wisdom the cross speaks of shame, defeat, humiliation. If God the Father really loved God the Son, how could He allow that to happen? In God's plan, the cross of Christ is the central focus of glory for the One who died on it.

On the cross Jesus' glory was displayed in His compassion for people like sheep scattered without a shepherd. There He showed compassion for spiritually dead and helpless people. He manifested His compassion to suffer in the place of us who deserved God's full wrath. His glory is seen in His patience of staying on the cross, His faithfulness in submitting to the Father's will, and His longsuffering that kept Him from calling twelve legions of angels to defend Him.

What a glorious Savior! With Paul then we should conclude, *But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world (Galatians 6:14).* At the outset of the Son's ministry, the Father publicly declared His love for Him. Now at the end of public ministry, God reveals His love again by putting the Son's glory on display.

Not only was it time for the loving heavenly Father to glorify the Son, but it was also time for the Son to glorify the Father. God the

Son was glorified in the Father's plan, *and God is glorified in Him (v.31b).* God the Son loved God the Father just as He was loved by the Father. Therefore, Jesus Christ desired for God the Father to receive rightful glory. Anyone who loves God desires for Him to receive the glory. He receives glory through our righteous lifestyles. Jesus taught us, *"In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).*

God the Father receives greatest glory as His plan of redemption is implemented. He is glorified for His wisdom in creating the plan of salvation. He is glorified in that through the sacrifice of Christ, He could be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. He is glorified for His faithfulness to His promise that the Seed of the woman would bruise Satan's head. He is glorified in His holiness that required the demands of His laws to be satisfied by our great Substitute Jesus. He is glorified in His love in providing for helpless sinners the Redeemer, Mediator, Friend, Brother.

God the Father was glorified at the crucifixion. God the Son was glorified at the crucifixion. And the ultimate glory was when God the Son returned to the glory He knew. Jesus said, *If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once (v.32).* It is as though we view the entire plan of salvation in one act of glorification. God the Son laid aside His glory to become one with fallen humanity. He fulfilled every detail of God's law perfectly having never sinned. He died though innocent to bear the penalty of sin. He rose from the dead in triumphant resurrection to validate His payment for sin. He ascended to heaven where He sat down at the right hand of the Father.

As a result, God the Son is once again fully glorified in the Father. That is what Paul referred to when he wrote the result of the Son's incarnation: *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2:9).* And we who receive the benefit of that obedient work are *looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God (Hebrews 12:2).*

The only acceptable conclusion of this triad of glory is that God our Creator is great beyond human comprehension. He gave us

created beings a glimpse of His glory through what He has created and through His Word. But the greatest expression of His glory is the person and work of Jesus Christ. As we walk closer and closer in fellowship with Him, we see a minute sliver of the Lord's glory that the three disciples saw on the mount.

In this conversation, Jesus laid the ground work for God's glory to continue through the followers (vv.33-35). He was preparing the followers to take up the work. He told them, "*Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come'*" (v.33). *Little children* is a term of love. Proud humans would consider this a derogatory address. We like to see ourselves as grown up, mature, wise, and in control. We are not. We are far more dependant on God's mercy than we can imagine. We receive the Lord's mercy because He, being the loving Heavenly Father, loves us like children. We should relish our child/Father relationship with God. We should moment by moment cling to the Father's hand especially when we realize we are trying to navigate the treacherous waters of our sinful world.

The disciples, being dependent on their Master, would long for Jesus' presence. But, it was necessary for their Master to leave His physical presence with the children. He was the exact expression of the Heavenly Father and so the disciples learned how to trust Him and depend on Him. But He was preparing to return to the Father in a matter of days. We should easily sympathize with the disciples who would suddenly realize how desperately they needed the Master to guide them still. For three years, Jesus had been the lightening rod of the religious leaders' wrath. Suddenly once He was gone, His representatives, the eleven faithful followers, were going to receive the full wrath of the ungodly hypocrites. Added to that would be the responsibility to take the Good News into the entire world. Added to that would be the reality that thousands of sinners would respond to the Good News and become the promised "Church." What was the Church? How should they lead this new, living, and vibrant organism?

Jesus left the "Jews," and they never would have the opportunity to meet with Him in the future. Here the term "Jews" refers to those people who rejected Jesus and resisted His teaching.

At a specific point, Jesus cut Himself off from association with those people and refused to offer them any more teaching. He told the doubters, "*I will be with you a little longer, and then I am going to him who sent me*" (John 7:33). He told them, "*I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come*" (John 8:21).

Unlike those Jews, the disciples would again be in Jesus' presence. "Hold on!" someone might protest. If Jesus loved His followers, He would not leave them . . . right? First, Jesus promised that He would send them the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, to take His place. The Holy Spirit is not a theory or a concept. He is a personality who dwells with us, though still a spirit. Second, because Jesus loves us, His followers, He has promised that we will live with Him forever where He went. We know that He went to heaven. Therefore, having encouraged Christians in Thessalonica to watch for the Lord's return, Paul penned, "*. . . and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words*" (1 Thess. 4:17-18).

Jesus was preparing the disciples to continue His work after He returned to the Father in heaven. It was the work of reflecting God's glory. Reflecting God's glory in the work requires love. That is what Jesus taught. Christ's followers must love like He loves. He said, "*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). It is significant that Jesus did not give this command until after the betrayer was gone. There is no record of this statement chronologically before this time in the Gospels. Jesus did state the principle of love God with all your heart . . . and love your neighbor as you love yourself. Jesus certainly illustrated how to love one another. But it appears that as long as Judas was around, Jesus withheld the command. Maybe this was a case of Jesus not casting pearls before swine or giving the holy thing to the dogs (Matt. 7:6).

This is a command to love each other—not a suggestion. How can Christ command love? If you don't feel love toward someone, how can you generate it? This is a fallacy of human wisdom and experience. The love of Christ, which we are to copy, is not primarily a feeling. It is the decision to do the best for the recipient of our love even if it requires sacrifice on our part. That kind of love focuses first

on the glory of God. God is most glorified when a person reflects the character of Christ. That begins with salvation and continues through sanctification—conformity to Christ. Christlike love has that as a goal for everyone.

Therefore, you can love a person you don't even like. Isn't that what Jesus showed us on the cross? How likeable are sinners like you and me in the eyes of the perfectly holy Creator and Savior? Not very! But Jesus loves us so much that He died in our place so that we can have eternal life and be just like Him.

Our Lord requires us to love each other like that. That kind of love desires for all sinners to come to faith in Jesus Christ. That kind of love is busy edifying, building up spiritually other believers. That kind of love sacrifices in order to help others become like Christ. That kind of love cannot be a feeling or it will be inconsistent at best and non-existent at worst. That kind of love is obvious.

Furthermore, Christ kind of love is identifying. Jesus told us, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”* (v.35). Emotional, touchy-feely kind of love is a work of the flesh, for the benefit of the flesh. Almost any human sunk in sin can generate emotions like that. How is that a mark of true Christianity? The erroneous conclusion that Jesus taught that certain feelings and emotions is the mark of Christianity has led to all kinds of ungodly practices and teachings. By ungodly, I mean things that do not glorify God the Creator but glorify the creatures. Decisive actions to help others become more like Christ, even if it means sacrifice, will identify us as the followers of Christ. People who live like that are becoming more and more sensitive about how we represent the true spirit and person of Christ. He was not an emotional, effeminate, likeable guy. He was perfect truth and perfect love and perfect discipline in action. How well do we exemplify that?

The guy was in a hurry because he left too late to make the appointment on time. He planned to push through the light as it turned yellow but the driver in front of him was in no hurry and stopped. The frazzled driver exploded. He shook his fist, blew his horn, and made a few other gestures. In the midst of his tirade, he heard a knock on his window and looked up into the face of a very serious police officer. The officer invited the man to get out of the car with his hands up. The man complied and the officer put him in the

squad car, took him to the police station, booked him, and put him in a holding cell. After several hours an officer came to the cell and escorted the man to the front desk where the arresting officer was waiting for him. The officer explained that he was terribly sorry that it took so long to clear up the misunderstanding. He explained, “Sir, when I pulled up behind your car I noticed the “Pro-life” bumper sticker, the “Meet me in Church on Sunday” license plate holder, and the little silver fish on your trunk. Therefore, when I saw you screaming at the driver in front of you, blowing your horn and making obscene gestures, I could only conclude that you had stolen the car.

Love each other like Christ loves. In that way, people will know you follow Christ.

Peter Showed Us How Hard It Is To Keep The Command (vv.36-38).

At least one disciple was certain of his commitment to Jesus (vv.36-37). He was not happy about the idea of being separated from the Lord. *Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward”* (v.36). It is possible that this conversation took place as Jesus and the disciples left the upper room and were on their way to the Mount of Olives and the Garden of Gethsemane. We read in other Gospel accounts, *And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered’”* (Matthew 26:26-27; Cf. Mark 14:26).

At some point in that scenario, Peter recoiled at Jesus' promise that He was going to where the disciples could not follow. Peter still needed to figure out the thing that we presume everyone knows. Peter still hoped for a Messiah who would defeat Rome. Peter still wanted the presence of God in this life, in the person of Jesus. We know that God's plan all along was for Jesus to return to heaven.

Peter didn't understand. He was sure he would be willing to die for Christ. *Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you" (v.37)*. Did Peter conclude from Jesus' words that Jesus was going someplace that would be dangerous for Peter? That appears to be the case. Maybe he was finally starting to connect the dots. Maybe the warnings about Jesus being betrayed into the hands of the authorities who would kill Him started to come together in Peter's mind.

Therefore, Peter was quick to assure Jesus that nothing could be too dangerous for him. He would lay down his life for Jesus. Peter loved Jesus so much that he was willing to die for Him. And all the other disciples agreed that they too were faithful, loyal, and brave to the extreme. Matthew wrote, *Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same (Matthew 26:35)*. Peter was dead serious. He was quite sincere.

No doubt we are sincere like Peter was completely sincere when we make similar boasts. But there is a huge difference between what we think we would do and what we are doing right now. God's Word requires husbands to love their wives the same way Jesus Christ loves the Church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). In premarital counseling I always ask the husband-to-be if he would be willing to die for his wife-to-be. Without exception all the brave young men answer, "Of course." That is when I point out that Jesus was not willing to die for the Church, but has already given Himself up for her. The question is not, "What would you be willing to sacrifice?" but, "What have you already sacrificed to prove your love?"

So, too, the question for us now is not, "What would we be willing to sacrifice for Jesus at some unknown point in some unknown situation in the future?" The question is, "What are you sacrificing for Christ today?"

The Master is aware of human weakness (v.38). In response to Peter's bold assurance, *Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me?" (v.38a)*. Would Peter really die for Christ? Jesus had just set the standard for His followers. They were to love each other. It is unlikely that someone will love fellow followers of Christ if they do not love Christ supremely. Laying down your life for someone is a sign of extreme love. Jesus pointed out to these men, "*Greater love*

has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). In light of that standard, do we really love Christ? Are we identified by that kind of love?

Jesus helped Peter understand how difficult it is to love consistently. He told him, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times" (v.38)*. That had to hurt. Jesus was not being mean to point out Peter's pie crust promise (easily made, easily broken). In fact, Jesus was helping Peter realize that he was in a serious spiritual warfare with Satan himself. The larger context says, "*Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-32)*.

The good news is that all is not lost when we stumble. Peter would indeed deny he knew Christ. That is not the same as dying for Christ and is not the same as loving Christ. Our spirit has the best intentions, but our flesh is quite weak.

We know that our Lord has commanded us to love each other. What we often don't know is what kind of love He expects from us. If we love like Jesus loved, we will look a lot like Jesus looked. Don't forget, that is what got Him hung on a cross. It's easy to say with Peter, "I love you so much I'll die for you." In reality, we can live out that kind of love only through full dependence on Christ our Savior.