
LIFE IN HIS NAME

THE LOVE YOU NEVER KNEW

John 13:31-38

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. 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.’ 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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

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.” Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

In our previous messages we have learned from the example of Jesus as he washed the disciples' feet. We saw there that that incredible act of service and love pointed to the cross. Jesus was saying, “You are made clean because of my life and my death for you, but I am going to also daily renew you as you walk in relationship with me.” Borrowing right from the text, Jesus said, “You are bathed, in one sense you are clean, because of my sacrifice for you, but then you are daily renewed in relationship. Your feet are cleansed.” But that whole experience meant more than Jesus makes us new and saves us. Jesus daily renews us, but he also calls us to serve one another and to love one another in this extraordinary combination of the ultimate sacrifice of laying down our lives for one another, and then daily caring for one another.

In the midst of that display, we see the plot developing involving Judas, who will betray Jesus. Jesus discloses this at the Last Supper in a very sacred time of communion with the apostles. As Judas goes out, we read these verses. In the back and forth of Jesus' incredible love for us and the call to be renewed in him and to follow his example, and Judas' treachery, back and forth, we read this glorious commandment. “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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples.”

Sometimes when I go to the gym I forget to take my wedding ring off before I go in to work out, and because I'm lifting such heavy weights it's kind of dangerous. Okay, I don't lift heavy weights, but it is annoying. So I will take off my wedding ring and put it in the receptacle where everyone puts their keys. People will say to me, “Wow, Brian, should you

leave your wedding ring there with the keys?” Then I make an announcement. I say, “Listen, if anyone steals this, she doesn’t come with it.” “Oh.” You see, it’s a symbol. It’s an important symbol. It identifies that we go together, and that in that sense, gloriously, she is mine. I am hers.

We are identified with Jesus, not by just a symbol. We are identified by love, by the love of Christ for us and by the transformation that comes because we are loved in this extraordinary way. Then, this is it, this is the mark: that love is then expressed. That love and that expression of love are really identified here first as our love for one another, our love for fellow Christians. We live in community, caring for one another as followers of Jesus Christ.

What we see here is that Jesus redefines love. He says, “I’m giving you a new commandment.” That’s very interesting, because love is not really a new commandment. Jesus himself, when approached by a young scribe, was asked, “What is the most important commandment? Tell us the greatest commandment.” You may remember that Jesus told him, “Well, the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” **Love God with your entire being.**

Then Jesus said the second commandment is like unto the first: **Love your neighbor as yourself.** When Jesus summarized God’s law, God’s word, with these two commandments, he was actually quoting from scripture. Deuteronomy 6:5: “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Then Leviticus 19:18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.” Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament, the ancient word of God.

In one sense you would say, “Wow, Jesus, how is this command new?” The command to love is not new. In fact, it’s interesting. We are reading the Apostle John’s gospel. When you go to his letters, in 1 John 2:7-8 he acknowledges this tension. He is talking to them about love and he says, “Beloved, I am writing you *no new* commandment, but an *old* commandment that you had from the beginning. The *old* commandment is the word that you have heard. At the same time, it is a *new* commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him” (that is in Christ) “and in you...”

Here is his point. He is saying that Jesus makes this old commandment new. He is in you and he renews you. You experience his love, you are transformed, and Christ in you is a whole new experience of God’s love, love that then moves out to touch other people.

So Jesus redefines love. The context of the passage, or really the underlying theme or foundation is the cross. Jesus is going to the cross. In fact, as the passage begins we are told that Judas leaves and Jesus begins to speak about being glorified. In the gospel of John when he speaks of being glorified, he is talking about his hour, his moment of glory. He is speaking of the cross.

He tells us in these verses (sometimes this happens in the gospel of John -- it seems a little bit confusing) that “the Father is going to glorify me, I’m going to glorify the Father, I’m going to be glorified in myself.” There’s just glory everywhere.

Really, he is pointing to the reality that the cross is the incomprehensible expression of God’s love. God loves us so much that he gives his son for us as a sacrifice for our sin, to pay the penalty, to satisfy God’s wrath poured out in judgment against our sin.

I want to try to express that and say that I am so troubled when one of my children suffers just a little bit. When I see them sick or upset, everything in me wants to rescue, deliver, help. I say this, really, in selfishness, not in some way to elevate me. I would much rather go through the pain than watch them go through it. God the Father loves us so much he gives his son to pay the penalty for our sin, and the son gladly gives his life. That’s what Jesus is talking about here. He is talking about this display of the glory of God and the love of God being magnified like never before.

Just to make it clear, Jesus then says, “Listen, do you remember that I told the Jewish leaders I was going somewhere and they couldn’t follow? I’m saying to you, just like I said to them: Where I go you can’t follow.” That’s the flow of the passage and the context for Jesus to say, “A new commandment I give you.” Of course the place that Jesus was going where they could not follow was the cross. Jesus said, “You can’t go there with me, but you will follow afterward. After my death for you, and after you are renewed because of my sacrifice for you, then you will follow me and follow my example and take up your cross.” **Jesus redefines love for us. Specifically, his sacrifice at the cross especially makes this commandment completely new.**

Here is what we’re going to do. We are going to break it down into three statements. I’m going to give them to you right now, then we are going to go through them quickly, one at a time.

- Statement #1: You will be different.
- Statement #2: You will know exactly what to do.
- Statement #3: You will look different.

Let’s go to #1.

I. You will be different.

Jesus here gives us a command. Let’s just start with that idea. Jesus is commanding us to love, and it is a commandment of *tremendous* importance. Right here, just in verses 34 and 35, three times we read this phrase: **Love one another. Jesus wants us to understand that he is commanding us to love one another. This is part of what church life does for you. It gives you an opportunity to learn to love people that you might not ever like otherwise.**

If you come to our home group, you will meet a vast variety of people. We are from all over the world -- in one home group, it seems like, right? There you are, and you will meet people that are just different than you are. But as you spend time in Christ together, you find out, "Wow, if I'm not careful, I'm going to really start liking these people." We are going to love one another in Christ.

Jesus tells us, friends, this is a commandment. I want to get the authority of that. I want to get the impact of it, if I might, because we elevate a lot of things. We treat a lot of things like they are non-negotiable, and they are so significant and they are so important. We treat them much more important than we treat this clear command that's repeated over and over for us as Christians.

In fact, I think about the topic of spiritual gifts -- an important subject scripturally. But, you know when Paul teaches about spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14, he is telling us that these are important, these are from God, these are wonderful, but don't forget: **Love is more important. Love is the most excellent way. Love is what characterizes us as the people of God.** So don't ever take your view or your understanding or your practice of spiritual gifts and make it more important than loving the people of God. Don't take power and magnify it over people, but have the fruit, the character of Christ, so that power will be used to build up and to bless other people.

Jesus is commanding this, but what makes the command possible is the underlying current in the passage that Jesus is going to the cross. There is a note of irony in the passage. Did you hear the words of Jesus? Let me set it up for you. Jesus says, "I'm going to a place that you can't follow. You will follow afterward." Now, if I were with the apostles I would have been like, "What? What does that mean?" So Peter helps us, right? Whenever there is confusion, Peter is sure to say the wrong thing.

So Peter jumps in: "Jesus, what do you mean? Where are you going that we can't follow? I'll follow you anywhere! I will die for you!" What does Jesus say? "*You will die for me?*" See the irony of it? Jesus is saying, "You don't understand. *I'm going to die for you.*" In the other gospels Jesus is quoted as saying, "When the shepherd is struck down the sheep scatter."

The point is that Peter is full of good intentions. Peter intends to die for Christ, but his weakness, his selfishness, his sin, his pride, whatever it is -- he is unable in the moment of testing to pass the test. Until what? Until Jesus dies for him. He is forgiven of his sin. The power of sin is broken in his life because of what Jesus has done for him.

Don't be too hard on Peter. You know we are talking about the Apostle Peter. Do you remember what happens to Peter? First sermon really ever preached, Day of Pentecost, he stands up, preaches, and thousands of people get saved. When Peter walked down the streets of Jerusalem, people would drag the sick out into the streets, hoping that his shadow

would fall on them. Peter is a significant person in God's economy or scheme in terms of how God used him, but **even Peter had to understand that the love that Jesus commands is not possible until Jesus goes to the cross, so that you can become a new you.**

If you are with us this morning and you are not sure about your relationship with Jesus Christ, let me just say this before I move on to the next point. **Jesus is the "how" of following God.** 1 Timothy 2:5 says "there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." If you are going to know God, Jesus is how you are going to know God. If you are going to be forgiven of your sin, Jesus is how. If you are going to have the spiritual power to walk with God and to love as God commands you, he is the how. **It's not just that he gives you a method or a strategy or a formula -- it's him. It's his life in your place, providing for the forgiveness of your sin. Then it's knowing him, and walking with him, and experiencing the new life that is yours in him.**

In this first point love is redefined because we are redefined, because we are made new in Jesus Christ. And now there actually is the possibility before us to walk in a totally new kind of love. **#1: You will be different.**

II. You will know what to do.

You will know *exactly* what to do, because Jesus in these verses and all throughout Chapter 13 is giving us an example to follow. He is telling us: "You are going to follow my pattern. You are going to live the life that I live, following my example. As we've already noted, that involves both the big sacrifice -- Jesus goes to the cross and lays down his life for us, and we are called to prefer others and to lay down our own rights and our own lives in love for other people -- but it's also this washing of one another's feet, a daily attentiveness to one another.

Now, friends, this stretches us. This stretches us, because if we're not careful, we tend to insulate our lives. We value our time. We look at our time, treasures, and talent and we are very measured in how we let others approach those things. **Jesus is saying, "I'm laying down myself for you in the large sacrifice and in daily attentiveness, and I'm calling you to be a community of love for one another that do the same.**

Point #2 follows Point #1. It's only possible when Christ comes in and renews our hearts. It's not even really desirable until we begin to receive and experience the love of Christ.

I just need to say this word before going on to the third and last point. In this passage we are talking about a specific application of love. We are talking about love within the Church. It's not a comprehensive teaching on love. If you go to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, Chapters 5, 6, and 7, Jesus talks about loving our enemies and how we are to love even those who hate us. If you go to John Chapter 3, verse 16, we read about God's love for the world. The emphasis here in John 13:34-35 is love within the Church. **I would picture it much like this: It starts with our relationship with**

God, experiencing God’s love, and that quickly extends to our love for other Christians. But it overflows to everyone else out of that passionate sinner as we receive and experience love with God the Father in Christ.

So in this passage, what’s pictured is that we are a kind of community where, though very diverse, we love one another, we care for one another, but never exclusively. We want to resist the temptation (and this *can* be a temptation) where we say, “You know what, I’ve kind of got my little group all figured out, and who I’m comfortable with, and we are going to keep everyone else apart, out.”

Real love in Christ always wants to open itself up to include other people. Let me say here that it’s very understandable why this becomes a temptation. If you have lived your life and you’ve been disappointed in relationship, maybe deeply hurt, and you come into a circle of friends where you begin to experience deeper friendship and acceptance and sacrificial love, it’s wonderfully renewing. You can begin to want to hold on to that and say, “Listen, I don’t want to threaten this. I don’t want to let other people into this circle.” It’s understandable, because what you are experiencing is so new and wonderful and renewing. But that will actually kill that very experience, and if you turn inward it will become stagnant and toxic and eventually spiritually poisonous. Just by nature we want to be inclusive of others. You will know exactly what to do. What do we mean? He is your example.

I teach a class at CEDAR on Worldview and we decided two weeks ago to talk politics in the class. That’s right. We were brave. No candidate endorsements were given. We were very careful. But, I was asking students to contemplate if they able to vote, who would they vote for and how would they do it, and what would be the criteria. We were talking about it and talking through it, and the students came to a certain conclusion. I said, “Okay,” (I’m simplifying the process) “this is who you would vote for. Now, let me ask you: Would Jesus vote for this person?” Then the room got really quiet.

It wasn’t necessarily that Jesus wouldn’t. It was just like, “Oh wow, that’s a whole other question, isn’t it?” You see, there’s a liberty that I take when I’m figuring out pragmatically and practically, and this and that, and strategy, but when you start to bring Christ into it, I’ve got to think about it on a different level. I think it was helpful. Some students began to then express that and connect their decision to that decision. Some were changing their minds and some weren’t. It really is helpful to stop and ask yourself in life, “What does the example of Christ lead me to do here in loving other people?” Please don’t come and ask me who to vote for after the sermon.

III. You will look different.

This is how we are known. “By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” You know the passage in James Chapter 1? We preached on it more than once here. Incidentally, the song we sang today after communion was a beautiful song about expressing God’s love – such a good fit for this text, and a call to show God’s

embrace and to show God's justice and mercy. I think Adam told me that he and a couple other guys here in South Florida wrote that song. It captures something that's important for us as a church: A desire to show God's mercy to other people. We have preached on the text in James 1 that defines true religion. True religion is defined as loving the orphan and the widow, avoiding worldliness, and taming the tongue.

Here's what's interesting about that passage in James 1. The idea is not that if you go out and do these three things: you love the orphan and the widow, you avoid worldliness, and you learn to control your words, then you will be accepted by God and your religion will be true and you'll have a relationship with God. No, the emphasis is that these things are so hard to do, really impossible to do, that to do all three of them will only happen when you are made new by Jesus Christ.

When Christ comes in and makes you new and you experience his mercy, it's impossible for you to not be concerned about the vulnerable of this world, to not care about orphaned children. It's just in you. That doesn't mean you become foster parents, but it does mean that you want to be a part of showing God's love to hurting people. This is God's nature. This is God's love. In your experience, he adopts you and you are there wanting to express that to others.

That's a similar idea here in John Chapter 13. It's not: "Okay, you go out. You love one another in this incredibly amazing way like no one's ever seen before. I'll accept you and you'll be proving it to other people." **No, it's about identity. Christ comes in and makes us new, we experience his love, we are changed, and we are transformed. This is the result, if you will, of the gospel, of the good news of Jesus Christ coming in and transforming us.**

Okay, friends. Stop here just for a minute. Some of you have walked with God for a long time. Some of you are not new Christians. If you stop and look at your life and you say, "Okay, Jesus said that love will mark us the way a wedding ring marks a married person, but even more significantly. It's not just a symbol. It's a part of who we are." If you look at that and you hear that and say, "Wow, let me step back." I know all of us would say that we could all do better, but you might be identifying right now, "Wow, I just don't see that in my life!"

Here is the good news of Jesus Christ: Go back to the Lord and say, "Lord, would you renew me?" I'm free right now in this moment to admit my sin, to say, "Lord, this is horrible in light of all you've done for me – making me a Christian, and even now in my walk with you, your provision is amazing! And yet, Lord, I'm seeing some profound self-centeredness." **What a delight to be able to come and say, "Lord, forgive me. Cleanse me. Renew me in your Spirit. My love will not be this "put on" kind of love, but it will really be who I am and how I am."**

You know that illustration where my kids are little and they're driving me crazy. That only happened once or twice in life, but it did happen. I'm embarrassed to tell you there was a time or two where I actually raised my voice at my children. I

know you are shocked to hear that. But I remember one specific occasion when after speaking to my kids (that's a euphemism for "I yelled at my kids"—I'm not proud of it, it was wrong) I saw that the windows were open and the neighbors were in the yard.

Immediately my concern is, "Oooh, this looks bad. I'm a pastor. I'm a Christian. I'm this. I'm that." You see, it's a whole different mindset when we say that this is who Christ makes us to be. It becomes evident in ways that cannot be hidden as opposed to something we are putting on for others to observe. Because that "put on" nonsense means that to your face we will be sweet, sweet, sweet, but behind your back not so sweet. We've all experienced that and maybe to some degree we've all done it. **Jesus wants to change our hearts so that our relationships are changed.**

Here's what I'm driving home. If I've dismayed you because I've confessed sin that I've made mistakes with my kids, please forgive me and move on. I've actually done a lot worse. Here's the point I want to leave you with and close the message. **You can't come away from a sermon like this with just guilt. It won't work. It won't motivate you. It won't change you. Only Jesus can bring that transformation. He invites you to admit your sin, confess it, and receive renewal in his Spirit. And go forth in faith, with a faith that he will show you. He will empower you. He will transform you to look like him. Now, that is really good news, isn't it?** It is good news. Let's bow our heads, please.

I want to ask you, before we sing the final song in worship, where are you in your relationship with Jesus Christ? Have you experienced his forgiveness? You know, I have made reference here today to politics, to a number of things, to various relationships. We might have all kinds of different opinions represented here on a lot of subjects, but one thing the scripture teaches is that we have all sinned before God, and we all must pay the penalty of that sin.

Jesus offers to us forgiveness as a gift, and a new relationship with him. I just want to ask you: Do you know Jesus Christ? Have you experienced that forgiveness? I want to ask you, if you have not but you want to, would you raise your hand? I want to pray for you this morning. Say, "Brian, please pray for me. I want to know the forgiveness of my sin. I want to know the promise of eternal life and come to Jesus Christ, and to experience the new life that he is describing. I want to know his love personally and his presence personally, the forgiveness of sin that comes by trusting in his name."

Life In His Name – The Love You Never Knew

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