

Love * John 13:34-35, 15:12-13

March 3, 2024 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

The passage of Scripture that we are going to look at today is one of the most *famous* passages in all of the Bible, one of the most *memorable* passages in all of the Bible and I would argue, one of the most *important* passages in all of the Bible.

Jesus clearly thought it was important – during the last supper, He said it not once but twice.

And *I* think it's important because it shows us two very important things:

1. Jesus' limitless love for us and
2. how to respond to that love.

By the time we're done here today, I hope that you will understand 1. just how much (and how tangibly) Jesus loves you and 2. how to respond to that limitless love.

So join me in John 13, John 13:34-35 and I'll show you what I mean. We're going to read John 13:34-35 and then we'll skip ahead to John 15:12-13. We're going to flip back and forth between those two passages so once you get there, keep your finger in one or the other. We'll start in chapter 13.

John 13:34, Jesus says:

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (Joh 13:34-35 NIV).

Talk about memorable, right?

Now flip ahead to chapter 15, verse 12; it's still the last supper, they're still gathered around the table, and Jesus says:

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (Joh 15:12-13 NIV).

Twice now, Jesus has said essentially the same thing: 'here's what I want you to do: Love one another as I have loved you.' That makes 'love' a pretty important word to live by.

Now, for whatever reason, Jesus doesn't expand on this idea of love here. He just says it and then goes on to other things, but I think that it would be helpful for us to unpack it a little and ask: 1. How did Jesus love us? And 2. How do we love each other?

Jesus says 'Love each other as I have loved you.' The two obvious questions are 1. How did Jesus love us? And 2. How do we love in response?

So let's unpack those, starting with this question: how exactly has Jesus loved us?

When Jesus sat at the table with His disciples and uttered these very famous words, the Cross hadn't happened yet and so I don't think that the disciples could appreciate how fully Jesus loved them. That's probably why Jesus didn't develop this command any further at the Last Supper. He just said it and then moved on.

But from our vantage point, after the Cross, we can understand what Jesus is saying. And Jesus is actually hinting at it here at the Last Supper.

Verse 35, Jesus says: Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Greater love has no one than Jesus, because Jesus is about to do just that – He is about to lay down His life for His friends. On the Cross, Jesus showed His love for us by laying down His life for us. This is how Jesus loved us – He laid down His life for us.

And theologically speaking, this is an incredibly insightful verse. Because according to Paul in Romans 5, at this point in salvation history, we were technically not *friends* of God, but *enemies!* We were separated from Him, we were estranged from Him because of our selfish tendency to ignore God and just do our own thing.

So technically speaking, at this point in salvation history, we were all enemies of God... Judas wasn't the only one.

And yet, Jesus' love for us was so abundant that He could look mercifully on us, even when we were against Him, and call us friends. Romans 5:8 - 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8 NIV).

While we were still alienated from God, He loved us enough to call us 'friend' and to die for us, to bring us back to God.

That clearly stuck with John because later on, in his first letter, John would actually say this: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us" (1 John 3:16).

Jesus loved us selflessly – He put our needs before His own and laid down His life to reconcile us to God.

Jesus loved us sacrificially – He took our place, He died for our sin and He rose again to give us real life.

Jesus loved us by laying down His life for us.

If that's how Jesus has loved us, what does that say about how we are to love one another?

Because clearly, that's the response that Jesus is going for us. Four times in four verses He says it:

13:34: 'Love one another.' 13:34 again 'As I have loved you (in the way I have loved you), so you must love one another.' 13:35: 'My disciples will love one another.' 15:12: 'Love each other as I have loved you.'

Jesus has loved us selflessly and sacrificially and He calls us to do the same. If you have experienced the love of Jesus, He calls you to extend that love to others.

That's why Jesus calls this a *new* commandment. God's people had always been called to love others – Leviticus 19:18 – 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'

But never before had God's people had such a clear demonstration of God's love for them. That's what's new about *this* command - we now have Jesus' example of love to *motivate* us to love one other and to *model* for us how to love each other – selflessly and sacrificially.

Frederick Bruner puts it like this: "We have been and are being loved: out of this deep living resource – love!... Pass on the same undeserved love you are experiencing in yourself from Jesus to the (perhaps) undeserving but hurting people around you."ⁱ

1 John 4:19 – We love because He first loved us.

And again, yes, broadly speaking, we are to love all people but here at the last supper, Jesus highlights how important it is for His followers, for the Church, to lay down their lives for one another and to love each other as Jesus did.

That selfless, other-centric love was the mark of the early church. People sold property to support one another, they took in widows and orphans who got that way because of persecution, they considered what would help each other and they did that, because that's what Jesus did for them.

Tertullian, a great church father and pastor in the 2nd century, wrote a book while Christianity was still outlawed to clear up some misunderstandings about the faith and in it, he quotes a pagan official who says: "See how they love one another... how they are ready even to die for one another."

The Church was known for loving one each other as Jesus had loved them.

And that's exactly what Jesus said would happen – 13:35 – by this love, all people will know that you are my disciples. IKEA is known for cheap furniture and instructions that ruin

relationships; the Shriners are known for their funny hats and little cars; the Church should be known for the same selfless, sacrificial love that Jesus demonstrated on the Cross. Not fancy buildings, not miraculous wonders, not even a seat on the Supreme Court. We should be known for loving each other with the love of Christ.

I like how Gary Burge puts it: “Nothing so astonishes a fractured world as a community in which radical, faithful, genuine love is shared among its members. There are many places you can go to find communities of shared interest. There are many places you can go to find people just like yourself, who live for sports or music or gardening or politics. But it is the mandate of the church to become a community of love, a circle of Christ's followers who invest in one another because Christ has invested in them, who exhibit love not based on the mutuality and attractiveness of its members, but on the model of Christ, who washed the feet of everyone (including Judas).”ⁱⁱ

We are called to love each other as He has loved us.ⁱⁱⁱ

I think that’s pretty clear, so let’s change gears to talk about what that love actually looks like. Because Hollywood and Hallmark have kind of skewed our understanding of ‘love.’ Jesus’ love is not primarily an emotion or a feeling; we look to the Cross to understand what love is and there we see that the love that Jesus displayed on the Cross is a conscious decision to act for the wellbeing of another person.

It’s the kind of love that we see in the foot-washing – humble, tangible, real. It’s the kind of love we see over in 1 Corinthians 13. On Valentines’ Day for the reading plan, we read 1 Corinthians 13 – ‘love is patient, love is kind’ – you often hear that at weddings, but frankly, Paul wrote that about the church, not about husbands and wives. If we’re going to love each other the way that Jesus loved us, we need to love each other with a love that is patient and kind, that does not envy or boast, a love that does not insist on its own way, a love that keeps no record of wrongs, a love that always assumes the best about the other.

Just think about that. Can you imagine how our relationships would change if we even just gave each other the benefit of the doubt and assumed in every moment that we’re acting of out love for one another? It’s radical; it’s counter-cultural.

And by and large, I think it’s something we’re doing. I mean, when you think about it, we’re a pretty heterogeneous church. There’s farmers here and city people, there’s blue collars here and white collars here; there’s people in their 80’s and people in the 20’s; by religious tradition we’ve got Lutherans and Presbyterians and Baptists and charismatics and Anglicans and yet, there is a bottom-line spirit of welcome and acceptance in our church.

I remember interviewing here, I ask the hiring committee: ‘Why should someone come to Langford?’ ‘If a new family moved into the area, what about Langford would attract them to this church?’ After a little thought, they said ‘We’re a really friendly church.’ And I thought, ‘Oh sure, every church says they’re a friendly church.’ But then we came and you really were

friendly and welcoming – and not like weird friendly and welcoming like ‘give me some space’ – just genuinely welcoming as a church should be.

And top of that, I know how you care for each other and support each other and take each other meals and that’s great. We’re not a church that’s known for infighting and back-biting so that’s great too.

I do wonder though if there are places even in my own heart where I need to die to self to say ‘I’m not always going to get my way here. I can celebrate that things are not exactly the way I want them because I know that they are benefiting my brothers and sisters in Jesus.’ I wonder if there are things that we can do to make sure people on the margins of our community are not falling through the cracks. I’m not saying that there are; but I think that it would be wise for all of us to invite the Holy Spirit in, to show us how and where we can be more Christ-like in our love for one another.

Because, admittedly, this *is* a command. 13:34 does not say ‘A new suggestion I give you.’ Chapter 13, chapter 15, both times, this is my *command*. It’s not optional. It’s not ‘this is how you become a next-level church;’ this is a non-negotiable, absolutely foundational, if you don’t get this right, you get nothing right concept.

Apparently John, the disciple who wrote this, was very fond of reminding his disciples ‘Little children, love one another.’ John followed Jesus and then became a pastor in his own right and St. Jerome in the fourth century tells us that his disciples got tired of hearing it and said ‘why do you always say that?’ and John replied, ‘It is the Lord’s command. If this alone be done, it is enough.’^{iv}

And he’s right. If this is all we do, love one another selflessly, sacrificially, as Jesus loved us, then we are being a faithful church. That’s what Jesus said, isn’t it? By this, all people will know you are my disciples; not by a big building, not by powerful miracles, not even by cultural influence. It is by love that we are to be known.

Love one another as Jesus has loved you.

Benediction

9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.
(1Jo 4:9-11 NIV)

ⁱ Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 891.

ⁱⁱ Gary Burge, *John* (NIVAC), 387.

ⁱⁱⁱ ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

^{iv} John was known in the ancient church for his concern for love. Jerome tells of John in his extreme old age saying, whenever he was carried into the assembly, "Little children, love one another."

When his disciples got tired of this, they asked, "Master, why do you always say this?"

"It is the Lord's command. If this alone be done, it is enough" (Jerome Commentary on Galatians at Gal 6:10).
John 13:31 quoted in Rodney Whitacre, *John* (IVPNTC).