

Recognize Jesus' Real Command

Loving the Unlovable Series, April 9 & 10, 2022 Palm Sunday Weekend | John 13:31-35

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IT'S EASY TO MISUNDERSTAND SOMEONE'S REAL WORDS

Reporters in Berlin in 1989 misunderstood the words of an East German government spokesman.

Democratic movements were surging across eastern Europe, even in East Germany.

For decades, the Berlin Wall stood as a dividing line between East Berlin and West Berlin. It kept East Germans from fleeing.

The East German people were demanding reforms, particularly the opportunity to travel freely.

The East German government decided to issue new travel regulations.

Shortly before the government spokesperson was scheduled to speak, he was given notes about updated travel regulations. Nothing was really changing. However, the notes mentioned that the government was discussing removing restrictions on travel.

After droning on for a boring hour, the spokesperson accidentally implied that travel restrictions would be removed.

Reporters quickly picked up on the implication that the Berlin Wall would be open and asked when the regulations took effect. "Immediately," the confused spokesman said.

Reports spread quickly. Within hours, crowds gathered at the border crossings.

Guards faced a decision—fire on the crowds or open the crossings. They opened the crossings.¹

Quickly, the wall itself came down all because a spokesman misunderstood the government and reporters misunderstood the spokesman.

Similarly, we can easily misunderstand Jesus' real command in John 13.

East Germany's spokesman said more than he intended, and people heard more than he said.

In the case of Jesus' real command in John 13, Jesus is saying more than we easily hear, and we hear more than we easily live out. We easily misunderstand Jesus' real command.

However, after three weeks, we are getting to the heart of Jesus' real command.

NOW WE'RE READY TO RECOGNIZE JESUS' REAL COMMAND

Let's review what has happened in John 13.

After arriving in Jerusalem for the Passover Feast, Jesus and his disciples gathered for a meal.

This would be their last supper together before Jesus' crucifixion.

During the meal, Jesus washed the dirty feet of his disciples.

After he did so, he told them that his action was an example he wanted them to imitate.

He talked about one of the disciples betraying him. Then he identified Judas as the betrayer.

¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/30/AR2009103001846_pf.html

Judas left to conspire with the Jewish religious leaders.

With Judas gone, Jesus turned to teaching the remaining disciples what he wanted them to know before his crucifixion.

In John 13, we've discovered that godly love is practical and sacrificial.

Jesus shows us what godly love looks like when he, the Teacher and Lord, washes the feet of his disciples, who are his servants and creations. Godly love is practical. It can also be humbling.

Washing the disciples' feet points us toward Jesus' ultimate act of godly love. He dies to pay the price for our sins. Godly love is also sacrificial.

Now we know what love looks like. It's practical and sacrificial.

We've broadened our definition of the "unlovable."

The unlovable are people who have betrayed us, hurt us, or caused us difficulties. They are difficult to love; we don't want to love them.

The unlovable can also be people who are different from us and make us uncomfortable.

The unlovable can even be people very close to us, people we loved at one time but who have (for one reason or another and for a long or a short time) become unlovable.

We've created a toolkit that helps us to love the unlovable even though it can be difficult.

When we know who we are, we have an easier time loving even the unlovable.

When we expect tough days, we can press through when loving the unlovable becomes hard.

When we decide beforehand, we are more likely to love when someone is unlovable.

Now John 13:31-35 helps us to recognize the full force of Jesus' command:

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."

In these verses, Jesus turns his example into a straightforward command: love one another.

We've been through the journey with Jesus, so we know partly what he means.

However, nestled in these verses are **Three Reasons to Love Practically and Sacrificially**

1. WE MAY GLIMPSE GOD'S GLORY

Let's review what John 13:31-32 says about God's glory:

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."

What is God's glory?

God's glory is that which makes him impressive and imposing.

Anytime infinite God makes himself known to us, we experience his glory.

In Exodus 24, God's glory appears to the children of Israel. God's glory descends on Mount Sinai like a cloud, but the cloud is dark and like a devouring fire accompanied by lighting and the sound of trumpets. That's the picture we get of God's glory outside of heaven.

That's the kind of glory we expect to see in Jesus.

In John 13, God's glory was coming to a crescendo in Jesus.

God the Father is glorified in God the Son, and God the Father glorifies God the Son.

What does this mean?

John 1:14 tells us that God's glory was in Jesus,

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

However, the Gospels repeatedly tell us that God's glory in Jesus was not immediately obvious during his earthly ministry.

Now in John 13, Jesus says that it is time for God's glory to be revealed in him.

In **John 17:4-5**, Jesus argues that his obedience, ministry, suffering on the cross, and death together fully and definitively reveal God's glory in him,

"I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."

Jesus means his betrayal, arrest, humiliation, trial, condemnation, crucifixion, torment on the cross, bearing the weight of sin, atoning death, and burial. These all reveal God's glory.

Jesus loving practically and sacrificially on the cross reveals God's glory.

When we fail to love practically and sacrificially, we miss out on God's glory.

When we fail to love practically and sacrificially, life becomes all about us.

Life becomes small and bends inward on us.

When we fail to love practically and sacrificially, we fail to manifest the kind of divine glory that Jesus radiated on the cross, and we don't see the glory of God that was all around us and available to us all along.

When we fail to love practically and sacrificially, we are like a pipe organ that is sitting idle.

The pipe organ has been called "The King of Instruments."

Pipe organs bring together a keyboard with pipes through which air is pushed and vibrates.

The pipes range in size from pencil-length to dozens of feet in length.²

The sound they produce can shake a room.

There are pipe organs in churches and elsewhere across the world that are sitting unused every week, with no one to play them and no one who wants to hear them.

All that sound is going unmade and unheard.

² <https://www.npr.org/2006/06/05/5448985/organ-music-pulling-out-all-the-stops>

When we fail to love practically and sacrificially, we are like an unplayed pipe organ. There is glory that should be displayed in us and through us that is not being displayed.

However, when we love practically and sacrificially, we may glimpse God's glory.

When we love practically and sacrificially in God's name, God's glory is displayed. We become like a pipe organ, once again bellowing to life and shaking rafters with music. If you prefer, we become like trumpets blaring, violins singing, and drums playing. Plus, we have the opportunity to sense and experience God's glory ourselves.

2. WE CAN LIVE FULLY IN THIS MOMENT

Jesus defines this moment in time in John 13:33:

"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.'"

Jesus would be leaving his followers.

Jesus affirmed that he would be with the disciples for a little while longer.

Then he would no longer be with them.

Jesus would no longer be with the disciples after he was betrayed. The disciples would not stand trial with him.

Jesus would no longer be with the disciples after his death. It was not time for the disciples to die with him.

Jesus would no longer be with the disciples after his ascension. After his resurrection, Jesus would ascend into heaven and to his Father. The disciples could not go there yet either.

Jesus would be present with his disciples through the Holy Spirit.

However, Jesus was turning the page from one moment to another.

Jesus was defining this moment as the time to follow his instructions.

So far, the disciples' job was to accompany Jesus and imitate him.

Now they would primarily follow Jesus' instructions without his physical presence.

Our job in this moment is the same as theirs—follow his instructions.

As we will find in verses 34 and 35, Jesus' first instruction is that in this moment we are to love one another practically and sacrificially.

If we do not love practically and sacrificially, FOMO may turn into ROMO.

FOMO is the "Fear of Missing Out."

FOMO is the idea that something good is happening somewhere, probably to people we know, and we are not there to enjoy it. We don't want to miss out.

With social media and cell phones, we are constantly pinged by updates on our friends' lives. We see the fun they are having, the exciting things they are doing, and the people they are doing those fun, exciting things with, and we are afraid we're missing out. That's FOMO.

But if we fail to love practically and sacrificially, FOMO becomes ROMO, the “Fear of Missing Out” becomes the “Reality of Missing Out.” If we fail to love practically and sacrificially, then we know that we are missing out on something important God is doing and wants us to do.

Practical, sacrificial love helps us to live fully in this moment.

Practical, sacrificial love is the first command Jesus gave us after he announced his departure.

Following Jesus’ instruction is critically important to the moment in history between when Jesus ascended into heaven and the moment when Jesus returns.

Practical, sacrificial love for one another is critical to this moment.

If we want to live fully in this moment, we must love one another practically and sacrificially.

3. WE WILL BUILD THE NEW COMMUNITY WE LONG FOR

Jesus gives a new command in John 13:34-35:

“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.”

In some ways, this command is very old.

Jesus calls this commandment new. By new, he implies that it has not been given before.

However, **Leviticus 19:18** says,

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

Jesus repeatedly quotes Leviticus 19:18 and says it summarizes half of the Law.

Then in what ways is this command new?

1 John 2:7 John admits that the new commandment feels very old,

Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning.

However, John goes on to write in **1 John 2:8** that the commandment is indeed new,

At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

The commandment to love one another is new in part because obeying it brings us out of the darkness that we’ve been living in all along and allows us to live in the **light**! That’s new!

Furthermore, in **1 John 3:24**, adds that if we love one another, we abide in God and God abides in us. He writes,

Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

God the Holy Spirit is with us, helping us to love one another. The **Holy Spirit** helps us? That’s new!

Jesus came back to this new commandment later that same evening in **John 15:12-13** where he said,

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

Jesus says that we are to lay down our lives for one another as he has done for us. That feels new in and of itself. Plus, there is now a **new community** for whom I must lay down my life if needed. That's new!

This commandment is new because it constitutes the new community.

Jesus brought completely unrelated people together.

Then he makes them family to one another.³

He makes us—his followers—sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters to one another. We're now family, the Church, a new community!

When he washes the dirty feet of the people in this little family, he is showing us what type of behavior is meant to characterize this new community.

Keeping the new command builds a new community that is a witness to the world.

Jesus said that if we love one another practically and sacrificially, then people will know that we are his disciples.

People are watching our love the way the meter reader watched the electricity we used at the house I grew up in.

Our house had a meter on the side of the house that measured the amount of electricity we were using. Each month, the meter reader would come by and note the number on our meter. Compare this month's number to last month, and you got the amount of electricity we used.

That image describes how people look at us. They are reading the meter on our expressions of practical, sacrificial love. If the meter is spinning, then we show that God is real, his power is working in our lives, and we are being changed.

Practical, sacrificial love is a witness to the world.

Keeping the new commandment builds a new community that thrives.

Our community with one another is built one loving, practical, sacrificial act at a time.

It's built around shared meals, conversations, and confidences kept.

It's built as we tackle problems together, serve together, study together, and pray together.

It's built when we simply spend time together and listen to each other.

It's built when we show up for each other in big moments and bad moments.

It's built when we carry someone else and when we let someone else carry us.

The new community is built when we demonstrate godly, practical, sacrificial love.

The new community is something we long for.

The world watches us when we love one another because community is something we all want.

The human heart, created in the image of God, longs for the new community Jesus creates.

You and I, together in the Church, have access to this thing we long for.

³ Matthew 12:50.

So, let's build it. Let's build the new community by loving one another.

WHAT ABOUT THE UNLOVABLE?

This series is about loving the unlovable.

However, I've spent most of this sermon talking about love itself and about loving one another.

That's because we have to broaden the concept of "unlovable" again, because sometimes even people inside the Church become unlovable to one another.

Loving others practically and sacrificially is difficult.

It costs us time, energy, inconvenience, and risk.

Theologian and scholar D. A. Carson writes,

"The new command is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, profound enough that most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice: Love one another."⁴

– D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*

Loving the unlovable practically and sacrificially is even more difficult.

When we love the unlovable and those who might become unlovable, the risk goes up.

We become vulnerable.

We really don't like to take those kinds of risks, and we really don't like to be vulnerable.

Jesus laid down his life.

Jesus' decision to love even the unlovable led him to take on human flesh, come to earth, live among us, and die on our behalf.

Jesus laid down his life for us, and that's what he is calling us to do.

Jesus is calling us to lay down our lives.

The sacrifice involved in loving one another and in loving the unlovable is real.

The inconvenience, the risk, and the vulnerability are all real.

However, Jesus doesn't call us to live convenient, risk-free, secure lives.

He calls us to lay down our lives.

When we become followers of Jesus, like Jesus we die to an old way of life. We lay that old life down, hopefully never to take it up again. The life we live after meeting Jesus is a new life! It's a life of love and obedience.

Jesus is calling us to lay down our lives for each other and for him.

Now we get it. Now we know what we have to gain and what we have to lose. Now we know what Jesus is calling us to.

When we recognize the full force of Jesus' real commandment, we can love the unlovable.

⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, p. 484.