



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 13: 31-38

Winter 2023

"The Eleventh Commandment"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Gospel of John. We're in chapter 13 and we will conclude that chapter. We're looking at verses 31 through 38.

If you were here last week, we concluded with Judas leaving the room. They are celebrating the Passover, having the feast of Passover—the Lord has washed the disciples feet, and even the feet of Judas. Then we read in verse 30, "So after receiving the morsel he, (*Judas*), went out immediately; and it was night." And as I explained, there's more to it than simply the time of the day recorded in that statement: "It was night"; and I think Augustin said, "And he was night." Verse 31,

<sup>31</sup>Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; <sup>32</sup>if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. <sup>33</sup>Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' <sup>34</sup>A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

<sup>36</sup>Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later." <sup>37</sup>Peter

said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." <sup>38</sup> Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times.

John 13: 31-38

May the LORD bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in prayer.

What a blessing it is, LORD, to be with Your people on a Sunday morning. A blessing to be here where we can open the Scriptures, read them freely, spend time in the hour considering the meaning of what we've read and how it applies to us; and what it tells us about You and how we're to live our lives. And so LORD, we pray that You'd bless us as we do that: Instruct us, convict us where we need conviction, encourage us where we need encouragement.

And we have much to be encouraged about as we read this, because we consider the greatness of our God, our Triune God: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and all that they have done for us from all eternity. A plan that was made, a plan that was executed, and a plan that has been applied. And what do we have to say about it? 'We did nothing to deserve it, nothing to earn it, nothing to achieve it. We received everything from a good and gracious God who is in control of all things.'

So LORD, help us to know that; and to grow in our appreciation of it. And as a consequence of that, love You more—and when we do that we will love one another more. So, that's our lesson; teach it to us this morning, Father, encourage us.

LORD, You are sovereign. Your Son demonstrates that in this upper room and all that took place, and how He was in complete control even though, under what we would think humanly speaking, was unbearable pressure. But He controlled everything and He revealed much. And one is that, He's in control; and we need to remember that when we consider the difficulties of life that we experience—as well as the blessings. But we know You're in control; and so we can look to You and pray for our needs.

We pray for those that are going through difficulty now. Many, no doubt, are going through it and we don't even know who they are, what they're experiencing now. We don't know their trials, but You do. And we're in Your hand and we can trust You at every moment. So we trust you now, LORD: To teach us, to encourage us from the text we've read, and through the hymns we'll sing. And we look to You to bless in Christ's name. Amen.

*(Message)* Why do Christians wear crosses? It sounds like stupid question, I know. It's a form of identity. Every faith has a symbol of identity. Jews have the Star of David; Islam has a crescent; Buddhism, a lotus flower. Christians have the cross: Which seems appropriate, especially since all through the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke of the cross as His glory. And yet, nowhere did Christ command that we identify ourselves as His followers by wearing a cross. In fact, it would have been unthinkable in that time.

Instead, He gave a very different way of showing our identity. It's something intangible, not something that we can hold in our hand, or hang around our necks, or wear on a lapel, (that really would be easy). In John 13, verse 35 he told His disciples, "By this all men will know you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." He called that "a new commandment". (vs34).

It's the subject He takes up only now because until now, He wasn't free to speak on true discipleship. A stranger had been in the room with them. Maybe you've been with friends but you couldn't speak freely because someone was present who was of a 'different spirit'. He wasn't sympathetic with your views. But when he left, the whole atmosphere changed. The group lightened up; everyone began to speak his mind, and the conversation began to flow freely.

That happened in the upper room when Judas "went out". (vs30). The whole atmosphere changed; Jesus could now speak His mind freely to His true disciples for whom the message was intended. These verses have been called 'The Prologue to the

Upper Room Discourse', (or 'The Farewell Discourse'), in which Jesus gave personal instruction to the disciples before leaving them.

He began with two main subjects. *First*, His glorification, and *second* 'a new commandment'. The two are connected. His glorification makes it possible for us to obey His instruction. Both are important. The importance of the subject of His glorification is seen from the fact that He used the word *glorify*, five times in verses 31 and 32, and also from the fact that it's the first subject that He took up.

"Now is the Son of Man glorified," (vs31a), that is, now that Judas has left on his errand of betrayal. The wheels had been set in motion for the Lord's arrest and crucifixion, and nothing would stop it. And so He spoke of it, actually, in the past tense to indicate the certainty of it. It was so sure that it was as though it had already occurred. (And He was speaking of His death.)

We saw that earlier in chapter 12, when the Greeks came seeking Jesus. The Lord took that as a sign; it signified to Him that His death was near. And He said, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified..." (vs23).

Now, there are glorious ways to die, (at least we can imagine that when say, a soldier falls on a field of battle). Sometimes death is even romanticized. But anyone who saw Christ die would not have believed that there was any glory in it. To everyone there He appeared to die as a common criminal, nailed on a cross, between two thieves—naked and helpless.

And yet the Lord is clear, as are the apostles, 'The cross is where the Son of God was *glorified*.' —And also the Father, because the Lord added, "...and God is glorified in Him." (vs31b). God the Father was glorified in His wisdom, and power, and love—because the cross meets all our needs, and satisfied His character and justice.

*First*, it revealed God's wisdom because it solved the riddle of how a holy God could forgive unholy sinners; how He could be both *just* and the *justifier* of the one who believed in Christ.

The answer was found in the cross, where Christ was nailed in our place as our substitute, and where He suffered the penalty of our sins to satisfy God's justice and remove our guilt. In the words of Paul, "He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (1Cor 5:21). God did not make Him *sin*, or *sinful*. I should say He made Him a *sin bearer* for us—for His people, His elect, an innumerable multitude, so that we would escape the penalty, go free, and live forever. In that way, God's justice was completely, and without compromise, satisfied in a substitute. That's God's wisdom. No man thought that up; no man could have imagined that. That's God's wisdom and glory.

And yet, the solution to the problem of God being both just and the justifier of the guilty came at great cost—the cost of His own Son. But in that we see His great love: He paid such a great price for us who are so undeserving. Now that's Romans chapter 5, verse 8, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners...", (*guilty and unworthy sinners, that's when*), "...Christ died for us."

So at the cross, God demonstrated His wisdom, His love, and His power: Because there He saved us—and delivered us from doom and from all our enemies. The cross was not a defeat, it was victory. It was there that He defeated the devil: Because when He paid for our sins, paid up all our debts and took away our guilt, He liberated us from the power of the devil and the demons.

In fact, in Colossians chapter 2, verse 15, Paul described the Lord's victory at the cross, a 'Disarming of the demonic powers, and dragging them behind His chariot in a triumphant parade.' Now that's power. Outside of Christ, people live in darkness and are open to the devil's deception. They're slaves of superstition and despair and he gives no hope. And in fact, he controls them by "the fear of death"; that's what the author of Hebrews tells us in Hebrews chapter 2, verse 15. And that's where we all would be, apart from the grace of God. Christ rescued us from Satan's control.

But not from Satan's attacks; we still wrestle with that. Paul told the Ephesians about the spiritual powers that we have to deal with daily; but they don't rule over us;

and we can overcome them. And we can do that because at the cross, Christ obtained for us new life. And that really is the greatest rescue of all; He delivered us from our old, sinful self when it was crucified with Him.

That's how Paul puts it in Galatians chapter 2, verse 20. "I have been crucified with Christ..." , 'When Christ was crucified as our representative, I was there on that cross, in effect, and my life was slain when His life was slain.' "I have been crucified with Christ; and it's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me." (ibid.)

The person we were is dead—crucified. We are now new people, and Christ is in every believer to enable us to be obedient as we live by faith. The cross is the reason His disciples are a new creation, able to do what He will call His "new commandment." So the cross is *glory*: The glory of God's wisdom, of His love, and His power. The Father is glorified in the salvation that He planned for us from all eternity; and the Son is glorified in accomplishing that plan.

But there is glory beyond the cross. And Jesus spoke of that future glory in verse 32, "...if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately." That happened at the resurrection when Christ overcame the grave; and then, 40 days later when he ascended into heaven and was enthroned at the right hand of the Father, triumphant and in glory.

The cross wasn't the end. God raised His Son and exalted Him to glory as proof that He had accepted His sacrifice for us. When He said, 'It was finished' ...It was finished! And the proof of that is the resurrection and the ascension of Christ into heaven. And as a result of that, we have a living Savior; and not only a living Savior, but we have a triumphant Savior who is ruling and reigning.

And that means we have His life within us—and we have His victory as well. We are "more than conquerors", as Paul told the Romans,(8:37). Every believer is in Christ, joined to Him spiritually: Really. Actually; so that presently we share in His resurrection life, power, and as I said, future glory.

Now all of this would happen "*immediately*", the Lord said—in a matter of hours, in a matter of days, events were already moving quickly. But the disciples didn't understand any of this. So in verse 33, the Lord spoke to them more specifically, more directly—and spoke to them affectionately. Knowing that their earthly relationship would end soon, He called them "Little children".

This is the only place in the Gospel where that word occurs. John used it seven times in his first epistle, in 1 John, and was likely influenced by the Lord's use of it here. But the Lord uses this expression only now, (after Judas was gone), because it revealed their true spiritual relationship with Him. They are children of His because of His grace. They are children of His because of the new birth.

So He spoke to them in this very personal way with great affection, because they needed to know that He was leaving. They couldn't come; they would remain here, and so they needed to know how they were to live in this present world. Verse 33, "Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' "

He told the Jewish crowd that, six months earlier, in chapter 7. They didn't understand that He was telling them of His death and ascension into heaven. The disciples may not have been any more aware of His meaning, but it was clear that He was leaving. He was on a unique journey, a mission, and they would remain behind here in this world. So for this new situation, He gave them new instruction, what He called, (in verse 34), "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." Love is the great epic of the New Testament, and one of the great themes, or topics, of the fourth Gospel, (it's sometimes called '*The Gospel of God's Love*').

But it is a virtue that is of great importance in the Old Testament as well. We see that in various places. We see it, for example, in Leviticus chapter 19, verse 18, where the command is given, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Rabbi Hillel, who lived

about a generation before our Lord said, "Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving mankind, and bring them nigh to the Law."

So how was the Lord's commandment here *new*? And the answer to that is, 'It's not new in the content of love, but it is new in other ways. It's new in its *standard*.' In the Old Testament, the standard for love is *self*: 'You shall love as you love yourself.' Now that's a high standard. But in *the new commandment*, the standard is not *self* but *Christ*: "...as I have loved *you*."

He is our model—and His love is perfect; it is unconditional love and a constant love; Christ never stops loving. His love is never in any way diminished at all. It doesn't go up and down. It doesn't fluctuate. It is infinite, it is eternal—and here His statement is in the *present tense* to underscore that. The idea is '*keep on loving*.'

It's simple to understand, isn't it? We get the point here. Simple to understand—but it is hard to practice. And the more we understand the nature of this love, the more we recognize how true that is. Christ's love is a sacrificial love—as just exemplified in what He had done for them in washing the feet of the disciples. He humbled Himself to serve them; and would humble Himself to serve them unto death itself. Well, that's the nature of the love that we are to have for one another: A love that dies to self and lives for others.

But love now also has a new object. In the Old Testament, the object was one's neighbor: And that was understood to mean, 'One's fellow Israelite.' So they were to love other Jews, (which wasn't easy). Love's never easy. But at least they could interpret that command narrowly enough so that they felt no obligation to the Gentiles.

But this *new commandment* has a new object, a much broader object: It is, "one another", and in the church, "one another", is not a physical neighbor but a spiritual one. That is a higher standard, because in the 'New Covenant community', in the church, there are both Jews and Gentiles—who were natural enemies. Jews looked down on the Gentiles as ritually unclean, and morally corrupt. And they were. They were notoriously immoral. And so they called them '*dogs*', '*pariahs*'. The Jews wouldn't eat with them. They had no fellowship with them; wouldn't integrate into Gentile society.

And that greatly offended the Gentiles. Both Greek and Roman writers called the Jews, "Haters of mankind". So hostility was strong between both groups, and yet, in Christ, and in the church, those two groups were not to just tolerate each other, they were to love one another as Christ loved them.

Jews accepting Gentiles as equals, Greeks loving Jews, slaves loving masters, masters loving slaves ... in Christ. The deep divisions that were so numerous then, (and are so numerous today), were closed. Alexander Maclaren wrote, "Barbarian and free, male and female, Jew and Greek, learned and ignorant, clasped hands and sat down at one table, and felt themselves all one in Christ Jesus."

And that's the challenge of the *new commandment*—to be caring for one another, as Christ cares for us. To be forgiving of one another as Christ has forgiven us. It's a high standard, one that is easy to preach, one that must be preached, but a standard that is often hard to meet. So often Christians fall victim to jealousy, competition, divisions. In fact, the more we understand the standard the Lord gave, the more we understand how far short we fall—and the more we realize and recognize our sinfulness and our unworthiness.

But it's in that way that we begin to appreciate more the Lord's love for us. It wasn't the *good*, it wasn't the *gifted*, it wasn't the *charming* that He loved, but *sinners*. That's what we are, all of us. The *glory* of Christ in the cross is what He did for us: The pardon for sin that we have, and the power of sin that is now broken. We still have sin. Our flesh is weak, and the devil is strong, and he tempts us daily. So we fail to love our brothers and sisters.

But one remedy for that, I think, one remedy for that failure is to remember that we are all *in Him*, and *He is in us through the Holy Spirit*. We, each, are equally filled with Christ through the Spirit. The Lord died equally for all of His people. He loves us equally—and infinitely. We are a unique society of Light in a world of darkness, a world that's against us. But we have each other, and should love each other as Christ loves us.

And again, because we are in Him, we have His *resurrection life*. We have His power to enable us to do the very thing that we should do. And by His grace, we can do that; and we must do that. "Love" is the great commandment for the church.

There's a story often told in connection with this passage which was preserved by Andrew Bonar in his edition of *Samuel Rutherford's Letters*. Rutherford was one of Scotland's greatest theologians, one of the principle authors of *The Westminster Confession of Faith* and *The Shorter Catechism*. He was a devoted pastor; and early in his ministry was persecuted and imprisoned for refusing to conform to the doctrine and practice of the Church of England, (the Anglican church).

The story is told that one day James Usher, the Anglican Arch Bishop of Ireland, came through Rutherford's town on a Saturday evening, and stopped at his house in disguise. Rutherford welcomed the stranger and offered him a room for the night. They shared a meal together, and afterwards Rutherford invited Usher to join the family in Scripture reading and Catechism.

As Rutherford was reading the Catechism he asked his guest, "How many commandments are there?" And Usher replied, "Eleven." Rutherford corrected him, but the stranger insisted, "Eleven." Well Rutherford was dumbfounded. He could not believe that someone in Scotland didn't know there were just ten commandments.

Then the stranger quoted the Lord's words, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." Everyone began to wonder who he was—and were they entertaining an angel unaware?

Well, the next morning, when Rutherford heard him praying for the church service, the guest identified himself as the Archbishop Usher. They had a good conversation and Rutherford even invited him, Usher, to preach. He preached that Sunday morning, an Anglican in a Presbyterian pulpit—and he preached on *The New Commandment*. Well, the story illustrates a great truth. The 'eleventh commandment' heals the divisions that exist between us, and unites the body of Christ. And it is our obligation to Christ.

It's also our privilege because 'the eleventh commandment' is the distinguishing mark of the Christian in this new age. Verse 35, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

We live before a watching world. It sees the way we live, just as well as it sees or hears the things we say. I think Mike Black has said, "The greatest sermon you can preach sometimes is just the way you live." And our conduct toward one another should match the Good News of Grace that we have received; and that the Lord said will mark us out as His disciples.

He didn't say they will know you by *premillennialism*, or *predestination*, or *the inerrancy of Scripture*. Doctrine is important, and those are all important doctrines. I hold to them, I preach them—and I preach many others. When the church is weak on doctrine, the church is weak—and it's about to die. Doctrine is essential.

Still, Jesus said, 'What will set us apart from the world, what the world will see as our distinguishing mark is love for one another'. Not love for the world. That's not to say we're not to love the lost; we are, and we do. We go to the lost with the Gospel, with the only hope that the lost have. But He's not telling us, 'Go love the world.' He's saying, 'You must love the family of God. And that's the evidence to the world that you're His disciples.'

And that's a challenge. It's what distinguishes us from the world, and displays God's life changing Grace to the world. Love is what Dr. Johnson called, "The evangelizing virtue". So it's very important, a very important subject of instruction—and one that the Lord would come back to again later in the evening.

So we might expect, (as important as this was), that it would get the attention of the disciples—especially since, according to Luke, during the Passover meal, they began arguing among one another about which one of them was the greatest. That's human nature, isn't it? 'I'm the greatest. I have priority.'

But the Lord's words on love seem to have made very little impression on them. Their minds were still on the Lord's announcement that He was going away. Peter was so

disturbed that he interrupted the Lord in the next verse with the question, "Lord, where are you going?" (vs36). And Jesus patiently answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now..." (vs36b). His mission had to be completed first.

And Peter himself had a mission that he had to fulfill, and that's the implication in the Lord's answer, "but you shall follow later." (vs36c). Follow Him where? Follow Him how? Well, 'Follow Him to heaven', as all the disciples would. Or maybe, follow Him in death. It could mean both of those. Peter's discipleship would be crowned with martyrdom. But he wasn't ready for that; he wasn't ready to take up his cross and lay down his life. He would have to fall and fail, miserably, and be restored by the Lord before he could follow fully—and fulfill the eleventh commandment.

Peter protested, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." (vs37). 'Wherever You're going, to the Greeks, to the Romans, I will follow loyally and I'll defend You under whatever circumstances there may be.' Well, we know Peter, we know he meant it. He genuinely loved the Lord. But he would soon learn how weak and faithless he really was. And the Lord told him, 'He would not follow. He would deny Him, and he would deny Him three times.' (vs38). And, of course, he did.

But all of these disciples, there in that room that night, deserted the Lord. It would happen in just a few hours, after a night of instruction on love. But that's the stuff that they, (and we), are made of—dust. It is when he is restored, at the end of the Gospel, that Peter learned the great lesson of the Lord's unconditional love for him—and how he was to love others, even when they fail.

That is one of the important ways in which we love one another. It's when a saint fails and falls, that we come alongside him or her, and restore that person to fellowship and spiritual usefulness. So through great failure, all of the disciples learned the Lord's lesson on love, this *new commandment*.

John did. The story is, when he was a very old man, with very little strength left in his body and his voice, he had to be carried to meet fellow Christians. And all he could do was repeat the command, 'Little children, love one another.'

And the early church learned the lesson. A century later, Tertullian wrote that the pagans marveled at the Christians' love for each other, especially when they faced fierce persecution. They said, "See how they love one another, how ready they are to die for one another."

I have nothing against crosses on churches or as jewelry. My wife wears a beautiful gold Huguenot cross a friend brought her from France—it's designed with meaningful symbolism. But no cross we might wear on our person or put on our buildings has any power at all. Only the cross that Christ was put on has power. It saves the lost, and it makes friends of enemies so that they not only tolerate each other, but love one another, and even, by God's grace, lay down their lives for one another. May we be like that.

And if you're here without Christ, may you come to Him, believe in Him; trust in Christ for salvation. You need it. You're lost. Be found in Him, and found in Him who considered it His glory to die for sinners.

Father, we give You praise for a wonderful, merciful Savior. We praise You for Your great and glorious plan of salvation that You set out from all eternity. It was always in Your mind to save lost sinners—and not a few, but a vast multitude that we can't even number. And we thank You for Your Son, who accomplished that plan; He is a wonderful, merciful Savior.

May we know You better and understand that love more, that we might love one another, as Your Son has commanded us to.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace. In Christ's name. Amen.

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