

As I Have Loved You

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[0 : 00] Well, have you ever experienced that phenomenon where you become so used to seeing something that you see it, but you don't really notice it anymore?

Maybe it's something on the wall in your house. Maybe it's a picture from your wedding or some kind of keepsake that you put on display. You know it's there and you walk past it all the time. You see it there again and again and again, and yet somehow seeing it there, it just doesn't really register anymore. You see it there, but you don't really appreciate it like you used to. You know it's a picture of a special moment or a wonderful scene, but it's been a long time since you really stopped and looked at the expression on the people's faces in the picture or at the details that really bring out the beauty in that scene.

This morning as we come to the word of God, we come to one of the greatest and most important things that Jesus ever said, but perhaps something so great and so important that it's become quite familiar, so familiar that maybe we've stopped seeing it and hearing it altogether.

[1 : 19] Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples. It's the night of his betrayal and arrest. Judas has already left the house to put his plan into action.

And as we heard last week, Jesus is calling for the careful attention of his closest followers because his time with them is running out. Imagine Jesus here at the table looking around into each face, looking into your face and saying these words, a new command I give to you, love one another as I have loved you.

So you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? It comes from John chapter 13. Yet I wonder if these words have become to you so familiar that you see them, but you don't really notice them anymore.

You hear them, but you don't really carry in your heart the full appreciation of them like you used to. I mean, isn't it easy to just hear Jesus say this and think, oh yeah, love.

[2 : 54] Yep. We need to love each other. Next, what else did Jesus say? Tell me something new. Tell me something I haven't heard already. I mean, we all kind of know this, don't we?

This is kind of Christianity 101. This is like basic, foundational, elementary stuff of being a Christian, right? Love. Yep.

I learned about that a long time ago. So then here's my question. Why, of all the things that Jesus could be saying to his disciples in this last words kind of moment, why is he telling them to love one another?

I mean, these are grown men that he's talking to. These are best buds who have just been on one of the most amazing adventures of a lifetime over the past three years.

Why is he speaking to them like children? Telling them something so basic, so obvious, so elementary. I mean, this is what those of us with kids say to our children, isn't it?

[4 : 03] When they get into fights with each other, we say, stop it, guys. Stop being unkind to one another. You need to love one another. And they look at you, and you say, well, is that thing that you were doing to her loving?

No. No. No. So why is Jesus speaking to these grown men, these adults here in the room around the table like they're selfish little children?

Is it possible that full-grown adults like you and me are still often acting like selfish little children? Well, we don't actually have to wonder because we actually know that these full-grown adults around the table, Peter, James, John, and the others, we know that just before this, they were actually arguing and fighting at the table.

Luke, in his gospel, tells us right after Judas kind of left the room to betray Jesus, a dispute also arose among the disciples as to which of them was considered to be the greatest.

So yes, they were behaving like self-centered children, and they needed to be told, the way that you are treating each other is unkind.

[5 : 34] You need to love one another. And so the first step to really noticing these words of Jesus again and appreciating them is admitting that this command, these words that Jesus is saying, they're not just for kids, for children.

They're not just something that we needed to hear back at the beginning of our faith journey. Jesus isn't wasting his breath here by telling them something that they don't really need to hear because they've been living like this the whole time.

No. This command is precisely what they needed to hear. And I want to say to you this morning, it's precisely what we here in this room need to hear as well, as much as our own children do.

It's something we all have need of, to love one another. In some cases, to stop treating the other person as if it's all about me.

In other cases, to stop speaking to the other unkind words or words behind their back. In some cases, to stop having an attitude towards that person of, I'm better than you or I'm more mature than you.

[7 : 00] In other cases, to stop ignoring or giving the cold shoulder to someone. In some cases, to stop holding a grudge against that person for that thing that they did to you one time or maybe that short list of things that they did or said to you over the years and more.

Love one another. It means not just stopping that selfish attitudes, those ways, those unkind behaviors. It means also starting and doing the kind things, the good things, the right things to one another.

Believe it or not, I've even heard Christians say about me, not about me, but to me, about other Christians. I've heard them say, well, I'm not angry at that person. I'm not holding anything against them.

I just don't want to be around them or have anything to do with them. Listen, Jesus didn't say, a new command I give you, stop treating each other badly.

that's a start, but it doesn't go the whole way. Jesus is not looking for a bunch of followers who are apathetic and uncaring and indifferent towards one another and just kind of show up on Sunday, go through the motions and then go their separate ways and have nothing to do with each other's lives.

[8 : 27] No. The command is, love one another. Think about one another the thoughts that love thinks. Say to one another the kind of words that love speaks.

Do to one another the kind of things that love does. Initiate with one another. Give generously to one another. Serve and meet the needs of each other.

Cry with those who are mourning. Celebrate with those who are rejoicing. Actually care about the other person and what's going on in their lives.

Speak to them in such a way as to build them up and help them and encourage them. Move towards the needy with a willing heart and with open hands.

Listen to what that other person is saying. Find out what's really going on in their lives. Bear with that brother or sister when they are less than lovely.

[9 : 32] All of these things are examples of what it sometimes looks like to love one another. And as I was thinking about it this week you know it's kind of a really hard thing to describe or to define love.

Because love thinks and says and does a thousand different things depending on the situation. Depending on the situation. Depending on the need.

Depending on what you have. Depending on the kind of relationship it is. It's amazing really. Love is one of the most beautiful things that we know.

It's like a mysterious and precious jewel with countless faces. and it's beauty comes from God himself. As it says in 1 John chapter 4 God is love.

It's who he is. And a little bit down from that we love because he first loved us. love is that holy and most beautiful thing about God and his glory.

[10 : 50] That goodness inside of him that just flows out of him to his creation. It's not just a basic or elementary thing in the Christian life.

Love loving is the highest glory to which we are called to be like our good kind patient generous compassionate and intentional God.

And so that's why Jesus is taking this precious time that he has left to give them this instruction because it's not just something that we need to learn at the beginning and then we're good to go. No. Loving one another is the full expression of God's glory in us that we are being saved in order to attain to for the rest of eternity.

And it's not just one of many commands that Jesus gives. It's one of the highest, the greatest, the most important commands that he gives. Those of you who know the story, do you know what Jesus, do you remember what Jesus said earlier in the week when he was questioned by that expert in the law?

[12:05] That guy said to Jesus, teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus replied, love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment, he said. And the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself.

All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments, said Jesus. Do you hear that? Loving God is the first, it's the greatest commandment.

And loving our neighbors, loving one another is the second greatest commandment. love. So this whole thing of being commanded to love by Jesus, it's the first command that we should all learn. The one that we should focus on obeying and doing the most in our lives. It's the greatest and highest calling of every follower of Jesus. It's the thing that should most characterize our lives as followers of Christ.

[13:25] love. And not only that, says Jesus, but the whole of the instruction that God gave to Israel through Moses, the law, and the whole of the instruction that God gave to the nation of Israel afterwards, the prophets, all of that can be summed up by these two commands.

The command to love. It's amazing. It tells us a couple things. It really is the most important instruction that we are given by God.

Fulfilling all the other instructions that God gives, all the other commands God gives is bound up inside of these two. Love God and love one another.

Love your neighbor. And second, it tells us again that loving is a many-faceted thing. I mean, think of the variety of things that God has said in the law and in the prophets that came afterwards. It's like saying that the entirety of the instruction given in the Old Testament, in all its variety, was calling people to just two things. Love for God and love for one another.

[14:48] God in fact, I would suggest to you this morning that the whole Bible has been given to us by God to show us what love really looks like in action.

First, coming from God to us, and second, how it should flow from us to one another. So this is what Jesus said earlier in the week about our calling as God's people to love, but now here Jesus says a similar sort of thing to his disciples at the table on the eve of his betrayal, and there are just a few details in the way that Jesus says it that catch our attention.

For starters, Jesus calls this a new commandment, a new command, again highlighting its importance. Think about what else Jesus has been doing at this table this very evening that's new. He's been giving the disciples a new way to mark the Passover, a thing to do in remembrance of him. He's told them that there's going to be a new covenant inaugurated, a new arrangement between God and his people that will be put into effect by his blood, his death.

And then we come to this commandment, a new commandment to go with the new covenant. You'll remember that the old covenant that was made was made with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai.

[16:18] You'll remember that it came with commandments, ten of them, written on stone tablets and others given alongside. And one of those old commandments, not one of the ten, but one of the ones given alongside was what we just heard.

It was, love your neighbor as yourself. love, which kind of brings us to this question. What's so new about this command to love one another?

It seems like a kind of an old command. Why does Jesus say that this is a new command? And it's here we have to notice the next important detail.

Jesus says, love one another as I have loved you. that's a little different than love your neighbor as yourself.

In both cases, God is giving us a pattern to follow, some description of how we should love the other person. The old command that God gave was that we should love them in the same way that we love ourselves.

[17:30] And we all mostly love ourselves very much. We do all kinds of things for ourselves, for our own benefit, to make ourselves happy, to meet our own needs.

And God was then calling us to show the same care and commitment that we show to ourselves, not just to ourselves, but also to the people around us, to our neighbors. But what's new about the new command is how we should love one another.

Do you hear what Jesus says? No longer are we merely to model how we love one another after how we love ourselves. Now, says Jesus, in this new arrangement, as my people, I want you to model how you love one another after how I have loved you.

Love one another as I have loved you. So you must love one another. another. And right here, we need to really pause.

We need to linger. The temptation is to think, maybe, oh, well, how did Jesus love his disciples? Well, I'll do my best to love people like that, and then we just move on to the next thing, and we continue on the story.

[18:50] Check. I got the love command figured out. What's next? But have we got the love command figured out? This is the big question that we need to meditate long about.

How did Jesus love his disciples? How did Jesus love his disciples?

You know what? Let's break out of sermon monologue mode for a second here. Let me just put it out to you. Let's open it up for discussion. How did Jesus love his disciples?

There's lots of right answers to this. Shout them out. He went to the cross. Yes, he died for us. And that's probably the first one that comes to mind.

It's the biggest. It's the one that shows his greatest, the greatness of his love for us. What else? he spent time with them.

[19:59] Yes. He washed their feet. A humble act. He was patient with them.

How many times did he try to explain things to them and they got, it's like they didn't get it. He didn't get really frustrated and just say, I'm done with you guys. No, he bore with them.

He was patient with them. Yeah. He taught them. Yeah. He forgave them.

Yeah. I think of Peter who denied the Lord three times on the night that he was betrayed.

He said, I don't even know that guy. And Jesus forgave him. As I got thinking about this, I realized there are so many ways.

[21:08] He chose them. He initiated with them. He spoke the truth to them even when it was hard for them to hear it. He invited them along for the ride, the adventure.

He revealed his true nature to them. He spoke words of encouragement to them like a father does to his children. There's a time where he made breakfast for them. He cared about their needs even more than his own needs when he was in his time of deepest trouble.

And the list goes on and on and on. Suddenly, I hope we realize that we need to go back and read through all the Gospels again and just pay a little bit closer attention to how Jesus treated people, how he treated all his followers all along the way.

We can't just say, well, Jesus did the ultimate and died for them and so we need to love one another really deeply, really self-sacrificially. That's true. That was the greatest demonstration of his love.

But there's even more to how Jesus loved his disciples than that. There's all these countless ways, some of which you guys mentioned, that he's loved them, that's leading up to that moment where he gives his life for them.

[22:32] Then we could go and read through Acts and the epistles. We could see what the apostles pointed back to in their letters about how Jesus loved them and taught them to love in different situations, in different relationships, different contexts.

And so this is why I say that we really have to linger here. We can't just breeze past this thing that defines the new command. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

I was thinking, what can we do to help ourselves see that we're not done with this command? I thought about printing up some massive looking bookmarks that just had this massive heart that just comes right out of your Bible so that everywhere you go with this thing, it's like I cannot not see as I have loved you.

I'm not done with that yet. I need to keep learning. How have you loved me, Lord? And would you teach me to love others, the people in my life like that?

Don't worry, I didn't print those up. But maybe that would help some of you. I don't know. might help me. This command to love is not just a once in a while thing.

[23 : 54] It's not just a, well yeah, I think I did that at least once yesterday sort of thing. No. It's an everyday, all of your life sort of thing.

Consider for a moment the prayer of Paul for the Philippians. This is what Paul prayed as he wrote in his letter. He said, this is my prayer, that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Now there's a whole sermon right there, but just notice for a second the language. Love for one another is not something we achieve and then kind of move on from to next things. It's something that we always have room to grow in.

And there's a certain knowledge and there's a certain depth of insight by which our love increases. What knowledge, what insight is that?

it's understanding more and more how Jesus loved people, how he loved us, you, me.

[25 : 19] He's the ultimate example of God's glorious love. And then there, of course, is the ultimate act of love which Jesus did for us.

We talked about it already, Charles mentioned it. He laid down his life for us. He died for us. Even as we consider this, I mean, we can never get to the bottom of just how much he loves us.

He loved us to do that for us. We could talk about how sinful and deserving of God's wrath that we are. We could talk about how shameful and painful his suffering was and what he endured for our sake.

We could talk about all the spiritual blessings and the blessings of the life to come that Jesus wants to give us for free. Not because we deserve them, but simply because he loves us.

All of these required the ultimate sacrifice of the cross. His love for us is bottomless. It's beyond measure.

[26 : 32] And Jesus has commanded us to love one another in the same way as he loved us. At the very least, it means that we love one another lavishly, extravagantly, as deeply as his spirit enables us to do it.

Forgetting ourselves, leaving ourselves behind for the sake of one another, being there with and for one another right to the end, even if it's costly.

This is it. This is the most important thing in the Christian life, except for our call to love God himself. This is it. This is Christianity at its core.

And in case we miss the importance of it, Jesus says it twice. Love one another as I have loved you. So you must love one another.

Why did he say it twice? Because it's too important, it's too great to just say it once. Verse 35. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

[27 : 50] father. Actually, he just snuck it in the third time there. What is Jesus saying? He's saying the mark of a true Christian is love for his fellow man.

There's a way that the people of the world can know that you really are a true follower of Jesus. They will see it in the love that you have for other people, for one another.

another. There's a way that the people of Davidson and this surrounding community can know for certain that we are true followers of Jesus the Christ.

Do they see it in our love for one another? Or do we look much the same as the rest of humanity? Fighting and arguing, gossiping and slandering, breaking our promises, being self absorbed, splitting and dividing over this and that and the other thing?

If that's all that people see of us, what are they to conclude about us? But that we're nothing like the Jesus that we confess. Listen, Jesus says there is a way for people to know that you are my disciple.

[29 : 12] They will know because of the way that you love and treat other people. they will see that the way that you treat them is out of this world. It's rare.

It's exceptional. It's outstanding. They'll think, man, this guy who met me just three weeks ago cares more about me than my own family or my friends.

I've known for years. They're around for me when things are good, but when things are going bad, where are they? But this Jesus follower who goes to the Bible church is there for me through thick and thin.

There's got to be more to this Jesus than I originally thought. There's so much more that we could say about all this.

We could talk about how it's the spirit of Christ living in us who enables us to love like this the way that Jesus did. We could talk about what love does and says and thinks towards people in all kinds of situations.

[30 : 17] We could talk about how valuable our lives are if love's missing. 1 Corinthians 13. This really is one of those things, one of those times where the whole rest of the Bible adds to the meaning of Jesus' command.

It gives us understanding about how we should love as we ought to. But that's where we all need to be on the journey. We need to be reading. We need to be meditating on God's word daily so that we can grow not just in our faith, not just in our understanding, not just in our hope and our joy, but in our love for each other.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for this command which you speak not just to your disciples then and there in the room, but to us today, all of us who believe in your name.

Give us ears to hear. Make us truly, deeply loving people. Help us to give up, to lay down our lives in whatever ways that looks like for each one of us to live this out, to bless the people that you've placed in our lives.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.