

New Life, New Commandment

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I think that the passage that I'm talking about this morning probably answers the question that David was asking the children, why do we have to do this?
- And you may be wondering that just as I'm standing up to preach to you, why do we have to do this? I'm hoping that this passage will tell us why we're here today.
- Today is kind of like a new year. Many of the programs are starting. We have Women at Ten, we have Sunday School, Central Focus, many Bible studies, music ministry, all kinds of things are starting up.
- The youth with their kickstart this past weekend. We're all being kickstarted. And not only that, but next week we're starting a new sermon series on the book of Exodus, which will be quite wonderful.
- And by the way, we're going to have bulletins with sermon notes you can take on the back, a blank for that. It's going to be a very good series. And we thought that as we go into all of these new things, that it's important for us to know what God expects of us as a church, to be clear in our minds about what God wants for us.
- [1 : 0 8] Why are we doing this? I spoke last week to the children and to the family service about Mary and her encounter with the risen Jesus, how Jesus called her by name.
- And where he was calling her to was heaven, to follow him into heaven, that he will take her there. And that God was speaking to each of us as Jesus rose from the dead, calling us to heaven.
- And the very good question for us, what is important for us to look at, is what does that life look like? What does it look like to be taken to heaven with Jesus?
- So this is why we're looking one more time in John. We're looking at John 13, verses 31 to 38. It's on page 103, if you want to follow along.
- So the context of this little passage, which is so important for us, is the night before Jesus dies, it is the Last Supper, and Judas has just left to betray Jesus at the beginning of verse 31.
- [2 : 1 8] The eleven disciples are sitting around him. They are the ones who are the beginnings of the church that we are part of now. So Jesus is speaking to the church.
- He's going to be doing that for the next, until verse 17. He's not only talking to the eleven, he is talking to each person who would follow the risen Jesus.
- And Jesus starts these very important instructions and teachings by saying in verse 32 and 33 that he and God the Father are going to be glorified very soon.
- Look at those verses, especially in verse 32. How many times do you see the word glorify mentioned? It's five times he's repeated, glorify, glorify, glorify.
- When John records Jesus repeating something, he emphasizes a point. And this is a very, very important point. We need to pay attention to this. This is what we are about as a church.

[3 : 23] He's saying that nowhere on earth does the glory of God shine more brightly, nowhere in all of the heavens and the earth, than on the cross of Jesus Christ.

And in fact, the second half of the book of John is sometimes called the book of glory because it is about the death of Jesus. And over and over again, the glory of Jesus, the glory of God is referred to.

Why is this? It's because in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we see, first of all, the amazing love that God has for humanity.

That the work on the cross was for our salvation. It is for us that we might know God forever. The cross reveals the infinite righteousness of God.

That Jesus would die in our place as the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. The sins that you and I are lost in.

[4 : 25] It speaks of his wonderful power in conquering death, in defeating the power of Satan on Easter morning. And finally, it shows the glory of God because in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Jesus opens heaven to us.

That's why he said to Mary, I am ascending to my God and your God, to my Father and your Father. He opens heaven to us. And that's how we know the glory of God.

It's revealed to us. The wonderful passage from Jeremiah that we heard read from the Old Testament says there will be a new covenant that we will know God. That his law will be written in our hearts.

Will we know God and who he is and what he is about because of the glory of the cross shining on us today in the gospel. And this gospel not only reveals God to us, it brings life to us.

That's why Jesus begins all of this teaching to the church with the good news of the cross. It's the foundation of our life together as Christians. We are being saved and changed by the power of God because of what Jesus did on the cross.

[5 : 34] And you and I bring glory to God when we talk about it and live it out. It might not seem like it at the time. There may be very mundane things we are doing in obedience to Jesus.

But this is where the glory of God is lived out in our lives. This is what we are about. This is good news. And it's critical for us as a church because without that glory of God revealed to us, preaching really lacks any real meaning or power.

People in the church don't find themselves transformed. They are simply affirmed in who they are. And all ministries, whether they're teaching or social action, become aimless because the love of God is obscured if we don't see the glory of Jesus Christ on the cross.

So it is critical that we as a church always know that the cross and resurrection is the glory of God and the only real glory of the church. And we can know wonderfully as a church that as we focus our lives and the life of the church on this gospel, we will thrive as a church.

And people here will be transformed by the gospel, which is God's power for us. Now I want you to notice something.

[6 : 54] That as soon as Jesus talks about the glory of God, as soon as he talks about the cross, he addresses his disciples as little children.

And this says something to us. It's an intimate term, an expression of deep love for them. It is saying to us what it means to have God die for you and rise again in great power.

The implications of the gospel is that God has called us into relationship with him as his children. And he calls us to live for him.

Very practically, we see the love of God poured out on us because of the gospel. Now that actually affects what we are about. Because we have the gospel, we are also meant to pour God's love out into those people who are in our lives as well.

That's why in verse 33 there is a call to action. Jesus says that I'm going to leave you. And he prepares them for that. He is going to die and rise and ascend to heaven.

[8 : 02] His disciples will be left behind. But they are not left alone. They are given the Holy Spirit and they are given a new command, it says there. A new commandment.

Verse 34. Well, that says it all.

This is why we're here this morning. It's a great priority of the church. There is a call for you and I to form our whole life around loving other Christians as Christ has loved you.

This is what is new about the commandment. It is as Christ loved you. In other words, because of the grace given to you in the gospel, his love compels us. It is the mark that we know him.

And it is a mark that often doesn't feel like it's something exalted. But here it is. It is what we are about as a church. We come not seeking to get something out of church.

[9 : 11] I don't know how many of you have conversations around the lunch table after the service. And often it is very tempting for us to say, I didn't get much out of being at church.

I did get something out of church. It is all about what we may have received in the service or in the time together. Jesus is turning that thinking right upside down.

And he is really telling us, when you go home from church at lunch, you say, how was I able to love other people this morning? How was I able to serve the people around me?

Was I able to take advantage of an opportunity to have a significant conversation, to give my life to somebody else in some way? Those conversations probably are far and few between, but that is what we are being called to in this priority of the church.

It is what the Christian life is all about. If you have been changed by the gospel, then you will live for Jesus by loving those around us. It is a real privilege as a minister, one of the great privileges, is to hear what is happening in people's lives throughout the congregation.

[10 : 26] People feel free to talk about what God is doing, along with the difficulties in one's life. And often I have heard people talk about the fact that they have been changed as they have heard preaching, as they have read the Bible and Bible studies, as they have been about a ministry, they have been changed by the power of the gospel.

And the changes are often very practical, that in thoughts and attitudes and very practical action, they find themselves loving others in a new way.

And that is the change that the gospel will always bring. You know, Paul teaches this throughout the letters in the New Testament.

When he teaches very strongly about the Christian life, how we are to live, but he doesn't say, you must do this, you must pull yourself up by the bootstraps in order to be a good Christian, he says the opposite.

He said, because Jesus has made you a good Christian, because he has freed you by his gospel of grace, live for him, because he has changed you.

[11 : 43] And an example of this is in 1 Corinthians 8 and 9. Paul is really calling people to give more to those who are hungry in the church.

And he points, first of all, to the generosity of Jesus Christ. He says, You know the grace of Jesus, that though he was rich, he became poor, so that through his poverty, you might become rich.

You see, instead of telling them they have to give more, he looks at Jesus, he takes them to the glory of the cross, and he says, there Jesus was doing that for you, and you are freed to be generous with the money for his sake.

You have received the gospel of grace. Another example is in relationships. Paul talks a lot about relationships with one another. How are we to live with each other?

And one example of this is when he was really exhorting husbands to be faithful to their wives, to be completely committed to them. And he doesn't just say, You've got to be faithful.

[12 : 48] He says to them, First of all, Christ has been perfectly faithful to you. Love your wives, he says, does Christ love the church, and gave his life up for her.

And you are the one who has benefited from that. You are the one who has been loved by the sacrificial giving of Jesus Christ. So husbands are brought into the glory of the cross, and Paul says, Therefore you are freed to be utterly faithful to your wife, and to love her in sacrificial ways.

You see, what the New Testament teaches us is the gospel grips you, and it frees you. And that's why Jesus says, Love one another because I have loved you.

Well, what does this look like in practical ways? And the thing that probably comes to mind as you read this passage is, how does an outsider look at our love for one another and think, that's very different.

After all, we all know of situations, many wonderful situations, where people who don't necessarily know Jesus or his gospel, live in very sacrificial ways, and love each other in wonderful ways.

[14 : 00] This is the grace of God at work. But the difference for us, that is noticed by the outside, is that Christ's love compels us.

Two chapters later, Jesus says, As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. How do we do it? If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love.

In other words, we love others. We do the difficult thing of forgiving those people, and dealing with conflict differently, of coming to a place, not as a consumer at church, but as one who gives, because this is what Jesus commands us.

It is out of our relationship with God, the God that we know, who has died for us, that we love. And that's the difference. And there's something unique about that love.

It's not necessarily a grand gesture, of giving our body to be burned, or doing remarkable things, that help those in need. It is about obeying Jesus, in our relationships with one another.

[15 : 07] It means coming to church, seeking to serve, and to love. Imagine what our church would look like, if even 50% of us, came to church, committed to saying, how can I love this morning?

How can I love those around me, as I meet during the week, with other Christians? Well, there's unseen ways that we do this. We pray for those that we know in church, who are in need.

We pray for those who hurt us. We pray for people who don't know the Lord, outside the church. This is love. It involves choosing not to take offense, forgiving those who have hurt us, without excuse.

Unseen ways that we extend love, to one another. But there are many practical things, that we do see, that we often think, aren't wonderful, in extraordinary ways, but very small.

It might be as simple, as welcoming somebody you don't know, into church. I saw that happening, a number of times, at nine o'clock this morning, which is great, because I know there's a number, of new people here today. It involves actually, singing with each other.

[16 : 20] Now, we need to explain that. How are we extending love, to each other by my singing? Well, that's a far fetch for me. It may not seem loving, for you to hear me singing, but, we are actually preaching to another.

We are encouraging each other, in the faith, in our faith, when we sing. Those words, are words of great power, they communicate the gospel. If we aren't singing, we aren't hearing each other.

As we hear God's word, read, by one another, it is an act of love, that we are able to extend, the gospel, as we read. Many small, practical things, even as far as, driving somebody to church, so that they can hear God's word, so that they can be encouraged, by other Christians.

Spending time in conversation, looking for ways, that you can, give grace, to people, in a conversation. It's really all about, weeping with those who weep, and rejoicing, with those, who rejoice.

How do I seek, to love those, around us? This is the great, mandate, Jesus is giving to us. Now the wonderful thing, about love, as Jesus is saying here, is that it actually, evangelizes, the world around us.

[17 : 38] And that's why, he says that, that all people, in the world, will know, that you are my disciples, as you love, in this way. And that's because, whether a person, is atheist, or agnostic, or understands nothing, about Christianity, they know, and understand, authentic love, when they see it.

And so, a church that loves, out of obedience, to Jesus, and out of freedom, of knowing the gospel, will be noticed, by the world. That's the promise, of Jesus here.

They will see, that you belong to Jesus, in your relationships, with other people, what you do, with your free time, the business decisions, that you make, what you do, with your money.

There is a joy, about this. It's done out of, a living relationship, with God. Makes people sit up, and take notice. A book, that I read, in preparing, for the sermon, was based on, John 13.

It was by, Francis Schaeffer. And he asked, two very helpful, questions for us, which I think, it's good to ask, us as a church. And that is, can an outsider, visit your church, and experience, the reality, of Christ's love, and truth, both being taught, and lived?

[18 : 54] Very good question. And what about, our individual lives? Do they reflect, the love of Christ, and do we, in an age of doubt, commend, his truth?

And that's the point here. Your real love, doesn't just affirm, it commends the truth. It is the way, that the gospel, is actually brought, into the world, with great effect, and power.

Because it's in response, to the gospel, of power. That's why the Bible says, we're like a noisy gong, it really means nothing, if we don't love. Even if we have, the greatest programs, in the world, and do the most wonderful, thing for people, Jesus says, it doesn't matter.

This is the commandment, for my followers. It is that we are, to build our lives, around this commandment, to love one another. And we, as a church, must be very careful, not to let anything, crowd out, that great priority.

And things do, crowd it out. The lack of time, we all experience, fear, or lack of forgiveness, these things, can stop us, from living out, this commandment.

[20 : 02] There's many forces, at work, in our lives, especially with our schedule, that prevents us, to being with other Christians, and loving them. This week, we had the great honor, at the Gifford household, of having a plant expert, over to our house.

And this plant expert, was a member, of this congregation, at 11 a.m. And also, she's married, to the rector, of St. John's. We asked her, about our five-year-old son's, miniature sunflower garden, that he had planted, several months ago.

These flowers, grew very well, but they didn't look, anything like sunflowers. They germinated, really well, they grew big, and they had, these little tiny flowers, that were pretty, they were nice, but they didn't look, like the photo, on the seed pack.

We carefully tended them, very lovingly. But just recently, two flowers, that looked just like, the photo, on the package, came up. And so we asked, Mrs. Short, what happened here?

Did they mix the seeds, in the seed package? And she said, no, I hate to tell you this, but those were weeds, that you've been cultivating, all summer. You've taken great care, of those weeds, but they're not sunflowers.

[21 : 20] In fact, they probably crowded out, all your real sunflowers. So, so very ruthlessly, we pulled out, with Alexander's permission, all of the weeds, and we have two, little lonely sunflowers, in a very large garden, right now.

I think, that this is a good picture, for us. Because we need, to ask ourselves, are we tending, and cultivating, the right things, in our lives? This is what Jesus, challenges us with.

We all have weeds, in our lives. Things that at first, look very good, and important, and maybe beautiful, but they actually, crowd out, our ability, to follow Jesus.

To do this, great commandment, of loving, one another. We are meant, to live out, the package, the picture, that Jesus, has given to us.

And this passage, is really calling us, to replace, the weedy activity, in our lives, the tending, of those things, that are not, of this command. And to replace that, with the love, that he commands.

[22 : 28] It's not always, easy to do this. We don't, we can't do it, on our own. We need to encourage, each other, to love. We constantly, need to look, to the gospel, and receive it, with thanksgiving, and joy.

And Jesus, is very patient, with us. But we are called, to that great, priority of love. I don't think, it's any accident, as we close this passage, that Peter, comes into the picture.

He makes, great promises. And Jesus says, you will be, a great failure, as well. And of course, he denied Jesus, because he was alone, and he was afraid.

But Jesus, was patient with him. And we know, from looking at, John 21, that the risen Jesus, restored Peter. And he leads him, to a wonderful repentance, which is important, for us to look at.

Because Jesus, asked him three times, do you, love me? And at each time, Peter said, yes. Jesus said what? He said, feed my sheep.

[23 : 31] Tend my lambs. Feed my sheep. He said, love the people, that God, has given to you. And this is the great priority, that Jesus himself, forms in Peter, with great patience, but in all truth.

And that's what he is doing, in each of us, today. We are all weak, even though we have, many tremendous gifts. We give in, to pressures, on our schedule, and all kinds of different, very important activities.

We are in need, of constant repentance, and to be dependent, on God. We need his strength, and encouragement. We need the strength, and encouragement, of one another.

So, I close by saying, that as we begin, this new term, we need to say, why are we here? We need to know, that the reason we're here, is that we, need to know, the glory of the cross.

The grace of God, poured out on us, on that cross. And to reform, our lives, around Jesus' new commandment, to seek real ways, to love one another, because of that glory, that we have received.

[24 : 43] Amen.