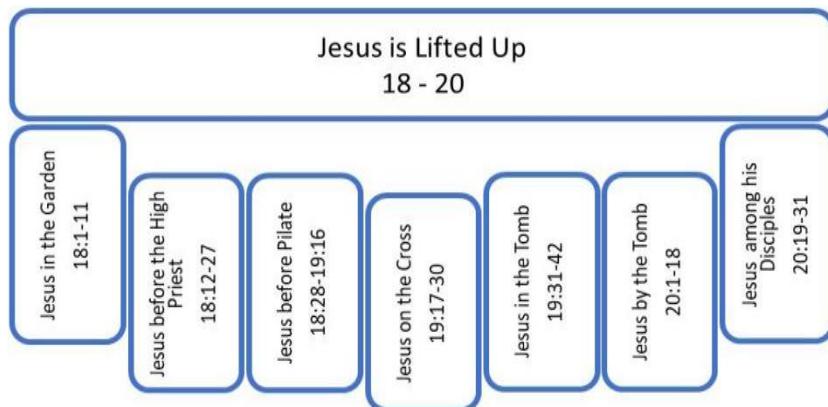


Lesson 22: John 13:21-38 A New Commandment

Introduction



We are looking at the second half of John 13. John is giving us a fresh perspective on the Last Supper. The three synoptic Gospels followed one another closely in reporting this final Passover meal. John includes some of the same detail, such as the fact that the disciples were all together with Jesus celebrating the Passover and during the meal Jesus foretells his betrayal by Judas. John does not change history. There is overlap in the accounts. But he leaves out some significant parts reported in Matthew, Mark and Luke, while also providing newly related details.

We might wonder how John could leave out what seems the most important part of the Last Supper reported in all three of the other Gospels. Matthew 26:26-28 tells us,

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” ²⁷ And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”

How could John leave out this theologically significant declaration by Jesus, which institutes the Christian practice of the Lord’s Supper? Well, he could leave it out if it had been a common practice among believers for the past 60 years, and he understood the record in the synoptic Gospels to be sufficient. John didn’t need to build on what was already a solid foundation. John could assume that Jesus’ words were common knowledge among Christians, begin regularly proclaimed at Christian worship. A seeker or new believer who did not know these words would soon learn them. It is not necessary for John to repeat something so well established and regularly taught in the church.

And we might remember that John does not leave out the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper completely. John is the only one to supply in his Gospel, and this was in chapter 6, the discussion with the crowd after the feeding of the 5000, where Jesus first declares, “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves.” As we saw in that context, eating and drinking were analogous to believing in Jesus. John did leave out the declaration at the Last Supper, but he also filled in the background that had been left out of the other Gospels.

And while John left out the words Jesus used to institute the Christian ritual of symbolically celebrating the Lord’s Supper with bread and wine, John added into his account the washing of the disciples’ feet, which was left out by other Gospel writers. I wonder they left it out so as not to overshadow the central significance of Jesus fulfilling Passover as the Passover lamb. When Jesus made that declaration at the feast, “This is my body” and “This is my blood” he changed history forever. No longer would believers celebrate the Passover with bread and wine, looking back to the Exodus as the great rescue from Egypt as the defining moment of their faith. From now on they would celebrate the Lord’s Supper with bread and wine, looking back to the cross as the great rescue from sin and death as the defining moment of their faith. These words of Jesus truly were the climax of that Passover. That point was made clear by Matthew, Mark and Luke.

It seems to me that John, having the benefit of that point being solidly established through three Gospel witnesses and the benefit of years of Christian worship, was in his writing able to focus on a different perspective of this Last Supper, on a more personal perspective. And this may be another reason the others felt it okay leaving out the washing of the feet. Not only might the washing of the feet have distracted from the central point of the Lord's supper, but it was also a very personal interaction between Jesus and his disciples. It was just for them, in a sense. John now feels the freedom, even the compulsion of the Holy Spirit, to give Christianity this more personal account as part of how Jesus prepared his disciples both for the cross and for future ministry. It's another true perspective on what happened that night at the Last Supper.

Following the washing of the feet, so now in the second half of chapter 13:21-38, Jesus gives his disciples a new commandment. This new commandment is sandwiched between the foretelling of two acts of betrayal. Let's read the whole text, John 13:21-38.

²¹ When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me." ²² The disciples *began* looking at one another, at a loss to know of which one He was speaking. ²³ There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, "Tell us who it is of whom He is speaking." ²⁵ He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, *the son of Simon Iscariot*. ²⁷ After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." ²⁸ Now no one of those reclining *at the table* knew for what purpose He had said this to him. ²⁹ For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.

³¹ Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; ³² if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. 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.' 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. ³⁵ "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

³⁶ 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." ³⁷ Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." ³⁸ 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.

Jesus is communicating to his disciples that things are about to change. He is leaving. They cannot come. The leaving will not be a smooth transition. It will include betrayal and denial. Jesus foretells this at the beginning and ending of the section. In between he gives a new commandment.

Foretelling the betrayal of Judas

We begin with the betrayal of Judas in 13:21-30. It is a significant emotional shift from the atmosphere Jesus had just created through washing the disciples' feet. He communicates his own willingness to humbly serve by washing their feet, and then exhorted the disciples to model their own leadership after his in humble service to one another. Humility is the attitude of Christian discipleship and Christian leadership. That's what Jesus wants.

Jesus teaches this principle through a powerful, personal, experiential lesson. Having complete the lesson, Jesus voices the trouble in his heart.

²¹ When Jesus had said this, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray Me."

You remember back in chapter 11, surrounded by Jews mourning the death of Lazarus, John used a similar phrase to describe Jesus' emotional response. In my Bible version, it said, "He was deeply moved in spirit (11:33)." The Greek word translated "deeply moved" there literally means, "angry" or "indignant". That expression would fit well in this context. We could easily understand Jesus being angry or indignant in spirit knowing that one of his disciples at this meal with him is preparing to betray him. But that is not the Greek word used here. The word here means to be "unsettled in spirit," "disturbed." The waters of Jesus' soul are stirred up as in a storm. Jesus is troubled. It weighs heavy on his heart. He communicates this emphatically to his disciples. "Truly, truly, I say to you, that one of you will betray me." He's got their attention.

Interestingly, the disciples do not all immediately look at Judas. We would, you know, we all know the story but they didn't. Judas the pious who rebuked Mary for wasting expensive perfume which could have gone to help the poor has concealed his heart well. We might wonder when his heart turned from devotion to bitterness. I assume Judas began as a disciple who believed Jesus to be the Christ. But he wanted Jesus to be a certain kind of Christ. At what point was Judas expectation of Jesus shattered? What kind of interaction with Jesus or with the people around Jesus would turn Judas away in disillusionment? When did he begin to steal from the money bag? Did greed lead him to reject Jesus? Or did he justify the sin of thievery as a result of his bitter disillusionment? And in all of this how did he hide himself from the other disciples? Through pious expressions or good-natured humor or efficiency in logistics? What mask did he choose to wear?

Whatever mask he wore, he wore it well. The disciples do not look to Judas as a prime suspect. They look around wondering who Jesus could be talking about. Peter, of course, is the first to speak up. He has something to say. Though he is a little more muted than a few moments before when he refused Jesus' offer to wash his feet, but then declared, "Wash all of me!" That's Peter that we're used to. In this more somber, troubling mood, Peter does not blurt out his question. Instead, sitting further from Jesus, he gets John's attention and tells him to ask. Let's read that part again, 22-26,

²² The disciples *began* looking at one another, at a loss *to know* of which one He was speaking.

²³ There was reclining on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. ²⁴ So Simon Peter gestured to him, and said to him, "Tell *us* who it is of whom He is speaking." ²⁵ He, leaning back thus on Jesus' bosom, said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus then answered, "That is the one for whom I shall dip the morsel and give it to him." So when He had dipped the morsel, He took and gave it to Judas, *the son of Simon Iscariot*.

To get what is going on, we need to imagine a different way of sitting around the table. The text does not say in verse 12 that Jesus sat at the table but that Jesus reclined. The low table would have had cushions around it instead of chairs. Jesus and his disciples would each recline on the cushions, leaning towards the table on their left arm. Their legs would have stretched out away from the table and leaning on that left arm would leave the right hand, the right arm free to take food or drink. In that position you would most naturally be looking at across the table, at others across from you, and to your right you're looking at the person's back. This would be the same all the way around the table. Using the right hand is what's culturally appropriate for eating so everybody's leaning on the left. It also means that if you leaned backwards across your left shoulder, your head would be at the chest of the person behind you.

Having this image of reclining at the table, we can imagine John leaning back to his left, such that his head was close to the chest or bosom of Jesus. This is what Peter gestured for John to do, since John was in that prime position to lean back and quietly ask Jesus the question. In the prologue, very early on, in 1:18 John alluded to this image at table of leaning back on the chest of someone to share personal information when he wrote, "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained him." We need this expression explained to us: being in the bosom of the Father. For them it was a natural image of everyday life. God and Jesus are not literally reclining at table with Jesus leaning back. It is a metaphor of close fellowship, they're

eating together, and they're close and Jesus is at that preferred position where he can lean back on the chest of the Father. It's the position through which personal knowledge is shared. Jesus has taken that personal knowledge and He has revealed it to us; it comes from his intimate relationship with the Father.

Here in John 13 the image is quite literal. They really are at table and John really does lean back to quietly question Jesus, "Who is the betrayer?" Jesus quietly answers. Only John hears. Then Jesus takes bread, dips it, and gives it to Judas.

As the text informs us, John has no time to act or to communicate to Peter before Jesus sends Judas off. Verses 27-30,

²⁷ After the morsel, Satan then entered into him. Therefore Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." ²⁸ Now no one of those reclining *at the table* knew for what purpose He had said this to him. ²⁹ For some were supposing, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus was saying to him, "Buy the things we have need of for the feast"; or else, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So after receiving the morsel he went out immediately; and it was night.

Jesus tells Judas to act quickly. He does. He gets up and leaves, which does not seem unusual to the disciples because Judas handles finances and arranges logistics.

We are told that at this very moment when Jesus handed the morsel to Judas, Satan entered him. I see two ideas worth considering here. The idea of Jesus handing the morsel to Judas and the idea of Satan entering Judas.

Does Jesus handing the morsel to Judas somehow cause Satan to enter into Judas or does it remove Jesus' protection from Judas? I do not think that is the implication. Handing Judas a morsel is an offer. It implies closeness and a willingness to accept Judas as a companion. Yes, it is an identification for John. Jesus is giving the answer to John's question, but I think he is doing more. A host of a meal might reach into a common bowl and take out a desirable portion and hand it to someone else as a gesture of honor. There was also a moment in the Passover feast when bitter herbs were dipped into a fruit sauce and then passed. Whatever the specific nature of the act, the gesture shows the mercy of Jesus even knowing what kind of man Judas is and what he had planned.

Judas knows now that Jesus knows. In the knowing, Jesus hands Judas a morsel of food. This final act of reaching out to Judas, follows a history with Jesus. Judas was accepted as his disciple. Judas witnessed his teaching and miracles in close contact. Judas just experienced the washing of his feet, Jesus touching his feet. And now Jesus hands Judas the morsel. And Judas in his heart rejects the offer, rejects the invitation. He is committed to his path.

I believe it is that hardened conviction in the rejection of Jesus, not by what Jesus does but by what Judas does in turn. That's what opens the door of his soul to Satan. He had been called a devil back in 6:70-71,

⁷⁰ Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" ⁷¹ Now He meant Judas *the son of Simon Iscariot*, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray Him.

That does not mean Judas is a demon. He is human. But the sin of his heart hardens him against Jesus. He is acting as a devil. He will act in allegiance with Satan, whether he sees it that way himself or not. Jesus recognizes the reality of the supernatural world. Angels exist. Demons exist. Satan is real and he's active. Satan has set himself up as ruler of the world. He is an illegitimate ruler but he still acts with power. God created Adam and Eve and gave them the charge to rule over the earth. The world is given to humankind, not to Satan. Satan's rule is illegitimate. Still, he is a powerful force at work in human society. Human beings who refuse Jesus, the second Adam and rightful King both as Creator and as Son of David, whoever rejects Jesus for whatever reason is understood in the Gospel of John to be in league with Satan, whether knowingly or unknowingly. That was Jesus' charge to the crowd at the Feast of Booths in John 8. To oppose Jesus is to oppose life. To oppose the

legitimate king is a rejection of the light. To oppose Jesus is to walk in the darkness of rebellion. It does not mean that those specific human beings are in active agreement with Satan. It does mean that human beings are open through the sinfulness of their own hearts to the influence of Satan, and even if they act self-servingly or for some other human cause, religion or nation or family, if that cause opposes Jesus then that cause is allied to the overall agenda of Satan. Whether the tyrant rules a nation or a congregation or a family or just himself, to oppose Jesus as the right and glorious king is to align with Satan. This is his aim to keep human beings bound in the dark under the reign of death. When we sin, we participate in that aim.

Judas' role in opposing the rightful reign of Jesus closely aligned with the plan of Satan to oppose God's will for humankind, to oppose light and life. So, he is called a devil in chapter 6. Then at the beginning of this present chapter we are told the devil put into Judas' heart the plan to betray Jesus. And now, even more, not only has the Devil put this idea into his heart, Satan himself has entered into Judas. A moment before Jesus made an offer. He held out his hand to Judas. Judas took the morsel with his own hand but rejected the Lord of Glory with his heart. And Satan entered in.

In chapter 3 we were introduced to a man named Nicodemus. "It was night." But that man entered into the light, into the presence of Jesus. We are going to see after the death of Jesus that that man ends up in the light. It was a long road before he fully came into the light and believed in the light but he comes to believe in Jesus. Judas walked the opposite road, also a long road. He spent two years walking in the light of Jesus. But now he has hardened himself against the light. He has not understood the light. And he is going to try to help overcome the light. The text tells us this. "After receiving the morsel, he went out immediately; and it was night." The one man came from the night into the light; the other man left the light and went out into the night.

Jesus expressed trouble in his heart over the betrayer. Though troubled, Jesus, as always, is in full control. He knows who the betrayer is. He even commands the betrayer to go do quickly what you're planning to do, and the betrayer obeys. Jesus does not lose his life. The darkness cannot overcome Jesus. Jesus lays his life down at the hour of his own choosing.

The hour is not truly Satan's. He schemes for the execution of Jesus, the second Adam, believing that by removing the Messiah he can maintain the rule of death through which he has bound mankind ever since the failure of the first Adam. But Satan does not understand the deeper ways of God. The cross is not going to be victory. The seeming failure of the Messiah on the cross will be the Messiah's victory. This hour of darkness, normally the domain of Satan, will turn into the hour of Jesus' shining glory.

Giving a new commandment

In this hour of glory, Jesus gives a new commandment to his disciples. This is the middle of our passage, verses 31-35.

³¹ Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; ³² if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately. 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.' 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. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Jesus speaks again about his glorification. Let's think about that for a moment. What does it mean to be glorified? We could say that to be glorified is something others do to you. When people lift you up in praise and honor, they glorify you. We could also say that to be glorified is the result of something you have done. When you reveal yourself as praiseworthy, you have been glorified. Through some action you are glorified. Both are true of Jesus. His action reveals him as glorious and he is declared glorious. And though he is declared glorious by human beings, that declaration is not primary to

Jesus. That's not the glory Jesus seeks. Jesus is declared glorious by God. The Father glorifies Jesus because Jesus has glorified himself through his own action.

We also need to recognize that glory is attached to these other ideas of name and nature. A person is truly glorious when his nature is truly glorious. Jesus is glorious in power, beauty, goodness, truth because Jesus' nature is one of power, beauty, goodness, and truth. His actions reveal his nature which is praiseworthy, therefore glorious. When we truly see Jesus as he is, the right response is one of praise and glory.

The idea of believing in the name of Jesus is the idea of believing in Jesus according to his true nature. As human beings, we cannot know his true nature. We cannot define him. He must reveal his nature to us. So we've got this in the prologue. It's Jesus who comes down in the flesh and then John can say, "And we beheld his glory, we saw him, we heard from him, he revealed his glory to us."

This idea of glory is also connected to the idea of light. Glory is often depicted as shining light. Light reveals the true nature of things. Light is an appropriate physical and metaphorical representation of the nature of Jesus, of power and beauty, of revealing truth. These ideas are all related in John: glory, name, and light.

One way that Jesus revealed his glory in his ministry on earth was through the miracles he did. We saw this through the first half of John. The miracles alone showed his power and his compassion. They showed his nature. They showed glorious things about Jesus. The miracles also served as signs, pointing to other truths about who Jesus is. He fed the 5000 in that miracle, he declared himself the bread of life. The miracle, the sign points to the fact that Jesus is the source and sustainer of life. He healed a blind man and declared himself the light of the world. The sign points to the fact that Jesus is the revealer of truth. If we want to know things about God, things we cannot know about God, about heaven, about hell, about goodness, about our own nature, we have to receive the truth that Jesus reveals to us. He is the light. He declared himself the light by opening the eyes of a blind man. Jesus also raised Lazarus from the dead and proclaimed himself, "I am the resurrection and the life." He holds life in his hands. We overcome death through Jesus. We experience resurrection through Jesus. This power of life that he has in himself was pointed to by the sign of Lazarus' resurrection. The miracles are called signs because the miracles reveal to us the nature of Jesus, the glory of Jesus.

The supreme act revealing the nature of Jesus is yet to come in the story. It's about to come. We're at the hour of glory, the hour when his true nature will be most supremely revealed. The cross is a statement of judgment. This is what humankind deserves. The one who is just, who is holy, who is righteous must demand the penalty of sin or he is no longer just. By insisting on the cross Jesus insists on judgment. Sin cannot be ignored. But the cross is also a statement of mercy. This is what Jesus offers to do for us, to take on himself that which we deserve. The one who is merciful, gracious and loving gives himself as a substitute. Jesus is glorified through the cross because it shows what he's willing to do according to his nature because he is supremely just and holy, because he is so loving and merciful he is willing to take on himself the shame of the cross on our behalf. We're talking about this glory of the cross to help us to understand these words in 31-32,

³¹ Therefore when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him; ³² if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately.

Judas goes out to betray Jesus. What he's going to help accomplish is the glorification of Jesus. The revealing of his nature through the supreme act of salvation. The Son of Man is glorified, that is, his nature is revealed, and he is exalted by God. And God is glorified in Jesus as Jesus submits himself to the will of the Father.

The disciples will not have understood what Jesus was talking about here. They remembered these words and they gained new insight after they experienced the cross and resurrection. They needed

to see the cross and the resurrection to understand the true nature, the true glory of Jesus. They will see, and they will understand, and they will lift him up in praise.

The point that the disciples would have caught on to here is that God is going to glorify the Son immediately, whatever that means, but it's immediate. As a result, he is only with them a little while longer. As he said to the crowds at the Feast of Booths back in chapter 7 and then again in chapter 8, "You will seek me [but] Where I am going, you cannot come." What are you talking about, Jesus? Going away and we can't come?

There has been a lot of emotion already this evening so far. You can imagine it. It's normally a festive environment, the Passover feast. Jesus then does something strangely touching, moving, but also unsettling when he washed their feet. Then the tone became very somber when Jesus announced the trouble in his spirit coming from the fact that one of them is a traitor. Now again, the troubling emotion shifts from the sinister idea of betrayal to the hollow fear of loss. Jesus is going. They will see him no more. They cannot follow.

In the midst of this emotion, Jesus declares, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." The emotion of the moment, I imagine, makes the commandment quite serious. Things are heavy. Jesus is leaving. There's a betrayer. It's emotionally difficult, troubling kind of atmosphere. And Jesus looks at them and says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you that you also love one another." I'm reminded right now of the trouble that is in our entire world right now with the Covid-19 virus. These are heavy, serious times. And we can imagine Jesus looking at us and saying, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you that you also love one another. You need this now. This is the essence of your discipleship, that you love one another." In a sense, this is not a new commandment. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is Leviticus 19:18, an essential idea of Torah Law. Leaders of Israel knew enough to affirm Jesus when he said the greatest command is to love your God and a second one like it to love your neighbor. The command to love one another as fellow creatures made in the image of God and beloved by him is not a new commandment. What is new is the added phrase "even as I have loved you." Jesus does not say, "Love your neighbor as yourself." I mean, he did say that, he said that earlier and holds to that, but here he elevates that to "Love one another even as I have loved you." Don't just love your neighbor as you would love your own self. No. Love your neighbor as I have loved you. And how has Jesus loved you? Jesus loved by giving up his life in great humility on a cross. To love like Jesus is the highest of callings, to love sacrificially, truly unconditionally. To value the life of someone else so much that you're willing to give up your own. The love of Jesus is impossible to fully and consistently attain. That does not mean we ought not strive towards obedience. He gives us this commandment so that we may strive towards something that really is beyond us. We have never been fully and consistently obedient. But Jesus has now given us a new vision to pursue. This is true discipleship. Follow me in this, that you love one another in sacrificial humility. That's what I've done for you, that's what I want you to put into practice. That's what it means to follow me.

This is what Jesus wants us to be known for. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Jesus sets the standard impossibly high in light of the cross and in the light his own perfection. But perhaps that is one reason he chose to wash their feet. The cross is our model but it's such a high model, truly sacrificial. Don't think of going to the cross as the only way to show your love. Yes, that's an image to strive for. Maybe start more simply. Think of washing one another's feet, just that. Just in your daily life take on the role of a servant to show kindness and care to one another. Ask, "How can I serve you?" Think, "What need can I meet today?" Start where you are. There are so many needs. I look around the world and I'm so overwhelmed with the needs. We have to start where we are. Think about who God has made you, how God has gifted you, what you can do to serve, the relationships you have already. Start with those close to you. "How can I serve you? How can I meet a need you have today? Jesus has called me to love sacrificially in humility. How

do I do that today?" This is what Jesus wants you and your family and your church to be known for. When people are around you, do they sense that you have love for each other?

Jesus' disciples are going to need love for one another when Jesus is leaving. Jesus is the bond holding them together. They will continue to love Jesus. They are going to need to be able to love each other, to forgive each other. Peter is going to need that from his fellow disciples.

The tone quickly turns once again. This must be very painful for Peter to hear. And I suspect, pretty surprising for the disciples. Judas was not named out loud. Peter is. Jesus foretells his denial.

Foretelling the denial of Peter

This is John 13:36-38,

³⁶ 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." ³⁷ Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." ³⁸ 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.

Peter's question, "Lord, where are you going?" shows us the disciple did not understand what Jesus was talking about. Jesus tells Peter he will follow later. Jesus goes to be with God. Peter will follow. He does not understand where Jesus is going, but if it is to death, Peter declares he will follow Jesus even there. "I will lay down my life for you."

Jesus answers him back, "Will you... 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."

In fact, Peter will give up his life as a witness for Jesus. Tradition teaches that Peter was crucified like Jesus. That is confirmed at the end of this Gospel. When Jesus tells Peter, he will stretch out his hands and be lead where he does not want to go. Peter will lay down his life. But not this Peter, the one who stands before Jesus right now. Peter is not yet the kind of person who is going to willingly give up his life.

In this chapter Jesus has called his disciples to an attitude of humility, to be willing to wash one another's feet. And he has called them to the motive of love that they would act out of love in caring for one another. This is the path of discipleship, an attitude of humility like Jesus Christ and a heart of love like Jesus Christ.

But can we do it? Can we be like Jesus? Peter is not going to be able to be like Jesus. Peter wants to be like Jesus. He wants to be able to lay down his life out of love for Jesus. But he's not going to be able to do it. He needs more than teaching. Telling people to love one another and care for one another, to be sacrificial and to be humble does not work. It might work a little. But not so much. Teaching and commandment is not enough. Peter must be changed so that he might be the kind of person who can keep the commandments.

And this is a problem of discipleship. Without some kind of transformation, the new commandment of Christ is not a grand vision to pursue, it is a hopeless mirage.

Jesus' rebuke of Peter is a rebuke to us all. Remember what stuff you are made of. Following Jesus cannot merely be a new vision of morality. If it is, we are in trouble. We all deny him. We all fall short. We are all afraid. We are all self-motivated.

Christianity as a moral program cannot succeed. To follow Jesus, we are going to need another way, a new way, not just a moral path. We need more than a commandment to be humble and a commandment to be loving. We need to be made humble. We need to become loving.

Jesus has set before us a new commandment. "Love one another as I have loved you." But that cannot be the end of discipleship. There must be something more to it. We have to pay attention to what Jesus is going to say next.

Reflection questions

1. Read John 13:21-38. What stands out to you as interesting, important, strange or confusing? What are some questions that come to mind?
2. Why do Peter and the other disciples not react when Judas gets up to leave the table just after Jesus has passed him the morsel? Did they not hear Jesus? How not? How does the placement at the table and the cultural way of reclining for a meal enable this information to remain between Jesus and the beloved disciple?
3. Who is the beloved disciple? Can you identify him?
4. How do you understand Satan coming into Judas? How is this different from 13:2?
5. Why was Judas not suspected by the other disciples? What does Jesus say about the state of Judas' heart in 6:64-65? How do you think Judas was able to carry out his role without anyone suspecting that he did not truly believe?
6. How does the command to love another relate to the command to wash one another's feet. Is it the same command or slightly different?
7. Why does Jesus call this command a new commandment?
8. From your own experience, when have you felt the authenticity of an individual or a group because their love for one another was evident?
9. How does Jesus' interaction with Peter relate to the previous narrative about Judas and the commandment to love one another?