

May 2, 2010  
Easter 5

*"The Highest Form of Love"*

**JOHN 13:31-35**

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**W**hen he was gone, 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 glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. <sup>33</sup> "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. <sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The news reported this past week that for a sum of \$10,000 you can have the genetic coding in your cells mapped out to determine if you have a propensity to certain weaknesses and diseases. It also reported that in a couple of years you will be able to do this for about a \$1,000. This will allow you to know more specifically the weaknesses in your body and take the right preventive medicine to improve your condition.

As much as we appreciate these advances in modern medicine, wouldn't it be even better if we could come up with some vitamin pill or some program to help people love each other more? Imagine a mother giving her two daughters who are always fighting a pill that would help them get along better. Imagine a husband and wife who are always bickering taking their morning vitamins that improve their marriage. Imagine a teacher handing out pills to the students to help them show greater kindness and respect for each other. Think of what a heavy dose of get along better pills could do for the exploding prison population in California and the nasty gang members stabbing each other on our streets? If any someone could invent these pills, what a better place our world would be! As the old song says, "All we need is love, love is all we need."

In these words just read to you our Lord Jesus tells his beloved disciples that he is giving them a new commandment to love each other. He calls it a new commandment because it comes from the new life that flows forth from the very special love that Jesus has for them. Jesus says, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Because you and I are branches connected to Jesus the vine we will produce fruits of love out of love for all that Jesus has done for you. This morning we want to take closer look at this highest form of love that we see in Jesus, a love that is so special it overcomes the evil in our human hearts and helps us love each other more.

**We see this love in Jesus**

Jesus had some very special, close moments with his disciples in that Upper Room where he celebrated the Lord's Supper with them for the first time. "When he was gone, Jesus said, 'Now is the Son of man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.'" Jesus spoke these words after Judas had left the room. These words about love were spoken in the context of a very unloving environment. Jesus was deeply troubled by what Judas was going to do to

him. It says early in this chapter, "After he had said this Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, 'I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me.'" Then Jesus had to endure the pain of watching Judas cover up and lie about what he was doing. The other disciples were arguing with each other about who was the greatest in the kingdom of God. In this unloving environment Jesus spoke about his love for us that goes beyond any kind of love we have ever known in this life.

Jesus told his beloved disciples that he was going to be glorified. He talked about bringing glory to his heavenly Father and having the Father then glorify his Son. Think of what it must have been like to just be near Jesus and experience love in its purest form. Jesus is ready to step in and take the sin of the world upon himself, every unkind and unloving thought and word that has ever come into your life and mine. He is ready to bring glory to his Father by being punished in our place, wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. He is ready to be cursed in our place and suffer hell for us.

We stand in awe of people who give their lives to save other people. In April of 2004 a young marine named Jason Dunham saved the lives of his fellow marines by placing his helmet and his body over a grenade and absorbing its explosion. It happened while they were wrestling a terrorist to the ground and a grenade was thrown. Jason died eight days later from wounds to his body and was given the Medal of Honor for his bravery.

We stand in awe of such deeds of kindness and love, yet they pale in comparison to the perfect, pure love that Jesus has for us. Romans 5 expresses this love in this remarkable way, "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love to us in this: While we were sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus brought glory to his heavenly Father by giving his life for us. The Father glorified his Son by raising him to life again. That's the glory that Jesus speaks about in these verses.

To help us see our need for Jesus, I would have you think of that large oil slick being released in the Gulf waters off Louisiana. Birds will get oil on their feathers and die. People will try to capture the birds and clean their feathers. Only a few will be saved. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, they passed down to their descendants a plume or slick of sin that reaches into every human heart. How else can we explain why Cain killed his brother Abel, and why your level of love and my level of love is never what it should be. Sin against an infinite God becomes infinite. Nothing can contain it. Our loving Father offered his infinite Son to contain the sin and destroy it. We can never exhaust the comfort and peace and joy from knowing the ultimate act of love expressed in these words, "God so loved the world (the world in all of its toxicity) that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." That's the glory that Jesus is speaking about when he says, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and the God is glorified in him."

Now listen to how Jesus speaks to his disciples in the most tender and loving terms of endearment. He calls them his children. "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going you cannot come." When you really love someone it is so hard to say goodbye to them. You miss them. There is an emptiness and loneliness in the pit of the stomach

that does not go away. With Jesus it is different. By going to his Father he puts himself in a position where he is able to comfort us with his love. He gives us the Holy Spirit who is our comforter. The Holy Spirit helps us see how real Jesus' love is for us. Jesus is the bridegroom and we are his bride. He is head and we are his body. He is the shepherd and we are his sheep.

Listen to this amazing prayer in Ephesians 3 that asks our dear heavenly Father to help us by the Holy Spirit to see more clearly the height and depth and breadth and width of love that Jesus has for us. "For this reason I kneel before the Father, 15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. 16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-- that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

I am not exaggerating when I say that the love you know that Jesus has for you is more real every day than the love you feel from your parents, your children, your husband, your wife, and people here in your congregation. It says in the beginning of this chapter that Jesus showed his disciples the full extent of his love for them. That's what he is doing for us every day. Every day his love is new to us as we sing in the hymn, "Every morning mercies new fall as fresh as morning dew."

### **We see it reflected in the lives of those who follow Jesus**

Jesus tells us to show the love he has for us in the way we love other people. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." The command Jesus gave to love each other was not a new addition to the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. It was a new command because it was coming from the new life these disciples had in Jesus and in the power of his resurrection. Resurrection people are able to wake up each morning and say, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Every day is a new day to rejoice in the fact that Jesus conquered death and gave us life, but it is also a new day to live in the power of the resurrection and a new day to work hard at showing love to other people, even when they do not deserve to be loved.

The Greek word used here for "love" is the well known word agape. The emphasis in this word as it is used in the Bible is on a love that is willing to sacrifice itself for other people just as Jesus sacrificed himself for us. I am holding in my hand a branch from a grape vine. Because we are connected as branches to Jesus who is the vine, we are able to bear fruit in our lives out of love for him. Here is how Galatians 5 describes this fruit that comes forth in your life and mine. "But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control." Because of Jesus we are willing to die for each other and just as important we have the strength to live for each other as Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

The early Christians made a deep impact on the Roman Empire because of their reputation for loving each other as Jesus loved them. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." A pagan Greek, named Lucian wrote of the early Christians, "It is incredible to see the fervor with which the people of that religion help each other in their needs.

They spare nothing. Their first legislator (his name for Jesus) has put into their hearts that they are brothers.”

Modern medicine will keep putting out pills like this to help us with heart problems, cholesterol problems, pain and bouts of depression. No one will ever invent a pill that will help us love each other. Today we have heard Jesus offer us his love, free of charge, and with his love the promise that we have the power to love each other more. Amen.