

The Command

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[0 : 00] So John opens the scene for us in this passage with Judas walking out of the door. If you see in verse 31, when he had gone out as a reference to Judas, John wants you to see the image of Judas walking out with the money bags in his hand. And so Jesus' first word of speech is now.

Now is the hour. Now is the hour of darkness. Now is the hour that he had been talking about throughout the whole book. The hour of the crucifixion of the betrayal. And this is the context within which the farewell speeches of Christ are written. In the center of this passage is found in verse 33 and 34. Jesus is saying to them, I'm about to leave you. I'm about to go away. In other words, he's saying I'm going to the cross. I'm about to be betrayed. I'm going to ascend.

I'm departing from you. You will not have me anymore. And so verse 34, which is the centerpiece of our passage, is an ethical commission.

Jesus is leaving and he's saying now what? Here's what? And this is what he tells them in verse 34. A new commandment I give to you that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

The question I want to ask with you tonight of this text is very simple. You probably even thought of it before. What's new about the new command? A new command I give to you to love one another.

What's new about that? We read Leviticus just a moment ago, Leviticus 19. Love your neighbor.

[1 : 38] You can think of Deuteronomy 6, the Shema, the hero of Israel, the Lord your God. The Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God and you shall love your neighbor. That command is repeated in 1 Kings. It's repeated three times in the synoptic gospels. He expands it in Mark 12 with the golden rule. Love your neighbor as yourself.

The command to love is literally the ground of all the other commands. It's the ground that every single other command walks on. What's new about it? What's new about the new command?

Nothing and everything. Nothing and everything. It's brand new and it's not new at all.

The two things I want us to look at tonight. What's new about the new command? There's something new about love first. And then secondly, there's something new about the object of the command.

There's something new about love and there's something new about the object of the command. So the first, there's something new about love in this command. Look, Jesus is leaving them and he's left them in the synoptic and Matthew, Mark and Luke. You know what to expect when Jesus leaves and that's something like a commission.

In the other gospels we get commissions like Matthew 28, the Great Commission. I want you to go. I want you to teach. I want you to baptize. I want you to give the poor. But the commission we get here is to love each other. To love one another. What is love? What is love? It's one of those words that's just tough.

[3 : 21] Actually, a few years ago I found out recently that three letter question was the most searched thing in Google for the entire year. What is love? People are wondering. It's hard to answer because it's complex. It's multifaceted. In English we only have one word for it.

Just in the Greek Bible in the New Testament there are seven different words present for the word love. It's multifaceted. This is what C.S. Lewis was getting at in the book. Most of you guys will know he wrote the book called The Four Loves. He identified four of the most prominent aspects of love in the New Testament.

You might know them. Eros is the first. It's the love between lovers. It's romance. It's attraction. The second is philos. The love between friends. It's the shoulder to shoulder side by side walking together type of love.

The third was storgy which is a little bit different. It's hard to define but easy to explain. It's the love of old books.

The love of the smells that you know from childhood. The love of that blanket that you carried as a toddler. The love of the nation. The love of a people.

[4 : 39] The love of a place. The love of home. That's storgy. And then finally the fourth, agape. Lewis defines agape as the love for someone's ultimate good. It's a love that transcends all the other loves but it also encapsulates all the other loves.

It's being about somebody's ultimate good. Being so concerned for somebody that you just want what's best. It's the love of a parent for a child. It's the love of when that child in the teenage years or whatever goes off, goes prodigal, goes rogue.

Parents, they don't care. You don't care what your kid does. When they come back you hike up, you gird up your loins like Derek was talking about.

You run out to them just like he did in Luke 15 and you grab them and you throw a feast for them. It's your kid. It's agape. You love them because you want them. You want them. This is agape. It's wanting them and it's ultimate concern for their ultimate good.

It's a love that will go prodigal. It's a love that will go prodigal for prodigal people. Now, what word does Jesus use in this passage? You know. You know. Three times and 34 he says it. Love one another.

[6 : 09] Just as I've loved you. Love one another. It's agape, right? Of course he uses agape. In other words, what he's saying to the disciples is this, have a prodigal concern, a radical concern for everyone sitting at this table right now.

The disciples that were climbing at the table have a radical concern for everybody at this table right now for their ultimate good. Be about their ultimate good. What's new about this? What's new about this?

Jesus very being his person and his action that he is about to take in the cross is itself the very definition of what agape is. You see.

Agape is so different from all the other loves because it is defined by Jesus himself. It is who he is, what he is and what he does. That's what agape is. In his person and work, agape love is being redefined, reconstituted, reimagined right before their faces.

This is what's new about the love. You can see Paul and others expressing exactly what this agape, what Jesus agape is across the New Testament.

[7 : 34] I'll just give you four brief examples. The first one is a god. Jesus agape is for people who don't deserve it. It's for people who don't deserve it. Romans 5, 6 and 8. While we were weak at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

One person would scarcely die for a righteous person, though perhaps for a good person one might die. But God shows his agape love for us and that while we were still sinners, Christ died. People might die for a good person, but agape dies for people who don't deserve it.

That's for a second. Agape is willing to pay a price. John 15, 13, just a couple of chapters later. Greater love, greater agape has no one in this that one laid down his life for his friends.

Third, agape loves people and we've already said this toward an ultimate goal. An ultimate in, an ultimate good. John 3, 16. For God so agape the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall have what? Eternal life.

The goal of agape is eternal life. Fourth, agape puts on display all the fruits of the spirit at once.

[8 : 57] 1 Corinthians 13, everybody loves that passage. It's the classic, I'm going to get married, I'm going to read 1 Corinthians 13. Everybody loves to read 1 Corinthians 13 at weddings and stuff because it's poetic, it's beautiful.

Non-Christians love 1 Corinthians 13. What's actually happening in 1 Corinthians 13 is that Corinth is an absolute mess. Those people are just straight up crazy. They're Christians, they got gifts, some of them are prophesying, some of them are doing miracles, some of them are doing all sorts of stuff.

And what Paul does is he comes in and says, look, you guys have gifts, you're doing stuff throughout the city, but you don't have agape. And if you don't have agape, your gifts are absolutely worthless.

And so he says, without agape, without love, you're just a clanging symbol. What is it, Paul? What is it, Paul? What is this agape? Agape, love is patient, it's not jealous, it doesn't boast, it's kind, it's slow to anger, it abounds in forgiveness, it bears all.

It is the sum of all the fruits of the Spirit. You cannot have any of them without having agape. That's Paul's point. So if agape is this prodigal, willing to die, willing to bear all, willing to pay prices, willing to be for people who don't deserve it, willing to be concerned for people's ultimate good, what's so new in this love?

[10:31] It's new because in Jesus' glorification that we read about in verses 31 and 32, the ultimate good, the ultimate good is being rewritten, reconstituted.

The entire good of the world, what makes people most fulfilled, most happy, what they most desire is being put on display, and that's Jesus' very person on the cross.

That's what's new. So if you look down with me at verses 31 and 32, when he had gone out, Jesus said, now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself.

Now this is kind of a bit of a tough, kind of a little theological exposition here that John's giving. What's glory? What's glory? It's kind of like love, you know, it's one of those words that you can't really define it off the top of your head.

When we think about Jesus' glory, he's saying now the Son of Man is going to be glorified. Of course we think of things like his resurrection, his ascension, his session, as we call it, at the right hand of the Father, his coming again to judge, his power over all powers, his kingdom that encompasses all principalities. That's Jesus' glory. Yes, right.

[12:02] But look, what John's doing here is he's setting up his glory in a little bit of an ironic way. He's juxtaposing it to something. If you see that he sets the word, the phrase, now is the Son of Man glorified. He does that for a reason.

You see, the phrase, the title, Son of Man, is a title that first appears in Daniel chapter 7, but it's a title on display throughout the Bible, and it always signifies a number of things, but the most important thing it always tells us is suffering, humiliation.

Son of men are men who suffer. They're men under the curse. They're sons of Adam. They're ones who are after the fall. That's what a Son of Man is. And so when John tells us now it's time for the Son of Man to be glorified, you see, there's a great juxtaposition happening.

The Son of Man, the suffering servant, the humiliated one, is time for him to be glorified. The hour has come. In other words, the cross. The humiliation of Jesus Christ on the cross is glorification.

That's what he's saying. How?

Because when Jesus is lifted up on the cross, we get the vision of the King lifted high in the most lowly of ways. It's looking up a division of the King high above the world on the most unlikely of things, a cursed tree.

[13:38] And it says, if you look carefully at who the subject, who's really being glorified here? Who's really being glorified here? If God is glorified, now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.

You see, who's really being glorified when Jesus is being humiliated on the cross is God the Father. It's God the Father. How is it that God the Father being ultimately separated from his Son at the cross, forsaking his own Son, is being glorified?

Well, it all depends on the way we define glory. One of the ways I think we can define glory is this. Glory is the revelation. It's a revelation of the Father's love, agape, through his majestic work in the Son.

You see, when Jesus is hanging on the cross, what we're getting is the Father's glory put on display. And his glory is agape. It's his love manifest to the whole world that he will humiliate his Son unto death, under sin, for somebody.

For us, his glory is that he agapes us, you see. His glory is that his agape for us is being put on display in front of the whole world as this Son of God hangs on the cursed tree.

[15:01] Look, one of my favorite lines from The Lord of the Rings, the two towers, the film, because it's not in the book, unfortunately, but maybe Tolkien would have said it if he had thought of it, is when Tharyadin of Rohan, the great king of Rohan, is pulled away from his curse and he wakes up to find that his son is dead.

And they take him out to his son's grave and what does he say? He says, no father should have to bury their child. And every person watching the two towers, that's a parent that hits them hard in that moment, no father, no mother should have to bury a child.

And how true is that for the father's relationship to the Son? No father and son have ever been as united as God the Father and God the Son, but at the cross, God's agape for someone is on display as he's ripped apart from the union that he's had from all of eternity.

Look, that agape is for you. This is what's new about the new command. The agape is being defined by the very separation of father from son on the cross.

This is a love that has never existed before in the history of the world, you see. That's what's so new about it. When I was in seminary, I had a professor walk in the class. He was a very learned man and very intimidating.

[16:41] And he walked up to the board and he wrote on the board at the beginning of class, why does God love you? Now, you can imagine that this is a room full of wannabe theologians and so answers started to flow.

Well, he made a decision pre-temporally in the Pactum Salutis to submit himself as the Son to the Father, right, so that we might be participants in his love.

We're loved only through the mediation of Son, pre-temporal covenant, XYZ, right. We can keep going with all this stuff. And he just wrote on the board, no, no. He said he loves you because he loves you. It's just voluntary. He doesn't need you.

He just he just loves you. You see, it's just agape. That's all. Why? Just because God's agape for you is your ultimate glory shown through the ultimate glory manifest in Jesus.

Kingship humiliation on the cross. You're agape for others. Love as he has loved is being about their ultimate good, which is only known through the glory of the cross.

[18:23] You see, he's redefining love because he's redefining what it what the ultimate good is and the ultimate good is having him, knowing him, seeing him.

He's redefined love forever in his death. That's the first thing. That's what's new about love. The second thing is this. Secondly and finally, there's something new about this new command in its object, in the object.

Now, what's the object of the new command? Jesus is the subject. He's the speaker. Who's he speaking to? The object. And you'll see very clearly that he's saying it to the disciples at the table.

They're the object of the command. And further, the object of the command is very clearly one another. In other words, it's each other. It's the people at the table. In other words, it is the other disciples. It's Christ followers. Right? So it's somewhat different from love thy neighbor. Love the Samaritan. Love the Gentile. Love the center. Love the tax collector. Love thy neighbor.

This command is love one another. It's take care of this, of these people, of the people around the table right now, this table right here, the table of the fellowship of the body.

[19:42] Now, Jesus further kind of instantiates that by calling them something that's a phrase that's never been used in the entire Bible until this very moment. And that's little children.

So he says to them, little children, yet a little while I am with you and you will seek me. Now, there's a reason he uses little children. There are a lot of words you can use for the word children, but he picks this one specifically, *technia* is the word.

It's no, it's nowhere else. It's very unusual word. He could not have said it moments before. Because Judas was still in the room.

Judas had to depart before the word *technia* could come out of Jesus mouth. Little children, my children, disciples, my people, love one another, love the *technia*, love the little children.

He couldn't have said it before now. And look, there's one other place in the entire Bible that somebody else picks up this phrase, this *technia*, this little children.

[20:51] And you probably know what it is. It's nobody else does it, but John in 1 John in the epistle. He uses it seven times. There's also nobody else except John in the entire Bible outside of the Gospels that picks up on the new command.

So John repeats the new command multiple times in 1 John. And he also refers through the entire letter to his audience as his little children. You see, why?

Well, let me just give you an example that he writes in 1 John, beloved, I'm writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you have from the beginning. The old commandment is what you've heard. This is what we were talking about earlier. It's an old command to love. At the same time, it's a new commandment that I'm writing to you, which is true in him and in you because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining.

But what I think is happening here actually is the reason that John picks up on this so much in his first letter is that John will never forget this moment. This is the moment that John was woken up from the dead.

Why? Just in the previous passage, the passage that Derek preached from last week, John was the only one that heard Jesus whisper who it was that was going to betray him, remember?

[22 : 09] John is the one who heard Jesus say, the one who dips the bread into the cup with me now is the one who... John realizes in that moment, betrayal, Judas, death, love one another, little children.

This is God. I am his. I am one of his. He's about to go to death for me. This is what John is being awoken to in this very moment. And he picks up on it in 1 John.

I mean, in some way, the letter of 1 John is literally an exposition of this very moment in his life, of this night. Little children, the new command, the cross, the betrayal.

I mean, these are all the things present in his letter. What's new about the new commandment in light of what John's very person is showing us, little children is showing us?

What's new? Look, what's new is this. People can love each other. People do love each other. You cannot obey this command to love one another unless you are a new creation.

[23 : 16] That's what's different about this love. It's not able to be obeyed unless you yourself are new. Born again. I mean, look, secular society, kind of the public order today, if there's one command in the Bible that they can get down with, it's this one, right?

I mean, love one another. Love one another. The public sector will scream that from the rooftops. They do all the time. Love one another. And even you might see it quoted from the scripture, but what they don't get is this. You can't love one another in the way Jesus is talking about here unless you've been born again.

You have to be a technia, a little child. There's no other way to agape than that way. So that's the first thing. The second thing in this point to see is this.

Just like in the foot washing, there was a juxtaposition between Peter and Judas as the two betrayers, but one being a born again betrayer. In this passage, there's a juxtaposition between John and Peter. And you see it at the end of the passage from 36 to 38.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? And Jesus answered, where I'm going, you cannot follow me, but you will. And Peter said to him, why can't I follow you? I will die for you.

[24 : 41] John has woken up to what's happening. Okay. John realizes I cannot follow this man. He goes to death for me. Peter doesn't get it yet.

So Peter says, look, hey, I'll come with you and I'll die for you. And oh, do you see the irony? Right? You see the irony? The irony is very present in just verse 38. Will you lay down your life for me, Peter? Jesus asks.

Why does he ask that? Well, because the cock will crow soon. Look, Jesus has just defined for them what Agape is, what true love is, to lay down the life for another, for those that you love, that you want their ultimate good.

And on this very night, Peter will have the opportunity to do Agape for Jesus. And instead he will betray him. You see?

The point is this. Look, Peter's a little child. He's one of the Technia. He's one of the flock. But even that's not enough. Even that's not enough to obey Agape commands. You know this is true. Have you ever had the experience that you know what's right?

[26 : 11] You know what's good, but you just don't care. You just do what your heart wants to do anyway. We all have, right?

This is a very common experience for all of us. Look, it's not enough to know what Agape is. It's not enough to even confess Jesus Christ. That just doesn't mean that you're going to wake up in the morning and be all about loving the body.

Because look, you guys have woken up in the morning and not been all about loving the body. About loving the people of God. About loving the Technia. It's just not us. We're just bent in a different direction. You've also had the experience, especially if you've grown up in the church, where you've kind of ingested that truth that's been preached from this kind of a setting like a million times in some free church or Highlands free church that you've grown up in.

But then that one day comes, right, where rationality seeps down into the whole of your person. Where all of a sudden that truth that you've been being told your whole life all of a sudden becomes

something like starting to actually pour over from your heart.

The penny is dropping. It's becoming an experience. Yeah, I know Jesus loves me, but then that one day comes where Jesus loves me. And those are two different things.

[27 : 42] And as a child of God, you may say, I need to agape the people. But the penny hasn't yet dropped that I need to agape the people. You see the difference.

Some days you have a warm heart for Christ and for his people and some days you don't. What do you do? You have to seek it. It has to be sought after.

And you have to be moved lastly to wonder at Jesus agape if you're going to obey Jesus agape. One of the distinctions and we'll close very briefly about Christianity from other religions. And there are moralistic versions of Christianity as well. But Christianity is driven in kind of the subject in our person, our consciousness by a sense of wonder at what you are in a way that recognizes you don't deserve it.

That's quite distinct from the moralistic way of other religions. If you go into a coffee shop and you walk up to the front and you pay for your Americana and they say, okay, we'll bring it to you.

[29 : 00] And you go and sit down and then this young strapping young man comes up and hands you your Americana. You know, most of you probably don't stand up on your table or in your chair and say, behold, this man has brought me coffee.

What loving kindness is this? You don't do that, right? Why? Because you paid for it. You deserved it the whole time.

You were awaiting it, but because you had put it put in what's required of you. But not so with Christianity. And not that's the moralistic way, but not but not with true Christianity.

Look, true Christianity wakes up in the morning, 50 years after believing in Jesus and says, me? Me? What am I that you are mindful of me? What am I that the King of all the universe would go to the cross for me?

I don't deserve it just as much today as I didn't deserve it 50 years ago. And the sense of wonder is reawoken by the gospel. The heart is rewarmed.

[30 : 16] And in that heart being rewarmed, the heart is bent again toward loving the saints. And without the sense of wonder and seeking it, we will not love each other in agape.

Sure, philos will have some philos, will have some eros, will have some storgy, but agape. Agape can only come through the gospel. I just want to close with an example of this, a story, and we'll pray from John's own life.

This is an extra biblical account that Eusebius, the early church historian, wrote about John and which most scholars take to be true. It's a perfect example of what this agape looks like being ingested over time through ingesting the gospel over time in the life of an apostle.

John's an old man. He's kind of skirting around his days, getting toward the island of Popmos. And he had helped plan a church in a local island, and he had met a young man there.

And he had taken this young man after planning the church and kind of entrusted him to the local bishop. And he told the bishop, take care of this boy, teach him the gospel, teach him Christianity, bring him into your fellowship, XYZ.

[31 : 40] John leaves, and he went in that time and planted a church in Ephesus, we think. And then he comes back and he inquires to the bishop about this young man. Where is he? And the bishop says, he's dead.

Well, he's not dead, he's spiritually dead. You see, he got in touch with a gang of robbers and murderers and mercenaries, and they live up in the mountains up there.

But, you know, every citizen knows you don't go into those mountains. If you go into those mountains, you will be killed just like everyone else has been killed. And John, who's a very elderly man, I want to read you CVS actual words to get the force of it.

The apostle ripped his garment into, groaned aloud, and he beat his own head. And he said, a fine guardian you are to the bishop.

And then he cried, I left that brother's soul to you. And then he turned to a servant and said, bring me my horse.

[32 : 53] And he rode up into the mountains and was captured. And he told them, I intended to be captured. And they took him to the leaders, and of course, the boy, grown into a man now, was the judge.

And you CVS writes that as soon as the young man saw John, he started, instead of telling his little posse to like beat his brains out, the boy, the man started running.

He ran out of the cave and ran away from this old man. And John ran after him saying, why do you run away from me, child, from your own father, unarmed and very old?

Repent before me, child, don't be afraid of me. You still have the hope of life. I will account to Christ for you. And here it is.

John 13, 31 to 38, 1 John, the entire epistle, here it is in John's action. He says to the boy, if need be, I will gladly suffer your death as the Lord suffered death for me.

[34 : 04] To save you, I will give my life. Stop, believe Christ has sent me for you. When he heard this, the young man stopped and stood with his eyes on the ground.

He threw his weapons down. He trembled in me. He began to weep. And when the old man came up, he flung his arms around him in a hug, pleading for the boy with groans before God as best he could.

And he baptized the boy a second time with his tears. And he pledged to him that he would not leave him until he was restored to the church.

I will gladly suffer your death as the Lord suffered death for us. This is the new command. This is agape. May we so become like our forefather in the faith in becoming like Jesus. Let's pray.

Father, we ask that you would make us lovers of the agape, put on display at the cross, and lovers agape-ing, doing the verb agape to one another.

[35 : 10] Being mesmerized by the gospel so much that we truly want to be for one another's ultimate good as much as possible. That is seeing Jesus. So we ask that you would just do that desire in our heart now as we close in Jesus' name. Amen.